L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty of Arts

Department
of Philosophy

UNIVERSITÀ
DI TORINO

ENGAGING THE
CONTEMPORARY 2024
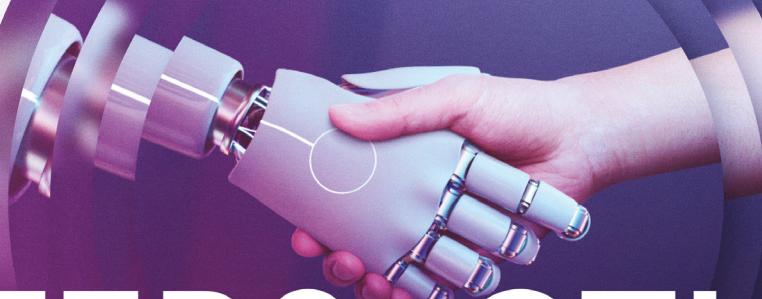
# INTERSECTIONS

## HUMAN/NONHUMAN
## RELATIONS

📅 20–22 NOVEMBER 2024

📍 UNIVERSITY OF TURIN

**CONFERENCE BOOKLET**

# Contents
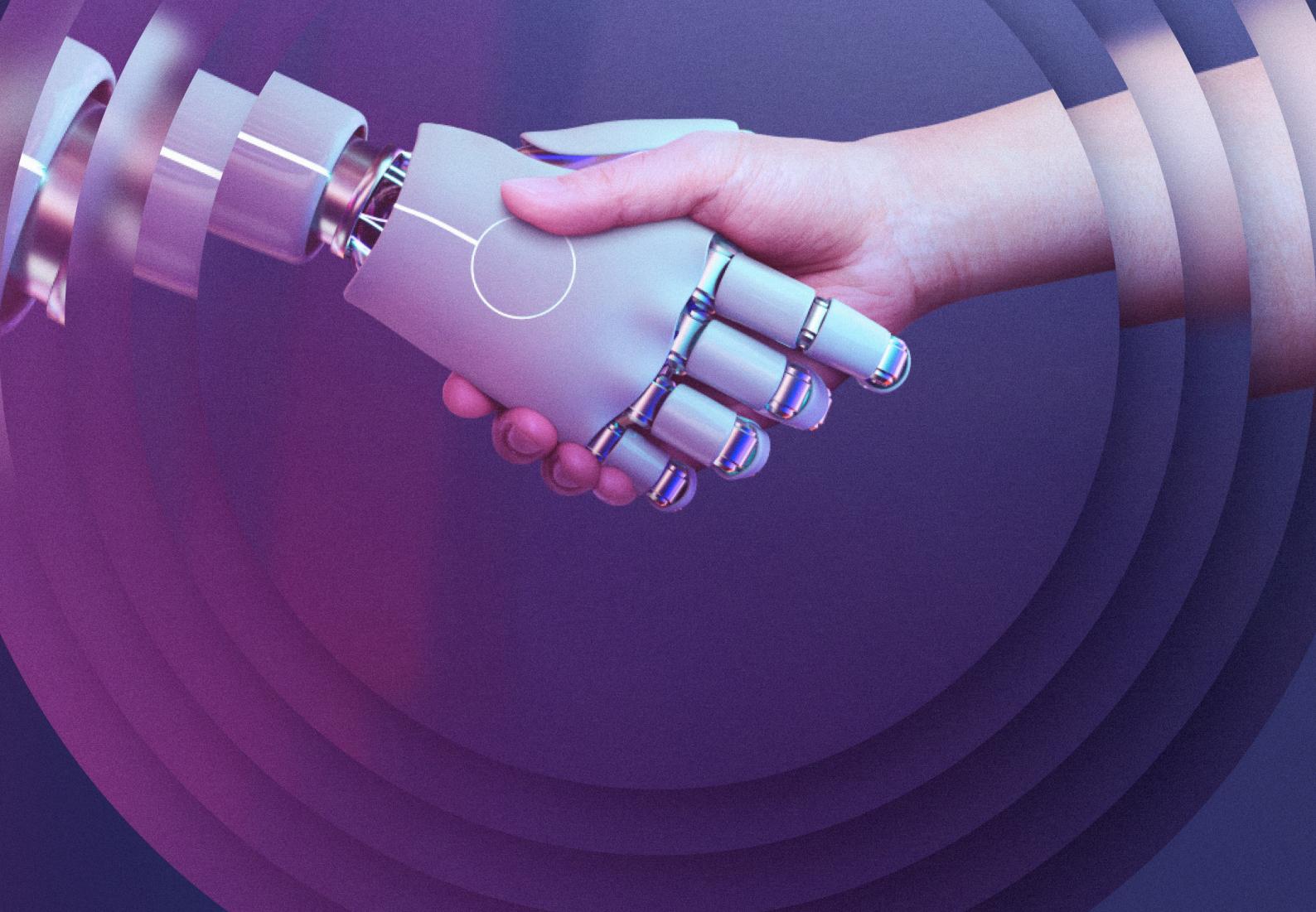
# Introduction

Engaging the Contemporary is a yearly event organised by the Philosophy Department at the University of Malta. This year's ninth iteration of the conference is jointly organised by the Philosophy Department of the Universities of Malta and Turin, and will take place in the beautiful city of **Turin, Italy**.

We live in a time defined by fast paced and unprecedented technological advancements, and an increasing awareness of the intricate web of beings which envelop, stabilise, and sustain our everyday existence. In this edition of *Engaging the Contemporary*, we seek to explore and (critically) assess the philosophical complexities surrounding the relation between humans and nonhumans.

The conference seeks to provide a platform for scholars to engage in interdisciplinary discussions that transcend traditional boundaries, in order to encourage dynamic dialogue between scholars working within diverse fields such as animal studies, technology studies, and new forms of realism and materialism. Through this collective exploration of interdisciplinary thought, we aim to illuminate the multifaceted philosophical dimensions that govern our relationships with various nonhuman entities with which we share the world.

# Keynote Speakers

**TIZIANA ANDINA** is Full Professor of Philosophy at the University of Turin (Italy). Since 2016 she is the director of the research center LabOnt – Center for Ontology at the University of Turin (www.labont.it). She has been a fellow at Columbia University (2008–2009) and of Käte Hamburger Kolleg University of Bonn (2015) as well as Visiting Professor at ITMO University Russia (2014) Nanjing and Wuhan University China (2019). She has published many articles on philosophy and the philosophy of art in several international journals. Her recent work concerns the definition of art and social ontology. Her publications include: Il volto Americano di Nietzsche La Città del Sole 1999 Il problema della percezione nella filosofia di Nietzsche Albo Versorio 2005 Arthur Danto: Philosopher of Pop Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2011 The Philosophy of Art: The Question of Definition. From Hegel to Post-Dantian Theories Bloomsbury Academy 2013 An Ontology for Social Reality Palgrave-Macmillan 2016 What is Art? The Question of Definition Reloaded Brill 2017 A Philosophy for Future Generations. The Structure and Dynamic of Transgenerationality Bloomsbury 2022 and (ed. by) Bridging the Analytical Continental Divide. A Companion to Contemporary Western Philosophy Brill 2014. She is co-editor of the international series Brill Research Perspectives in Art and Law and of the international series Analytic Aesthetics and Contemporary Art (Bloomsbury Academic). Since 2020 she is editor of Rivista di Estetica.

**MAURIZIO FERRARIS** is Full Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Turin and is the president of Labont (Center for Ontology) and of "Scienza Nuova", an institute of advanced studies – dedicated to Umberto Eco and uniting the University and the Polytechnic of Turin – aimed at planning a sustainable future, both from a cultural and from a political point of view. Visiting professor at Harvard,  Oxford, Munich, and Paris, columnist of "Corriere della sera" and "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", author of successful television programmes and over seventy books translated worldwide, in his long career he has  determined a new course of thought and studies in at least six areas: history of hermeneutics, aesthetics as theory of perception (*Rational Aesthetics*), social ontology (*Documentality*), metaphysics (*New Realism*), technological anthropology (*Doc-humanity*), and philosophy of economics (*Webfare as Digital welfare*). In 2005 he wrote the world's first philosophical book on the mobile phone: *Where Are You? Ontology of the Mobile Phone.*

# Conference Organisers

### CONVENERS

**PROF. TIZIANA ANDINA**          University of Turin

**PROF. CLAUDE MANGION**          University of Malta

### ORGANISING TEAM

**DR ROBERT FARRUGIA**          University of Malta

**DR ERICA ONNIS**          Cusano University/University of Turin

**DR NIKI YOUNG**          University of Malta

**FRANCOIS ZAMMIT**          University of Malta

### CONFERENCE WEBSITE
**ENGAGING THE CONTEMPORARY 2024**
INTERSECTIONS: HUMAN/NONHUMAN RELATIONS

➤ engagingthecontemporary2024.com

# Programme

## DAY 1 | Wednesday 20 November

⦿ **PALAZZO NUOVO**, Via Sant'Ottavio, 20, 10124 Torino

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|---|---|
| 08:45–9:00 | *Registration* |

⦿ **AUDITORIUM QUAZZA**
**Chair: Erica Onnis**

| | |
|---|---|
| 09:00–09:30 | *Welcome Address*<br>Tiziana Andina (UniTo) & Claude Mangion (UM) |
| 09:30–10:30 | **KEYNOTE**: Maurizio Ferraris, University of Turin |
| 10:30–11:00 | *Break* |

| | ⦿ SALA LAUREE GALLINO | ⦿ AUDITORIUM QUAZZA |
|---|---|---|
| 11:00–12:30 | **PARALLEL SESSION ONE**<br>Chair: Valeria Martino | **PARALLEL SESSION TWO**<br>Chair: Erica Onnis |
| | **Greta Francesconi**<br>Giving birth in a Post-Anthropocentric world | **Eamon Reid**<br>Flattening Processes: The Tensions Between Pluralistic Machine Ontologies and (a Possible) Liberal Politics |
| | **Francois Zammit**<br>Homo Economicus as The New Cyborg | **Rita Serpytyte**<br>Things, Objects and Reality |
| | **Martina Todaro**<br>The Promethean Drift of Dante's Transumanar | **Audronė Žukauskaitė**<br>Toward and Organism-Oriented Ontology |
| 12:30–14:30 | *Lunch Break* | |

| | ⦿ SALA LAUREE GALLINO | ⦿ AUDITORIUM QUAZZA |
|---|---|---|
| 14:30–16:00 | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Martina Lillo | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Giulio Sacco |
| | **Michael Ardoline**<br>Interiority and Control: Subjectivation in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism | **Vaiva Daraškevičiūtė**<br>Aesthetis of "Artificial Nature": Between Rejection and Uncanny |
| | **Sebastian Nähr-Wagener**<br>Technology as Dispositif and the Production of Subjects | **Costanza Penna**<br>*No title supplied* |
| | **Rodrigo Guiomar Carrasco Flores**<br>Fields of Sense and Cosmotechnics: towards an Andean concept of technology | **Martin E. Rosenberg**<br>The Ontology of How and the Epistemology of Now: Jazz Improvisation at the Intersection of Materialist Phenomenology and Panpsychism |

# Programme *(continued)*

## DAY 1  |  Wednesday 20 November *(continued)*

⊙ **PALAZZO NUOVO**, Via Sant'Ottavio, 20, 10124 Torino

| 16:00–16:15 | *Break* | |
|---|---|---|
| | ⊙ **SALA LAUREE GALLINO** | ⊙ **AUDITORIUM QUAZZA** |
| 16:15–17:45 | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Martina Lillo | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Giulio Sacco |
| | **Timothy Tambassi**<br>Is Extensible Markup Language perspectivist? | **Oliver Norman**<br>Performing the non-human Other :<br>On Monsters, Club-Kids, and Aliens.<br>Beyond Drag as a Gender Performance |
| | **Evangelos Koumparoudis**<br>Defining Death and Dying in Relation to<br>Information Technology and Advances<br>in Biomedicine | **Jetske Brouwer**<br>Categorical Porosity and Care: Comparing<br>Ecofeminist and New Materialist Perspectives |
| | **Marco Emilio, Cristina Viano**<br>**and Irene Domenicale**<br>The Challenge of Tokenizing Collective Agency | **Robert Booth**<br>'We Should all in Part be Naturalists':<br>Ecophenomenology, Ecofeminism,<br>and Environmental Education Policy |

# Programme *(continued)*

## DAY 2 │ Thursday 21 November

📍 **PALAZZO NUOVO**, Via Sant'Ottavio, 20, 10124 Torino

| 09:00–10:30 | 📍 SALA LAUREE GALLINO | 📍 AUDITORIUM QUAZZA |
|---|---|---|
| | **PARALLEL SESSION** <br> Chair: Costanza Penna | **PARALLEL SESSION** <br> Chair: Giulia Beltritti |
| | **Luca Valentino** <br> Making sense of nonhuman impacts on society: Against the new materialist approach | **Zachary Goldberg** <br> Using Wittgenstein to Fulfill the Principle of Explainability in AI |
| | **Emily Dellheim** <br> Intersect, interact, Imagine: Relational Becomings, Inclusive Encounters and New Materialism in Museum Education | **Giovanna Di Cicco** <br> From Social Robots To Moral Robots? Empathy and moral standing in the age of affective robotics |
| | **Leonardo Geri** <br> On vicarious causation and the third, new object | **Irene Olivero** <br> Evaluating and Re-Engineering AI's Social Impact: A Conceptual Engineering Framework |
| 10:30–11:00 | *Break* | |
| | 📍 SALA LAUREE GALLINO | 📍 AUDITORIUM QUAZZA |
| 11:00–12:30 | **PARALLEL SESSION** <br> Chair: Costanza Penna | **PARALLEL SESSION** <br> Chair: Giulia Beltritti |
| | **Kristupas Sabolius** <br> The Compossibility of Coexistence | **Arjen Kleinherenbrink** <br> Why non-humans do not have agency |
| | **Matteo Maria Paolucci** <br> Spacing (as) Coexistence: Nancy and Morton on 'World' and 'Nature' | **Tyler Tritten** <br> Habit as Organon of Philosophy: A Cosmology |
| | **Agnieszka Jagła** <br> Shifting boundaries between the human and the nonhuman in The Stone Gods by Jeanette Winterson | **David Roden** <br> Of Minds and Hyperminds |
| 12:30–14:30 | *Lunch* | |

# Programme *(continued)*

|  | ⊙ SALA LAUREE GALLINO | ⊙ AUDITORIUM QUAZZA |
|---|---|---|
| **14:30–16:00** | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Giulia Miotti | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Valeria Martino |
|  | **Maximilian Margreiter**<br>When is AI-Art Art? | **Drew M. Dalton**<br>New Realism and the Metaphysics of Nihilation: Engaging the Thermodynamic Revolution |
|  | **Michael Miller**<br>Autopo(i)etics and Authorial Technique in the Work of Holly Herndon and Sasha Stiles | **Andrea Cocciarelli**<br>Posthuman ontologies and achieving queered personhood |
|  | **Regine Rørstad Torbjørnsen**<br>Autopo(i)etics and Authorial Technique in the Work of Holly Herndon and Sasha Stiles | **Niki Young**<br>Not an Abyss but a Dynamo: Alphonso Lingis and the Animal |
| **16:00–16:15** | *Break* | |
|  | ⊙ SALA LAUREE GALLINO | ⊙ AUDITORIUM QUAZZA |
| **16:15–17:45** | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Giulia Miotti | **PARALLEL SESSION**<br>Chair: Valeria Martino |
|  | **Poppy Wilde**<br>Who's in Control?: Posthuman subjectivities and feminist resistance in videogaming | **Andrea Gentili**<br>Who speaks for the nonhuman?<br>Nature's representation and the law |
|  | **Antonis Sarris**<br>Virtual and Hyperreal Intersections: Baudrillard and Deleuze in Alain Damasio's novel Les Furtifs | **Katie MacDonald and Suzanne McCullagh**<br>The Rights of Nature and Multi-Species Political Community |
|  | **Jasmijn Leeuwenkamp**<br>Saving 'nature' from humans with rights: ecocide, rights of nature, and the hidden dimensions of predation and use | **Giacomo Pezzano and Marco Pavanini**<br>Comic Ideas: The Nonhuman Constitution of Philosophical Cognition |

# Programme *(continued)*

## DAY 3 | Friday 22 November
◉ **SCIENZA NUOVA**, Corso Rodolfo Montevecchio, 38, 10129 Torino

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|---|---|
| **09:30–10:30** | **KEYNOTE**: Tiziana Andina, University of Turin |
| **10:30–11:00** | *Break* |
| **11:00–13:00** | **SESSION ONE**<br>**Chair: Erica Onnis** |

**Federico Comollo**
Phytosemiotics: the Key to a Vegetal Ethic

**Viola Di Tullio**
Beyond instrumentality: rethinking plants as agents in environmental philosophy

**Maria PatriciaTinajero**
A Multispecies Translation and Ethical Aesthetics Approach to Reimagining Human-Plant-Soil Relations

**Agata Kowalewska**
Feralizing the Plantationocene with weedy rice

| | |
|---|---|
| **12:30–14:30** | *Lunch* |
| **14:30–16:00** | **SESSION TWO**<br>**Chair: Giulio Sacco** |

**Andrea Veraldi**
Hyperhuman Subjects: On the interplay Between Technology and Nature

**Nataliya Atanasova**
Objet, cache-moi: the subject's presence in a hostile world

**Alicia Macías Recio**
From Aesthetic Appreciation to Ecological Action: Art as a Means to Address the Challenges of the Anthropocene

| | |
|---|---|
| **16:30–16:40** | *Concluding Remarks:* Tiziana Andina (UniTo) & Claude Mangion (UM) |
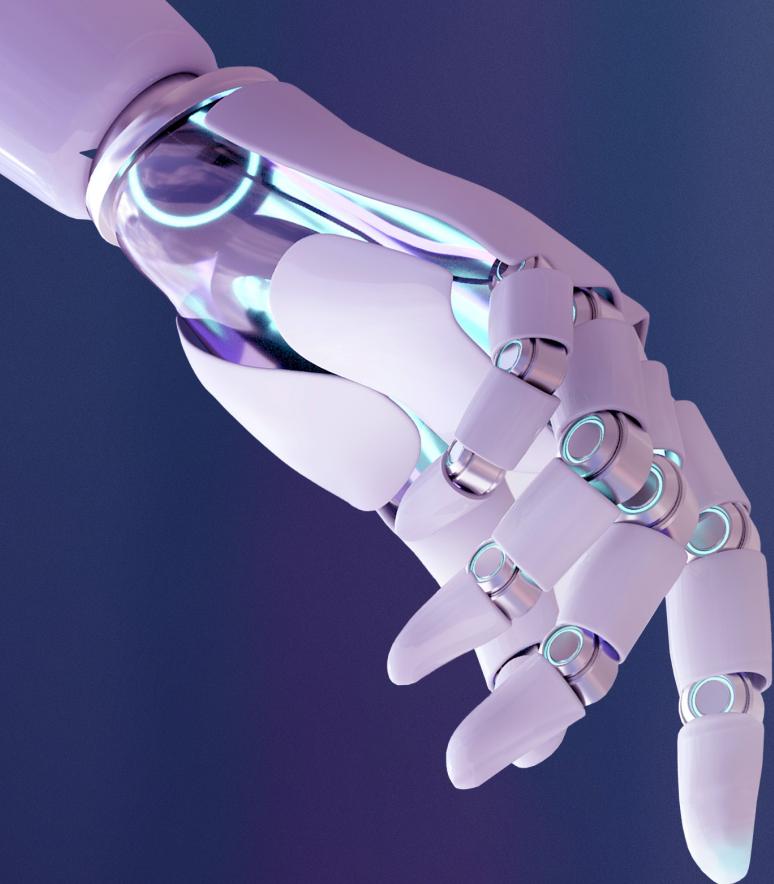
# ABSTRACTS

# List of Abstracts

# Hyperhuman Subjects: On the interplay Between Technology and Nature

Andrea Veraldi

Cusano University

The aim of the paper is to address the issue of a possible integration between theory of person and post-humanism. through the theory of Bernard Stiegler about the original connection among human, technique and temporality and about the interplay between the oblivion of Epimetheus and the *hybris* of Prometheus, we outline the original defect of human being and his dependence on the technique that precedes him with an amount of externalizations like languages and documentality. This background explains the ambivalence of the technique as *pharmakon* that can recovery or at the same time be poison generating regression and missed interiorizations of the externalizations. That conclusion leads to an evaluation of the positive aspects of post-humanism not referring the creation of a new bionic species, but the hyper-humanistic enhancement of human being. Thus the reconciliation between personalism and post-humanism is available within a theory of the *integrated hybrid* in which is valued the work of the polarity of technique toward the polarity of human in order to achieve the hyper-human transcendence.

# Of Minds and Hyperminds

David Roden

Independent

In this paper I consider Instrumental Eliminativism (IE). IE is a recipe for making very weird posthumans that no merely sapient human could understand or engage with. Unlike Churchland-style Theoretical Eliminativism, IE does not claim there are no minds but that certain technological alterations could change minded creatures into non-minded creatures without them ceasing to be agents.

Arguments for IE take different forms in my work. The most compelling is that transitioning to Hyperminds comes about with Hyperagency. A Hyperagent is a maximally flexible agent, able to alter its own substrate at a very fine grain. These virtuosos in self-modification would have no functional roles for mental states because a plausible antireductionism entails they would be unable to infer them from their fine-grained states. I will set out the Hyperagency argument and consider three considerable objections to it:

1. Agency-Elimination (AE): Eliminating minds implies eliminating agency; consequently, Hyperagents are logically impossible.
2. Self-Ruin (SRO). Hyperagency is naturally impossible because massive self-tinkering without a rational plan would cause any embodied agent to fall apart.
3. Complexity (CO): Hyperminds would run up against computational complexity bounds or similar.

I will argue that each of these objections can be met and consequently that the IE is a significant claim for the metaphysics of mind. I will end by considering how IE bears on the ethics of speculative posthumanism, and the debate between realists, anti-realists, and idealists.

# New Realism and the Metaphysics of Nihilation: Engaging the Thermodynamic Revolution

Drew M. Dalton

Dominican University

One of the principal aims of the turn to realism is the desire to escape the tendency towards idealism in post-Kantian philosophy, termed by Meillassoux "correlationism." To overcome this tendency and to discover what Meillassoux calls the "great outdoors," proponents of "new realism" have suggested a variety of epistemological methods: from the mathematization of nature to the inauguration of a new object-oriented phenomenology. Whatever their other differences, what these new realisms hold in common is the conviction that: 1) by challenging the epistemologies of the past, traditional metaphysics will also come into question; and, 2) to accomplish these aims, contemporary philosophers must engage the work of their colleagues in the material sciences.

It is surprising, then, that not only is their little engagement with the actual conclusions of the material sciences within these new realisms, but that relatively traditional metaphysical systems are maintained therein as well. This paper will redress this tendency. By drawing from the argument and conclusions of my recent monograph, The Matter of Evil: From Speculative Realism to Ethical Pessimism, I will show how we might learn from the contemporary material sciences to develop radically new metaphysical conclusions. Specifically, I will show how the so-called "thermodynamic revolution" in the material sciences can be used to generate startling new metaphysical accounts of reality which reveal being not to be something which either exists eternally, or which is steadily becoming in perpetually transformation, but rather which is steadily unbecoming.

# Habit as *Organon* of Philosophy: A Cosmology

Tyler Tritten

Gonzaga University

Philosophy is beset by multiple binaries: conscious/ unconscious, human/animal, nurture/nature, vital/inert, spontaneous/mechanical etc. Such binaries must be overcome, but, contra reductionism, these differences are also to be saved, hence a non-reductionistic or neutral monism is required. The monism I sketch posits the following axiom: whatever is happening anywhere is happening everywhere, and whatever is not happening everywhere is happening nowhere. Consequently, whatever is true at the quantum level is likewise true of humans and gods, and everywhere between. Differences are always in degree rather than kind.

The metaphysical hypothesis I propose to achieve this non-reductionistic monism is that all operations of reality, from top to bottom, are habit. What one calls "habit" in psychology, is "motor habit" or "motricity" at the organic or animal level, "instinct" at the level of species, and "inertia" at the inorganic level. All levels of reality exhibit a propensity to preserve past modes of being through future repetitions that introduce a quotient, however minimal, of novelty. This compulsion to repeat does not efface binaries, but it saves those differences, even vertically.

I will argue that habit, simultaneously a principle of conservation and novelty, is a universal principle of being that constitutes a continuum between vertical binaries. Consequences of this metaphysics of habit include the following: 1) that relation precedes relata (which requires a "middle out thinking"), 2) a democratic but not flat ontology, i.e. there are still hierarchies, and 3) that the "stuff" of reality be conceived as plastic, i.e. as slime, protoplasm or subtle body.

# 'We Should all in Part be Naturalists': Ecophenomenology, Ecofeminism, and Environmental Education Policy

Robert Booth

Liverpool Hope University

In response to a worsening of the climate and ecological crisis, the UK Department for Education (DfE) recently published a policy strategy which intends to facilitate transformational behavioural change via reforms which inculcate in pupils a lasting and action-orientated 'awe and wonder' about the more-than-human world. Its approach attempts to link increased sustainability and climate literacy with transformational change via satisfaction of two aspects of effective environmental education: the ontological aspect, by which pupils better grasp 'their place in nature'; and the affective aspect, by which pupils are motivated to protect and value 'nature'. Here, with the help of theoretical resources drawn from ecophenomenology and ecofeminism, I argue that the strategy inadvertently reveals a lacuna in environmental education policy, whereby relatively uncritical commitment to a strong ontological naturalism unduly limits critical reflection upon the more problematic affect and action-guiding assumptions underlying the entities that mainstream science reveals. Since, I argue, the strategy's prospects for transformational change are unduly limited by the uncritical commitment to the ontological naturalism which underwrites it, I end by considering how a strategy more amenable to ecophenomenological and ecofeminist insights might look.

# Defining Death and Dying in Relation to Information Technology and Advances in Biomedicine

Evangelos Koumparoudis

Sofia University st. Kliment Ohridksi

The definition of death is a deep philosophical question, and no single meaning can be ascribed to it. This essay focuses on the ontological, epistemological, and ethical aspects of death and dying in view of technological progress in information technology and biomedicine. It starts with the ad hoc 1968 Harvard committee that proposed that the criterion for the definition of death be irreversible coma and then refers to the debate over the whole brain death formula, emphasizing the integrated function of the organism and higher brain formula, taking consciousness and personality as essential human characteristics. It follows with the contribution of information technology in personalized and precision medicine and anti-aging measures aimed at life prolongation. It also touches on the possibility of the creation of human-machine hybrids and how this raises ontological and ethical issues that concern the "cyborgization" of human beings and the conception of the organism and personhood based on a post/transhumanist essence, and, furthermore, if sentient AI capable of autonomous decision-making that might even surpass human intelligence (singularity, superintelligence) deserves moral or legal personhood. Finally, there is the question as to whether death and dying should be redefined at a transcendent level, which is reinforced by already-existing technologies of "virtual after-" life and the possibility of uploading human minds. In the last section, I refer to the current (and future) applications of nanomedicine in diagnostics, therapeutics, implants, and tissue engineering as well as the aspiration to "immortality" by cryonics.

## Phytosemiotics: the Key to a Vegetal Ethic

Federico Comollo

PhD Candidate at University Institute for Advanced Studies (IUSS) in Pavia &

at Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (Luiss) in Rome

Our era is characterized by the rise of the non-human. Every day we are surrounded by pieces of evidence that our planet is subject to different forces and agencies. From animals to plants, various entities act in their environments, changing and performing their territories. In this paper, I will analyze the vegetal agency and its ethical consequences starting from three points. First, semiotic freedom – namely the ability to choose the external signs to interpret – is at the base of life and should be considered a pillar of agency (Sharov & Tønnessen, 2021). Second, plants are capable of semiosis, as demonstrated by phytosemiotics (Krampen, 1981), and therefore should be considered agents implementing their projects in a territory for survival. Third, many authors are pursuing the idea that semiosis has an ethical content insofar as interindividual and interspecies relationships are semiotic processes (Tønnessen et al., 2015), and therefore it is possible to confer them a moral value. Starting from these assumptions, I will argue that an ethical turn in our relationship with plants should pass through the recognition of their semiotic freedom and ability. Moreover, I will pursue the idea that we can theorize a relational ethic of plants starting from the semiotic processes at the base of their ability to share spaces.

**References**

Krampen, M. (1981). Phytosemiotics, Semiotica, 36 (3/4), 187- 209.

Sharov, A. & Tønnessen M. (2021). Semiotic Agency. Science Beyond Mechanism. Springer.

Tønnessen, M., Beever, J., & Hendlin, Y. H. (2015). Introducing biosemiotic ethics. Zeitschrift fur Semiotik, 37(3–4), 3–12.

## Performing the non-human Other : On Monsters, Club-Kids, and Aliens. Beyond Drag as a Gender Performance

Oliver Norman

Université de Poitiers

Does drag performance merely perform gender? Judith Butler (Gender Trouble), Esther Newton (Mother Camp), Diane Torr (Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender As Performance) and many more seem to equate drag with gender performance, with a calling into questions of gender norms: be it to parody them or reidealize them (Butler, Bodies That Matter, New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 126).

While this approach may allow for an adequate explanation of queen and king practices, it does not allow much space for alternative styles of drag: monsters, creatures, aliens, etc. What does a club kid made out all in white like Pandé Maniaque (Poitiers, France) or a clown like Cain the Clown (London, UK) or Klonn (Valletta, Malta) tell us about gender, if anything? Drag theory, attempting to navigate the treacherous waters of the difference between gender performance and performativity have all but neglected to talk about drag artists who do not fit a binary view. The selection process for shows like RuPaul's drag race perpetuates and even accentuates this phenomenon: the French casting call only asking for queens explicitly.

The drag performances here questioned do not fit into the norm of gender performance, rather they seek to perform non-human others, be they existing beings such as animals, insects... inanimate objects (Sasha Velour performing as an armchair in The Big Reveal), possibly existent but unconfirmed beings (aliens), non-existent beings (creatures) or even as artworks (club-kid drag). What can these performances of non-human others tell us of the very nature of drag? Can they perhaps destabilize the consensual view of drag as a play-on-gender?

I will attempt to show how alternative drag performances tend to deconstruct the very traditional definition of drag itself, stripping it down to its bare-bones structures while also manifesting the forgotten Others within the drag community, those performing other Others, strange Others who are sometimes recognizable, sometimes not.

Even if drag is not a performance of gender, could we not, follow Luce Irigaray (This Sex Which is Not One) rather than Butler and talk of mimicry, of a play-on-norms, a play-on-performance? Is a drag clown not a performance of clowning, a performance-squared? Such an approach would make the minimal definition of drag that of a performance of normativity, whatever that normativity may be. But, the norms of non-human others are they fixed enough to talk of such a performance of normativity? Do drag performances of non-human others correspond to Derrida's complex and vertiginous analysis of the Mime in Dissemination who does not reproduce, does not imitate anything, but produces, drawing on the blank page of their white makeup but also of an absence of normativity? (Instead of Irigaray's mimicry, Derrida's non-mimetic mime) Are non-human others specters that haunt the performer, undecidable origins whose traces we bear witness to? Does the performer not becoming a trace in the Derridean sense, both self and unself, both human and non-human at the same time, overcoming dichotomous thought through play?

# The Ontology of How and the Epistemology of Now: Jazz Improvisation at the Intersection of Materialist Phenomenology and Panpsychism

Martin E. Rosenberg

*Independent; The New Centre of Research and Practice*

In recent work, I refer to a famous quotation by pianist Bill Evans, who, when asked to define jazz, says: "Jazz is not a what. It is a how." I would like to unpack this statement with respect to understanding how the question of time interferes with the ways we look at different schools addressing philosophy of mind. Here I would like to situate the materialist phenomenology of Manuel DeLanda, with the approaches to panpsychism in the works of David Chalmers, Phillip Goff, Galen Strawson, Hedda Hassel Mørch, and others from the analytic tradition. Here, I would like to explore jazz improvisation as a thought-experiment to play out both differences and commonalities of these distinct "schools" embracing profoundly different assumptions. To the point, materialist phenomenology and panpsychism both address the problem of emergence: for DeLanda's account of visual cognition, emergence involves a transformation from material to phenomenal processes involving heirarachies of agents and selves; many panpsychisms involve a form of monism by which the phenomenal remains embedded with the material at all levels of existence, leading to an ongoing debate as to how the emergence of consciousness happens, with respect to the "combination problem." Interestingly, both materialist phenomenology and several panpsychisms propose that these implied hierarchies of organization are reversible with respect to causality in the production of consciousness: there are top-down and bottom-up characteristics presented by both "schools."

To begin, I will address the musical note as an object with both material and phenomenal characteristics. In fact, although the physics of sound has been quite well documented, one could conceive of a note as having a phenomenal existence. I am only half-joking by saying that one could locate embodied, embedded, enactive and extended characteristics in the way that a musical note behaves. A famous incident involving Herbie Hancock and Miles Davis and "the wrong note" during performance will suffice to illustrate. I will then address the distinct processes of musical cognition (The HOW) that I have identified specific to jazz improvisation, involving bottom-up (Proprio-Sentience) and top-down (Projective Apprehension) performance. One could bring to bear either DeLanda's model or those from panpsychists to understand the difference between the intentional superimposition of musical notes onto an existing musical song form involving slow cognition (PA); and the visceral reactive responses of musicians at very fast cognitive speeds to each other (in ways reminiscent of debates within the philosophy of mind over "the zombie problem") (PS). I have argued that these forms of cognition coexist. Following the work of Francisco Varela on the multiplicities of cognition defined in his "The Specious Present" (The NOW), I then conclude with questions about 1. time's role in emergence in the context of materialist phenomenology and panpsychism; 2. how one must view top-down and bottom-up cognitive processes as equally characteristic of emergent behavior.

# Flattening Processes: The Tensions Between Pluralistic Machine Ontologies and (a Possible) Liberal Politics

Eamon Reid

Edge Hill University

Ian Bogost surmised the general claim of flat ontology thusly: "all things equally exist, but they do not exist equally". These ontologies have been described, often critically, as "liberal ontologies". Flat ontologies, including (Deleuze inspired) object-oriented machinic pluralisms (Bryant, Klienherenbrink, Ardoline), are liberal in the sense that they are generally the most inclusive or expansive – more often galaxies than (Meinongian) jungles. Some critics of ontological liberalism tend to find these points problematic: surely, humans do not exist equally alongside incorporeal objects like numbers and corporeal machines like nonhuman animals? In his succinct Liberalism, John Gray outlines four common aspects of (political) liberalism: universalism, egalitarianism, individualism, and meliorism. Moving from the political to the ontological, there seems to be disagreement concerning the status of individual entities. Kleinherenbrink describes the dispute as one between relationist and substantialist ontologies: the former denying individual entities individual autonomy; the latter asserting the autonomy of entities (ultimately a dispute over "individualism" in broad terms). But this parsing of liberal ontology absconds the second part of Bogost's axiomatization: that things do not exist equally even if everything exists as something. Here, ontological liberalism does not translate into political liberalism, as it is evident that we deny certain entities equal footing based on what they are (or what they are taken to be). Whilst I agree with those who argue that ontology and politics should not be conflated, there are evidently overlaps. In this paper, I argue that such overlapping may follow from the meliorist element of liberalism. Meliorism refers to the "affirmation of the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements" (in Gray's formulation). Yet what could an "ontological meliorism" look like? I argue that for flat machinic pluralism(s), ontological meliorism concerns processes of flattening, that the degrees of unequal existence between things corporeal and incorporeal can be revised and transformed through ontological and political experimentation. In this way, a political motivation is derived from flat (liberal) ontology that necessitates engagement with things – including human and non. While the flat ontologist rejects the bifurcation of the universe into human and non, these categories retain political and social significance. Ultimately, the liberal (political) philosopher cannot ignore posthumanist problematizations. Likewise, the posthumanist ought not to abandon constructive and normative accounts of subjectivation, as it is here where differences can be transformed through constructive experimentation. Ardoline argues for this in his reading of Deleuze and the Confucian Xunzi. While constructing larger (political) "phase spaces" (in Ardoline's account) is desirable, there is still the need to "discern what must be excluded, removed, or prevented" from the political, what entails accounting and ordering processes. I argue here that a "rhizomatic" liberalism can both critique, redefine, and potentially overcome existential relations of inequality through experimental applications of Latour's "taking into account" and "arranging in rank order". Both moves, expansion and contraction, are arguably necessary for a liberal politics that does not abscond posthumanist problematization or ontological flattening.

# Who speaks for the nonhuman? Nature's representation and the law

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The relationship between humans and nonhumans has become of central importance in the environmental issue and produced the urge to rethink classical paradigms and the invisible line between nature and culture. Accusing modern thought of an irreducible dualism, authors such as Michel Serres and Bruno Latour have called into question the need to reconfigure that relationship, to give the excluded (nature, hybrids) a voice through spokespersons or mediators.

In an attempt to remove the coercion to silence imposed by the moderns, both Serres' "new natural contract" and Latour's "parliament of things" stand as critical devices not only of the conceptual framework of modernity, but also of its juridical declination, within a more ambitious project, that of overcoming the philosophies of the environment that have arisen since the 1970s in the direction of a stronger political ecology.

This project confronts us with a no small problem on a practical level: if the forms of mediation between the human and nonhuman worlds are to change, if the latter dimension is finally to make its entrance on the political scene, then who will speak on its behalf? The answers to this question are very different – limiting ourselves to the authors mentioned above: it will be the ethical community of scientists for Serres, and of political representatives gathered in assembly for Latour.

However, whatever answer we are able to give will bring the original problem back into play. Are not representation, even the lending of a voice (as well as the unearthing of ontologies, in Philippe Descola's lexicon) once again all human operations? Put differently: does not the regime of objectification of the natural world, which is said to have dominated modern thought, re-enter the picture here? Representation seems to be an even more powerful mechanism for reducing the represented to silence, because not only is it claimed to speak on its behalf, but at the same time it is claimed that it was the represented itself that gave us this legitimacy. It somehow repeats the Hobbesian formula: repraesentatio as guarantee of a power absolutus.

Nevertheless, even as we criticize the solutions, the problem remains. What we would like to propose is a kind of perspective realignment of the problem, and we believe we can do so from within law itself. Law is indeed a human instrument, a vehicle of juridification that transforms everything it touches into a legal matter. But its object need not be regarded as a mute and inert objectivity that would need a proxy. On the contrary, if instead of the object "nature" we think of the object "environment" not as a set of things, but as an interweaving of intertwining relationships, interests, and vital connections, and turn its protection precisely to the maintenance and enrichment of this plexus, perhaps we will more coherently succeed in giving nature a voice. A voice that will not be that of man, but that of justice and equity.

# Using Wittgenstein to Fulfill the Principle of Explainability in AI

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For humans to successfully interact with AI tools, the algorithms and systems must be explainable. The purpose of Explainable AI (XAI) is to use "the parameters relevant to decision-making to compute an account of the (algorithm's) output that is expressed in meaningful and explanatory terms" (O'Hara 2020, 1). AI regulations and guidance documents include explainability as an essential principle of ethical, responsible or trustworthy AI (e.g. EU AI Act; EU HLEG AI's Guidelines for Trustworthy AI; Alan Turing Institute's Understanding Artificial Intelligence Ethics and Safety). Meaningful explanations are especially important in socially relevant contexts employing AI such as medicine, defense, policing, education and finance.

Years of research and technical progress have made significant strides towards developing explainable AI output. Nevertheless, fulfilling this principle remains a critical, ongoing challenge. How can reading Wittgenstein help us advance beyond the status quo towards creating more meaningful XAI?

O.K. Bouwsma wrote that Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations (PI) "furnishes us with the rudiments of a certain warfare, instructs us in the use of certain instruments, instruments with which we are already furnished. Besides it furnishes us with exercises, exercises without end, war-games. And to what purpose? That we may perfect our skill in the warfare against our own confusions" (Bouwsma 1972, 82). This "skill" coincides with Wittgenstein's definition of understanding as "an ability to go on" (PI, §156). But how can XAI developers make sense of understanding as a "skill" or an "ability to go on"? And how does this interpretation help fulfill the goal(s) of XAI?

Explainability is an instrumental value that furnishes AI-users with sufficient information for decision-making in a socially relevant content. One well-known XAI function is to explain how much an algorithm's input features contribute to its output in order for users to identify and mitigate proxies or bias leading to discriminatory actions. But simply knowing that particular inputs correlate with certain algorithmic output is not a full explanation (perhaps necessary, but not sufficient) within a socially relevant context. One cannot yet "go on" to use the algorithm in a non-discriminatory way.

As Wittgenstein teaches us in PI, explanation/understanding is a social practice that involves an ability to go on, as well as the acceptance of this "going on" as an act of "going on". In the complex socially relevant contexts mentioned in the first paragraph, we can ask which actions one can go on to do and which actions would be socially accepted as reflecting an understanding of these complex contexts. The answer is that meaningful, socially aware understanding of complex contexts is the ability to go on to ask insightful ethical, social and political questions about issues that may not have settled answers—to wage warfare against our own confusions. As evidenced during this conference, the socially accepted response to complex material is further inquiry rather than passive agreement.

I will conclude this presentation with some suggestions for how XAI developers can facilitate the ability to go on to ask meaningful questions rather than producing static explanatory output. This Wittgensteinian approach will more readily meet AI regulations mandating explainability.

## Categorical Porosity and Care: Comparing Ecofeminist and New Materialist Perspectives

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For more than five decades, ecofeminists have been interested in the intricate web of life. Besides reconceptualising human and nonhuman beings as (always-already) interdependent and co-creating, ecofeminists have also been interested in the twin oppression of women and nature. They understand their respective marginalization in modern, male dominated societies not as coincidental but as interconnected and necessary. This marginalization is the outcome of hierarchical cultural and/or material structures of power, by which both women and nature are othered vis-à-vis a master subject that is—at least traditionally—male and/or (culturally) masculine. Importantly, while tracing and critiquing the woman-nature association, many ecofeminists extend it; they denounce and seek to end the comparable subjection of "other others" such as marginalized social groups and nonhuman animals. Hence, many ecofeminist texts and practices display an intersectional perspective—sometimes avant la lettre.

Since it has been coined and elaborately theorised, the concept "intersectionality" has proven to be a fruitful analytical tool in many critical research areas. In this paper, I will explore ecofeminism's past, present, and potential intersectionality, by distinguishing three types of intersectionality: the anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical type (Leslie McCall). Holding on to these three intersectional types, I will compare intersectional ecofeminisms with the intersectional analyses one can typically find within contemporary posthuman and new materialist feminisms. Ecofeminism has been said to "foresee the posthuman turn" (Rosi Braidotti) in multiple ways. What does an analysis of these traditions' respective intersectionality tell us about their commonalities and differences?

Furthermore, within ecofeminisms and new materialist feminisms, "care" is often centralised, as both a descriptive and prescriptive term: it characterises various human-nonhuman relations, and could foster more liveable and just relations across Earth-dwellers. I will end this paper by exploring what type of more-than-human or multispecies care follows from both intersectional ecofeminism and intersectional new materialism. Coming back to the anti-, inter-, and intracategorical, I will question to what extent we still need to work with social categories in order to detect, criticise, and transform more-than-human inequalities, and thus foster care, or whether it would be preferable to emphasise the (ontological) porosity of social categories altogether.

# Toward an Organism-Oriented Ontology

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In my paper I want to introduce my own recently published theory of Organism-Oriented Ontology (EUP, 2023) and propose it as an alternative to the so-called "new ontologies", such as Object-Oriented Ontology proposed by Graham Harman, or speculative materialism, proposed by Quentin Meillassoux. Following Deleuze and Guattari, I re-conceptualise the notion of the organism in such a way that it might be understood as an assemblage. Such an understanding of the organism-as-an-assemblage is consistent with recent developments in biology, such as the notions of symbiosis and symbiogenesis, and the concept of the holobiont.

Interpreted in this way, the notion of an organism can be significantly extended and used to account for different phenomena, such as the interactions between the different levels within the same living system (an endo-organism), for the interaction between different species (a hybrid organism) and the interface between organic and inorganic, or technological entities (an exo-organism). It also helps us to rethink the interactions between living and non-living systems on a planetary scale and to discuss such phenomena as Gaia theory (planetary organism).

By conceptualising symbionts and holobionts, hybrids and chimeras as ontological conditions, we resist the biopolitical demand to decide which forms of life are worth living. In this respect Organism-Oriented Ontology is mutually inclusive, sharing the ontological value with the cognizers of other species, those who are living and those who have become extinct. It also gives ontological weight to all conditions of human life, including disability, illness, and death. It also includes technologies, which are understood not as something external and hostile, but as extended projections of our internal organs and organisms.

# Comic Ideas: The Nonhuman Constitution of Philosophical Cognition

Giacomo Pezzano & Marco Pavanini

University of Turin

The human lifeform can be regarded as a bio-technical phenomenon, where biopsychic dynamics intertwine with technical practices, thereby constituting our behaviour, morphology and ecology (Sloterdijk, 2016; Stiegler, 2018). This condition has a decisive consequence, which we have started to appreciate only recently: what has been traditionally considered "purely" human features uncontaminated by technicity, such as higher-order cognition, require nonhuman and specifically artefactual elements in order to manifest themselves, operate and evolve (Aydin, 2021; Malafouris, 2013).

In our presentation, we set out to investigate how this perspectival shift in our representation of the human lifeform may change our understanding of those operations based on which representations of the human lifeform are typically produced, i.e., complex, reflective thinking, eminently exemplified by philosophy in the western tradition. Philosophizing, indeed, inasmuch as it consists in reflecting on the human condition, is a human activity and, as such, is conditioned and mediated: not only socio-culturally, but also technically. Hence, the technologies according to which philosophy is carried out will structure and shape, in return, philosophical practice itself: this mediatic condition—as we will highlight—represents a true 'unthought of thought' (Kittler, 2009; Zwier et al., 2016).

Philosophy has been traditionally performed and transmitted through alphabetic writing, which appears as even a prerequisite for abstract and theoretical thinking in many different approaches, such as cosmopolitan political philosophy (Appiah, 2003), extended cognition theory (Menary, 2007), media history studies (Ong, 1982), and genealogical hermeneutics (Sini, 2016). Thus, we aim to underscore how the written medium constitutes a condition of possibility for philosophy in the double sense that it enables philosophical thinking but also contraines it, risking making philosophers prisoners of what we will call "the myth of the written word". On this basis, we will enquire into what it would mean to practice philosophy with other media, rather than just written words, contributing to developing a philosophy which regards new technologies also as a manifestation of what philosophy itself might become, rather than just as new objects of its traditional analysis (Coeckelbergh, 2019).

Specifically, we will outline and discuss the creation of a visually oriented philosophical work, namely the graphic essay 'How to Do Concepts with Images', designed together with the International School of Comics of Turin. First, we will contextualize this work within the framework of the recent comic-based research approach (Moretti, 2023). Secondly, we will assess its advantages as well as its limitations compared to traditional, text-based philosophy. Thirdly, we will suggest that the new digital, screen-based media and technologies can provide us with the chance to renew philosophical reasoning, by wedding abstract concepts to the sensory embodiment of their contents.

## Is Extensible Markup Language perspectivist?

Timothy Tambassi

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If someone were to argue that Extensible Markup Language [XML] and Information System Ontologies [ISOs] have little in common, they would have many strings to their bow. The main one, for my part, is this. XML is, as its name suggests, a markup language – or rather, a metalanguage that allows users to define their own customized markup languages. ISOs are neither languages nor metalanguages; they are artifacts specified by (ontological) languages. And XML is not even one of those languages.

As for the "little" that XML and ISOs have in common, there is one similarity that caught my attention. Both XML and ISOs have something to do with partitioning. XML partitions data using tags. ISOs partition a domain of interest using classes, instances, relations, and properties. Precisely from the partitioning of ISOs, the philosophical debate has outlined an epistemological view of ISOs, namely perspectivism. For this kind of perspectivism – which does not coincide with perspectivism in the philosophy of science – partitioning a domain means making a mental division between those entities on which we focus and those that fall outside our (domain of) interest. According to this view, the act of partitioning provides a perspective on the domain. Moreover, as perspectivism holds, whatever domain we consider, there can in principle be multiple, equally valid and overlapping perspectives on the same domain.

Now, it has been already proved that this kind of perspectivism is not just one of the philosophical views that populate the debate on ISOs: rather, it is an underlying assumption of ISOs. In other words, ISOs are themselves perspectivist. In this talk, I will investigate whether the same is true of XML: that is, whether XML is perspectivist.

So the purpose is purely speculative. I believe that discussing whether XML is committed to perspectivism might help to clarify some of the theoretical assumptions of this markup metalanguage. More generally, the idea is that since creators of markup (meta)languages develop those languages under the guidance of some theoretical assumptions, for the sake of methodological accuracy those assumptions should be subject to critical analysis rather than remain implicit and unexamined. The focus on XML is not accidental. First, XML is still widely used, and there are many other markup languages based on XML. This means that this critical analysis is, at least in principle, extendable to other markup languages. Second, XML not only supports the exchange of data and information, it is both human- and machine-readable. In other words, XML – like ISOs – supports communication between humans, between humans and machines, and between machines. And while supporting this communication is certainly not the prerogative of XML and ISOs alone, we cannot even rule out the possibility that determining whether XML is perspectivist may also shed new light on some of the theoretical assumptions behind such communication.

# Interiority and Control: Subjectivation in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism

Michael J. Ardoline

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In Surveillance Capitalism, Shoshana Zuboff argues that the self and its internality are under greater threat than ever, so much so that it raises the possibility of the end of subjectivity all together. Much recent work has scoured the poststructuralist political philosopher for insights into this situation. This is an intriguing pairing because poststructuralists have a complicated relationship to the self where, on some accounts, it is little more than an internalized system of capture by external forces such as capitalism, the police, etc. Because of this, poststructuralism offers the possibility of a non-reactionary critique, thereby offering a unique account of what of importance is lost in the end of subjectivity. I argue that more important than the individual self or subject is the loss of interiorities and the connections between them. To understand the threat to interiority, I look to Foucault's concept of technologies of the self to explain how the hollowing out of subjectivity Zuboff warns us of is taking place. Finally, I will argue that this new form of subjectivation demands a return to virtue ethics' central question of how to properly shape the right sorts of character.

# From Social Robots To Moral Robots? Empathy and moral standing in the age of affective robotics

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The recent breakthroughs in social robotics and the spreading of increasingly sophisticated artificial agents have led the research in human-robot interaction (HRI) to acknowledge them as actual social actors. Since every social relationship is inherently also a moral one, this new sort of interaction confronts us with unprecedented ethical questions. This study, therefore, stems from the will to investigate how social robots stand with regard to the moral community and whether they can be considered not only social actors but also moral actors, along with the ethical implications that follow. Throughout the examination, a distinction is first made between the notion of "moral agent" and "moral patient." The former notion is then discussed referencing applied ethics, as suggested by engineering ethics and machine ethics. However, they are shown to be inadequate in properly legitimizing social robots as moral agents. The second one is addressed by identifying three main philosophical approaches for ascribing moral relevance: ontological, comparative, and relational. Although all of them fail to normatively ground the membership of social robots in the moral circle, this analysis highlights the fundamental role of empathy in moral recognition processes and the need to investigate its underlying functioning and significance. Empathy is investigated by turning to a neurocognitive understanding, which emphasizes its physiological and evolutionary roots, along with the anthropomorphizing mechanisms involved. Partly through HRI studies, which highlight the human tendency to anthropomorphize social robots and to show spontaneous empathy towards them, the empathic process is identified as an instinctual and pre-reflexive drive for moral recognition. Following this background, the most challenging ethical issues are discussed, along with the theoretical effort to hold empirical cognitive evidence and philosophical reflection together. While this study acknowledges the central role of empathy in ascribing moral relevance, it also points out its limitations by reframing the three considered approaches, not as competing paradigms, but as complementary moments of the one moral recognition process. Thus, a fundamental tension emerges between the impossibility for the normative justification of social robots' membership in the moral circle and the human tendency, despite this, to experience a certain degree of empathy and moral regard toward them. Finally, the discussion explores two main ethical issues that arise from this tension. First, the design of highly humanlike social robots seems to constitute a form of deception and an arbitrary manipulation of individual empathic processes, which hinder accurate self-representation of reality, in favour of economic and commercial interests. On the other hand, the increasingly widespread presence of such robots poses moral agents in an unprecedented condition, where empathy is no longer a reliable tool for moral recognition. Both issues, then, trigger the need to rethink design and production models of social robotics, which should find in ethical discussion the main pillar to build a path that is attentive to the sustainability and consequences of its advancements.

# Technology as Dispositif and the Production of Subjects

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The fact that technology is not just a neutral means for the realization of concrete purposes is nowadays widely recognized within the philosophy of technology. In analytical shortening, two sides of this overcoming of an instrumentalist concept of technology can be singled out in particular: One side focuses primarily on technical action, including the handling of technical objects - in this perspective then, the underdetermination of technology and technical action is often pointed out, be it in the wake of a perspective on technology as a designed space of possibility for human action (e.g. Hubig 2002, 2006) or a conception of human-technology relations as essentially multistable (the locus classicus is Ihde 1990). The other side, however, focuses in particular on the actors involved in technical action – within this perspective the idea of a stable subject existing independent of technology is often criticized, whereby further attention is then directed, for example, to forms of co-constitution of subjects and objects within human-technology relations (e.g. Verbeek 2005, 2011) or to various types of interweaving and merging of humans and technology (e.g. Haraway, e.g. 1997, 2016 or Latour, e.g. 1994, 2010, 2019).

In the context of these moments of overcoming an instrumentalist concept of technology, considering technology as a dispositif now takes up the aspect of the underdetermination of technology and technical action: Technology comes into view as a structure of effects with a certain direction whose effectiveness is never completely determined. But primarily such a perspective focuses on the side of the actors: with regard to technology, certain constellations of power (and knowledge) are particularly relevant, which in their productive function contribute to the constitution of subjects. However, how exactly such a productive function of technology as a dispositif could be understood is still largely unclear, despite occasional efforts in the philosophy of technology to understand technology as a dispositif in general (e.g. Hetzel 2005) or the connection between technology and subjectification in particular (e.g. Dorrestijn 2012).

The talk Technology as Dispositif and the Production of Subjects addresses this gap on the one hand by drawing on Christoph Hubig's broad concept of technology adopted from Friedrich von Gottl-Ottilienfeld (see especially Hubig 2006, 2007), and on the other hand via an understanding of dispositifs and subjectification based on Foucault (see especially Foucault 2000, 2020b, 2022, 2020a) and Deleuze (see especially Deleuze 2019). In this framework, technology is understood as a certain structure of material, intellectual and social technology, whereby its dispositive power is conceptually located in particular at the level of social technology. By means of the four dimensions of self-constitution in the introduction to Foucault's The Use of Pleasure (Foucault 2020a, pp. 36-45), social-technical elements of technology can then in turn be made fruitful for questions of subjectification. Without reducing technology to a mere dispositif, a conceptual specification of the dispositive character of technology, including its productive function in the context of subjectification, is thus achieved.

# Making sense of nonhuman impacts on society: Against the new materialist approach

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t is a widely shared belief among many contemporary scholars in the humanities and social sciences that the current global ecological predicament has one of its main causes in the anthropocentric modern worldview which ontologically separates humans from nonhumans, reducing the latter to the status of inert objects to be freely used for the satisfaction of human interests and desires. Challenging this worldview means not only acknowledging that the world is made of socioecological processes in which humans and nonhumans are always intertwined, but also providing a conceptual framework to elucidate the way in which nonhuman entities actively contribute to shaping society.

So far, one of the most prominent approaches in tackling this issue has been developed by new materialist thinkers, who claim that the societal consequences of nonhumans, biotic and abiotic alike, should be interpreted as the result of the exercise of an agency that is equal to that of humans, if not greater.

The objective of this paper is to present a critique of the new materialist approach by highlighting some crucial flaws associated with it and provide some suggestions for building a more robust theoretical framework for explaining the societal impact of nonhumans, based on the fundamental distinction between living beings, which can be said to have agency, and nonliving objects, whose impact on society cannot be explained by the concept of "agency".

The initial section of the paper briefly reconstructs the arguments employed by scholars such as Latour, Bennett and Barad to challenge human exceptionalism and to recognize agency to all types of nonhumans. It shows how these arguments can ultimately be reduced to two strategies: either to severe the link between agency and intentionality, or to anthropomorphize nonhumans by ascribing human-like intentionality to them.

The second section illustrates some crucial shortcomings present in the new materialist proposal. First, it shows how the concept of "agency" is defined in such a minimal way that it could be extended to every existing entity up to the point of depriving the concept of its very meaning. Furthermore, it illustrates how, by disregarding the distinction between biotic and abiotic entities, new materialism proposes a form of fetishism which attributes properties exclusive of living beings to nonliving things, delegating onto the latter the responsibility for social relations and withdrawing accountability from human subjects. The final section provides some suggestions for framing the societal effects of nonhumans in a way that overcomes the flaws of new materialism. First, it argues for distinguishing between living and nonliving nonhumans, according the property of agency only to the former group. Then, drawing upon the work of anthropologist Alf Hornborg, it delineates a framework according to which the impact of nonhuman objects, both natural and technological, on social relations can be explained in at least four ways (nonhuman objects as constraints, catalysts, proxies and fetishes) without incurring into the fetishistic conclusion of granting objects the same agency as living beings.

# Why non-humans do not have agency

Arjen Kleinherenbrink

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The idea that non-human entities have agency is at the heart of many theories associated with the metaphysical turn in continental philosophy and the wider humanities. Examples include Jane Bennett's vibrant materialism, Karen Barad's agential realism, Levi Bryant's variant of object-oriented ontology, and the later works of Bruno Latour.

Yet there is no consensus on what non-human agency is. It is varyingly and often incommensurably defined as simple causal efficacy, purposeful behavior, collective action, pre-individual formatting, overarching structuring, possession of emergent properties, and entanglement with non-human behavior. This proliferation of definitions has not spurred much debate about the exact nature of agency. Scholarship in the contemporary humanities instead seems to embrace agency's many possible meanings as a sign of purportedly healthy pluralism and anti-dogmatism.

This has led to criticism from adherents (such as Timothy Morton in Humankind) as well as skeptics (such as Hartmut Rosa et al. in Critical Theory and New Materialisms) of the metaphysical turn. The concept of agency would be so metaphysically vague that it paints everything with the same brush and thereby obscures relevant ontological differences. It would also be ethically suspect, because vagueness about the agency of non-humans allows one to either stress or downplay human responsibility by conveniently selecting whichever definition suits their case.

I argue that these criticisms are correct and that the concept of agency ought to be restricted to designating specific features of organic entities. First, to be an agent is to act on possibilities discerned in an environment. All organisms do this, even if there are enormous differences in how aware different species are of this fact about themselves. Some organisms, like human beings, manipulate natural objects and build artificial objects to help them act on possibilities. Agency is as such a property of finite and mortal organisms who, due to their biological needs and limited lifespans, have an existential stake in the realization of specific possibilities in light of a purpose.

Second, non-human entities do not have agency. Even advanced digital artifacts do not have it. What the many confused definitions of agency in the metaphysical turn are instead aiming at is the fact that non-human entities (like all entities) have powers. By virtue of having powers, non-human entities have mind-independent reality and their very own causal traction on others. Yet this does not make them agents. Instead of agency, non-human entities have tendencies. This is because powers are never 'bare powers' but always predispose towards a specific range of responses to stimuli. The notion of powers already has a presence in the relevant literature, but that powers result in tendencies has not gotten much attention.

The result of the argument is a clearer metaphysical view. This helps counter the aforementioned metaphysical and ethical vagueness. Our general metaphysics ought not to include a notion of agency, because powers and tendencies suffice. The concept of agency can then be reserved for the special metaphysics of the domain of organisms.

# Aesthetis of „Artificial Nature": Between Rejection and Uncanny

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In paragraph 42 of Critique of Judgement, Kant analyses the problem of intellectual interest in beauty. According to Kant, in some cases an immediate interest in beauty does not conflict with morality, but is complementary to it. In order to state this Kant has to separate an interest in beauty of nature from an interest in beauty of art.

In this context Kant inserts an example about a landlord, living in the countryside, who entertains his guests with artificial birdsong. As Kant comments, the supposed birdsong attracts a lot of admiration from the visitors, but when the trickery is revealed, the effect of harmonious natural atmosphere immediately disappears.

Referring to this example, two problematic points can be noted. First of all, Kant defines art by its relation to that with which it is artificial, i.e. by its relation to nature. At least as far as this passage is concerned, according to Kant, art is not much more than artificial nature. The distinction between real and artificial nature in Kant's aesthetics has hierarchical character. Art is treated as artificial nature, because it is not enough nature. And secondly, Kant expresses the idea, that artificial nature as insufficient nature is unworthy of attention – the interest disappears and that's all. The structure of this reaction could be described as a two-step judgement – a momentary deception and then a rejection.

The problem of artificial nature as an insufficient nature, found in Kant's thought, is particularly relevant today due to the fact that, in contemporary culture, the concept of artificial nature is primarily associated with technology. There has already been done quite a lot of research on this issue, demonstrating that the visual or acoustic resemblance of technological systems to living or organic entities provokes not so much ignorance or rejection, but a much more contradictory condition of uncanny.

In the second part of the paper referring to Sigmund Freud ("The Uncanny"), Masahiro Mori ("The Uncanny Valley") and Yuk Hui (Recursivity and Contingency) will be discussed the relationship between technological artificiality and uncanny.

The Freud's insights about the dialectal character of the term "uncanny" (between unfamiliar and recognisable) opens up the possibility to interpret the motif of technological artificiality (indication to T. E. A. Hoffman's "The Sandman) and its resemblance to reality not in psychological, but in ontological perspective as the uncanny caused by the disappearance of the clear boundaries between the "authentic" and the "artificial" reality.

Masahiro Mori discusses the uncanny primarily as technological kind of problem which should be overcome. However, the analysis of his position highlights his doubts, where the uncanny is linked to the latently rooted human evaluation of the self as insufficient in relation to technology.

In Yuk Hui's thought the uncanny is also related to technology and appears as disorientation characteristic to the reality of new cybernetic systems. These systems operate on the principal of recursivity (integrating contingency) and constantly erasing the line between organic and artificial.

# Who's in Control?: Posthuman subjectivities and feminist resistance in videogaming

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In this paper I focus on the award-winning 2019 videogame Control, developed by Remedy Entertainment and published by 505 Games. Drawing on the ways in which the avatar-gamer relationship goes beyond merely objective interactions between "self" and "other" I show how the subjectivity that emerges from videogaming is a complex, embodied, intra-action between different components (Wilde 2023). As such, my research demonstrates the ontological inseparability between avatar and gamer, utilising Barad's (2007: 136) argument that '[p]osthumanism doesn't presume the separateness of any-"thing," let alone the alleged spatial, ontological, and epistemological distinction that sets humans apart'. This research explores how this is evident across the avatar-gamer agencies that emerge in videogaming, through affective capacities as well as goal-oriented alignments, in ways that reject humanistic dualisms and anthropocentric notions of mastery and control. As Barad (2007: ix) states, '[i]ndividuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating'.

In Control, the player-protagonist Jesse Faden starts a journey looking for her missing brother and ends up as Director of a secret agency – the Federal Bureau of Control. Battling a supernatural threat of corruption by the "Hiss", Jesse discovers a workplace full of otherworldly dimensions. In Control, the posthuman subjectivity of avatar-gamer entanglement is reflected in the posthuman subjectivity Jesse herself displays through her entanglement with a paranormal entity known as Polaris, who Jesse is in psychic contact with, considers an ally, and talks to throughout the game. Jesse might therefore be considered more-than-human, displaying what Braidotti (2022: 221) terms 'a new sensibility in welcoming the alien and the monstrous as sites of affirmation and becoming'.

Beyond the exploration of the multiple agencies and entities that allow the posthuman subjectivity of Jesse-Polaris-player to emerge, drawing on different elements of work in the game, this paper explores the representation/performance of Jesse. This involves considering the neoliberal expectations placed upon her and the corporate environment she is in, the ways a process of neoliberal subjectivation is evident, and how Jesse demonstrates resistance to individualism in favour of intersectional (posthuman) feminist approaches (Wilde 2024). Janish (2018: 222) writes that 'women's experiences when playing games are linked inextricably to their larger life environments, such as social, cultural, work, home, and political arenas [...] we must remember that our experience of gender in our non-gaming lives weighs directly on the way we interact with games, gamers, and games studies'. As such, I consider the relationships and roles that frame Jesse, including male/female camaraderie and Jesse's rejection of hierarchies, to see how Jesse's relationship with Polaris might be considered as an alliance, per Braidotti (2022: 221), that 'allows shared critiques of binary power relations' and distorts self-representations to 'reveal the inner workings of their relational political economy'. Beyond merely exploring the relationship between human and machine, this work aligns with what Ferrando terms 'feminist ethics, which [...] allows us to focus on relationality, situated knowledges, and embodied experience' (Ferrando 2020), viewing videogames as a contemporary site for the exploration of rhizomatic relationships.

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# Fields of Sense and Cosmotechnics: towards an Andean concept of technology

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The notion that reality can be approached in multiple ways is widely accepted. However, according to negative realism, two distinctive characteristics of reality are its resistance and in-amendability, indicating that objects resist thought and cannot be corrected by it. This conceptual framework allows to understand that objects are independent of individuals, but it recognizes different ways of making sense of different types of objects. Each object, whether natural, ideal, or social, is presented within a field of sense, thus providing different approaches for its study. Moreover, there are diverse worldviews regarding the relationship between humans and technology. In this context, the reflection focuses on technology, considering the characteristics of a real object as proposed by new realism. The goal is to review the relationship between humans and technology using Markus Gabriel's theory of Fields of Sense, and to simultaneously establish a link with Yuk Hui's theory of Cosmotechnics. The purpose of this theoretical connection is to develop a framework that allows for proposing an alternative worldview to conventional ones, specifically an Andean-Aymara cosmotechnics. To achieve this objective, the process will be divided into several stages: firstly, Markus Gabriel's theory of Fields of Sense will be concisely presented; secondly, the concept of Cosmotechnics proposed by Yuk Hui will be explained; thirdly, a link between both theories will be developed; and finally, it will be explored how the Aymara worldview could reconfigure or reinterpret our relationship with technology. This approach seeks not only to understand the interaction between technology and society but also to offer philosophical alternatives that resonate with specific cultural practices and their technological implications.

# When is AI-Art Art?

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The majority of artworks produced in the present age, which we encounter every day, have either been created with the help of digital tools, are born fully digital, or at least will be digitally reproduced in some form for wide dissemination. Despite this, the common and romantic conception of a painter in their studio, in front of a canvas, still dominates the way we think about how artworks are created and distributed. The wider public only becomes aware of this shift to digitally mediated art production in select circumstances. The prime examples would be the NFT-hype in 2021 or the more recent fascination with AI models, which has dominated the discourse about digital artworks since late 2022. This paper aims to engage with the latter phenomenon, particularly focusing on the creation of digital images by text-to-image machine learning models such as DALL-E, Mid-journey, Stable Diffusion or Gemini, and to explore some of the implications and consequences of these technologies for our general conception of art. I propose to critically reflect on digital images generated by text-to-image machine learning models by applying concepts from Nelson Goodman and his work in analytical aesthetics. The questions one is immediately confronted with when dealing with such images are: Are they artworks and can artworks be created by nonhuman agents or a combination of human and nonhuman agents? I argue that those questions are wrongly posed and do not help us to engage with those images on a critical level. I will show that those generated images can certainly feature all five of Goodman's (1984, 135–137) symptoms of the aesthetic, namely exemplification, semantic and syntactic density, relative repleteness and complex forms of reference. Therefore, they can easily function as artworks but are not necessarily artworks. This distinction is motivated by Goodman's (1978, 67) proposal to shift from the question of "What is Art?" or "Is this object Art?" to the more illuminating question of "When is Art?". I will propose a preliminary answer to the question: "When is an image generated by a text-to-image machine learning model an artwork?". My answer to that question will demonstrate that the problems we face in this case are not at all dissimilar to those encountered throughout the 20th century when confronted with concept art, objet trouvé, readymade art and early experimental generative music. My answer will also draw attention to the following questions: "What is part of the work in case of these generated images? Is the prompt part of the artwork?". This will lead me to the following conclusion: The well-known but still subsisting tendency of text-to-image machine learning models to produce stereotypical, racist, sexist or otherwise problematic content allows these images, combined with their prompt, to function as artworks; facilitating critical reflection on those prejudices and their link to the symbolic function of images in general.

# Posthuman ontologies and achieving queered personhood

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In our current era ontology is a powerful tool to claim one's space in the world.

As queer, non-white, non-male, and non-european peoples have been doing for time immemorable, socially- and culturally-positioned existence takes more than individual consciousness to be recognized and validated as such. Not everyone is seen as a person, and not all those seen as people are treated equally.

Political action and cultural rewiring are thus required for those whose identity still ought to be recognized, and as new post-human identities such as cyborgs, transhumans and transspecies people are being forged, they have yet to achieve social, cultural, and political validation and recognition.

Due to the affects relegated to such technologically-mediated identities by popular media, which I explored in Cocciarelli, A. Reconfiguring Humans (2024, Unpublished manuscript), without social, legal, and political ontological recognition that is based on inclusivity and equality the potential consequences these identities face can be dire, degrading, and possibly lethal.

In this paper I will thus contend that the nature of embodiment is fluid, cultural, political, and relational, and that recognizing such an outlook allows for different identities to be included and their personhood to be recognized regardless of, and concurrently because of, their embodiment.

To argue in favor of new, fluid, and hybrid ways of experiencing embodied existence, I will employ notions, logic, and perspectives from Posthumanism (Braidotti, Hayles, Haraway), Queer Theory (Richardson), and Feminist Disability Studies (Kafer, Garland-Thomson). The power bodies retain will be explored and discussed, challenging simplistic and reductive understandings of embodiment based on anthropocentric rhetoric and hierarchical dualisms.

With this paper I thus aim to bring forth the discussion of queered models of (post)human identity, in the hopes of politicizing the current emergence of new identities while concurrently establishing a framework for future ontological discussions of personhood as well.

# The Challenge of Tokenizing Collective Agency

Marco Emilio, Cristina Viano and Irene Domenicale

IUSVE/UPS (Emilio), University of Turin (Viano), University of Camerino (Domenicale)

Among digital innovations, blockchain technologies have captured significant attention for their potential to revolutionize economic transaction governance (Voshmgir, 2020) by relying on nonhuman tools, such as codes (Jacobs, 2020). This prospect has sparked a diverse philosophical investigation: blockchain technologies (BCT) are viewed either as narrative tools (Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2017) or as substantive metaphors (Jacobetty & Orton-Johnson, 2023). Furthermore, much metaphysical research has been focused on cryptocurrencies (Passinsky, 2020) and trustless social construction (Lipman, 2023).

However, by being applied to reframe social actions (Marres, 2016), investigating these digital tools can cross many issues of social ontology, such as group agency (List & Pettit, 2011; Tuomela, 2013), institutions (Hindriks & Guala, 2019), and money (Searle, 2010; Guala, 2020). At first glance, mutual transactions through BCT minimize the role of mental states in building joint actions between anonymous subjects (Kirchschlaeger, 2023).

Regarding these issues, insights can be gleaned from empirical investigation within digital geography and information sciences, where BCT is utilized in fostering civic goods through a co-design methodology (Avanzo et al., 2023; Viano et al., 2024). This inquiry suggests a more nuanced view of interactions between community members and blockchain technology, contrasting with the 'anti-institutional' approaches of mainstream BCT rhetoric. Moreover, the need for relational processes in implementing digital ledgers and the need to clarify the tokenization of non-economic goods underscores the intricate nature of the issue.

Intersecting these branches of inquiry might shed light on the interaction between human and digital nonhuman agents aimed at transforming social life. However, a coherent intertwining of these two issues has yet to be fully developed.

From our interdisciplinary standpoint, advancing this investigative effort can significantly enhance current debates in at least two different areas. Within social ontology, it could enhance the inquiry about group and collective agency (Pettit, 2023) and their reliance on artifacts. Simultaneously, it might help clarify what kinds of affordances are peculiar to different blockchain technologies and which notions of collectivities are at stake in applying nonhuman agentive tools.

By analyzing the role of intentional design and implementation of digital artifacts, we will claim that criteria for evaluating human/nonhuman reciprocal actions can be formulated only by clarifying what and whose agencies are at stake.

Pursuing this general goal, we will start by investigating some accounts of group agency and institutions through the lens of non-ideal social ontology (Burman, 2023) and metaphysical inquiry on digital artifacts (Bailey, 2024; Turilli & Floridi, 2008). Hence, we will scrutinize some cases of the application of BCT in Italy in civic domains (Viano et al., 2023). Due to its configuration, the implementation of this technology is notably complex: on an empirical level of analysis, economic, social, and moral incentives are often inextricable and demand a "reading for difference" approach (Gibson & Graham, 2008) applied to digital technologies (Certomà, 2023; Lynch, 2020; Santala & McGuirk, 2022). In a third step, drawing on the contribution of Nguyen (2020), we will sketch an articulation of the interplay between artifacts' design, participants' motivational states, and social ranking in making available new libraries of agencies. Therefore, we will elaborate on what this examination entails for a comprehensive view of joint actions within blended human/nonhuman environments. We will develop the idea that trust's intentional promotion is necessary to build new collective affordances (Weichold & Thonhauser, 2020) through digital artifacts. However, different understandings of group agencies at stake lead to diverse outcomes. As a last step, we will outline some open queries regarding agency transformation, tokenization, and transaction of values within the current debates in social ontology and digital studies.

# Objet, cache-moi: the subject's presence in a hostile world

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In "The German Ideology" (1845), Karl Marx argues that the most important historical act of humanity is the production of material artifacts to sustain life. He claims that these artifacts, which are essential for the continuity of life, determine living space and define individual existence.

As the former Situationist Asger Jorn claims, artifacts signify human presence and interact with historical substance. Jorn's "détourned paintings" illustrate this interaction by repurposing existing artworks to reflect contemporary contexts. Conversely, artists such as Jean Tinguely (Homage to New York, 1961) and Banksy (Self-Destructing Girl with Balloon, 2017) grapple with the challenges of life and acknowledge transience by creating artifacts that self-destruct in response to their refusal to adapt to the conditions of the present. In these regards, assembling objects requires an active, emotional engagement with the surrounding world. Moreover, when objects return the viewer's gaze, they take on a certain energy that can heighten the mystique that surrounds such objects. Walter Benjamin (1936) defines aura as the ability of an artifact to establish a relationship with the viewer and to shape individual and collective experiences. Similarly, artifacts such as the volleyball "Wilson" in "Cast Away" emerge in times of despair and offer solace and protection. They return the gaze to their creator and only disappear when conditions change, emphasizing their transient nature.

The following contribution presents artifacts as a means of improving the world and encouraging a stronger relationship with one's environment. In this sense, examples such as Mario Merz's paradoxical, inaccessible but transparent igloos and Banksy's "Dismaland", which has been transformed into a refugee shelter, underline a similar idea. They symbolize protection and home (which is also the meaning of igloo in Innuit language) under antagonistic conditions, while at the same time using abundant materials, and that created this hostility in the first place.

Ultimately, the paper will conclude that society and its artifacts are intertwined and shape individual consciousness and social structures. Artifacts reflect humanity's struggle for survival and meaning in an uncertain, transient world. They embody the human presence and offer solace amidst the chaos of existence, which represents an order yet to be deciphered.

# Beyond instrumentality: rethinking plants as agents in environmental philosophy

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Contemporary philosophical and ethical debate is rethinking the human role within the environment and the relationship with nonhuman beings, including vegetal entities. In Western philosophical history, plants have remained on the margins of significant thought patterns, excluded from moral and political consideration. While plants have long been regarded primarily as instruments providing ecosystem services and resources (Sullivan 2010), recent thought increasingly recognizes their intrinsic value and agentivity.

Drawing on insights from plant ethics, this work will confront the traditional value of plants as natural, passive objects and instead acknowledge their active participation in shaping the world. The argument posits that it is crucial to consider plants as central subjects in environmental relations and as bearers of an intrinsic value grounded by their agentivity and specificity of being. The discussion within plant ethics has tried to determine what concept would ground plants' intrinsic value, exploring notions such as dignity (Abbott 2008), interests (Sandler 2018), and flourishing (Kallhoff 2018). However, some scholars, such as Sylvie Pouteau (2014) and Karen Houle (2018), contend that this approach is anthropocentric, as it attributes humans' morally valuable attributes to plants. Starting from this framework, I will argue that agentivity may be a more appropriate concept to explore human-plants mutual influence and plants' intrinsic value.

The inclusion of plants in philosophical discussions provides an opportunity to explore broader questions around temporality, movement, individuality, collectivity, similarity, and radical otherness that transcend species boundaries. The areas of reflection span from what plants are (Pouteau 2018) and what they do (Chamovitz 2012) to their social and biopolitical position within more-than-human societies. The reintegration of plants into philosophical thought prompts us to consider their biopolitical dimensions (Ernwein 2021) as well as the ways in which they influence human lives and societies (Breda 2016). Scholars such as Pouteau (2014), Marder (2013), and Myers (2015) have shed light on the sociopolitical and ethical implications of our interactions with vegetal beings. By exploring the multifaceted relationships between humans and plants, this work aims to move beyond mere representation and avoid reifying the category of plants itself (Ernwerin 2021).

In this context, examining humanity's ethical responsibilities toward vegetal life has become critical. As we grapple with environmental challenges and biodiversity loss, understanding and respecting the agency of plants takes on new significance. This exploration extends to considerations about resource management, ethical frameworks for environmental policy, and the commodification of nature within capitalist systems. By delving into the complex interplay between vegetal agencies, ethical considerations, and human-plant encounters, this work aims to foster a deeper understanding of humanity's place within the web of beings. Finally, by reassessing the pivotal role of plants in shaping our world, we can unveil new pathways toward more sustainable and equitable relationships with the environment and nonhuman entities.

## Costanza Penna

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This article argues that "collective mental time travel" (Michealian and Sutton 2019) is relevant to frame the ontology of group persistence and transgenerational social actions, which involve collective endeavors spanning multiple generations (Andina 2022). Mainstream social ontology struggles to explain how the membership and normativity of such collectives can extend to future generations, thus undermining the very structure of diachronic group persistence. This paper moves from promising findings in psychology and memory studies to offer a way out of this puzzle.

In Section I, I contend that transgenerational actions necessitate both collective memory and collective future thinking at each stage. Collective memory (Olick et al. 2011; Kattago 2016; Barash 2017) enables present members to reassess the intentions and plans of their predecessors, while collective future thinking (Szpunar and Szpunar 2016) allows to imagine their successors and the extension of actions across even distant generations. Without these forms of projection into the past and future, transgenerational actions could hardly obtain altogether.

In Section 2, I define the structure and functioning of a transgenerational group's memory and future thinking as intrinsically interconnected and collective in a strong sense (Halbwachs 1992; De Saint Laurent 2018; Szpunar 2021). The interplay between remembering the past and imagining the future underscores the notion of "collective mental time travel and challenges the notion that future generations only passively accept their inheritance from the past, thus counterbalancing the commonly assumed asymmetry between past, present, and future.

In Section 3, I explore normative implications for diachronic group persistence within this framework. I claim that collective memory and future thinking are forms of diachronic mutual recognition among generations (Honneth 2015). This is definitional of them as social groups (or subgroups), while also allowing the identification with the transgenerational group. In this sense, other generations are addressees of mutual recognition, which provides normative grounds to act in a transgenerational sense. However, contra Honneth, I argue that due to the non-reciprocity and non-existence of future generations (Parfit 1984), recognition can never be fully accomplished. Far from condemning to presentism or short-termism, this reveals the structural openness of present generations to the future (Lévinas 1979): acting as a group allows members to prepare for a diachronic time that overcomes current members and is accessible only to the group as a collective.

The upshot of this account is threefold. First, it offers a critical entry point to challenge the mainstream assumption that collective actions are based on ideal conditions of common knowledge and rationality of the parties (Bratman 1993; Gilbert 1992; Tuomela and Miller 1988). Instead, collective memory and future thinking help explain the opaque character of transgenerational actions and allow considering the role of power, conflict, and discursive struggle in the negotiation of memories and future scenarios. Second, it introduces a new approach to transgenerational group agency and persistence which is inherently normative, avoids presentism and paternalism and is sensitive to long-term efforts. Third, the ontological framework presented is supported by empirical data from psychological studies, fostering an interdisciplinary approach to group persistence.

# Giving birth in a Post-Anthropocentric world

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In the short story First Law (1956) by Isaac Asimov there is a malfunctional robot. Due to this, it is banished from the Base on the planet Titan. A scientist, left on an expedition, gets stuck by a snowstorm and encounter a storm pup: the only menacing living thing capable of withstanding the habitat. When the man is about to preemptively strike him, the anomalous robot named Emma Two arrives like a shadow, shouting: "Master, don't shoot". Disobeying the most important law of robotics, it does not defend the scientist but it takes the creature and leaves the man behind. However, both the scientist and Emma will return to the Base. The android carries the little one that is not a storm pup: "To that robot there was something else that came first, even before me" said the scientist, "we named it Emma Junior. (...) Emma Two had to protect it from my gun. What is even First Law compared with the holy ties of mother love?". Here the story ends as an extraordinary example for dealing with the relationships between humans and nonhumans by focusing on the issue of motherhood. Today, Anthropocentrism is being continuously re-discussed operating a deconstruction of it through recent Posthumanism and Transhumanism, as well as theories on Biotechnology within the complex relationship between technology and society. Inspired by Asimov, I would like to focus on a contemporary science fiction story: the television series Raised by wolves (2020). A dystopian Earth is ravaged by wars and the future of humanity is entrusted to two androids, Mother and Father, sent to an alien planet so that Mother can reproduce by feeding the human embryos assigned to her. The figure of the Father should be considered to clarify its role far from a phallocentric view. Thus, we enter the terrain of feminist studies on the relationship between machine and human being read through cyberfeminism, techno-feminism and new materialism as applied to birth. These are theories that are reformulating classical paradigms of human interaction – even of reproductive modalities – decentralizing perspective to abandon the centrality of the human and initiate new ontological pathways concerning creation and life. Procreation, therefore, is no longer considered a uniquely human faculty. Positions such as those by Haraway, Kristeva and Braidotti are useful to reflect on the role of the Gynoid Mother, on the metamorphoses of the artificially constructed and specially programmed female corporeity to totally enslave it-self to gestating and nurturing human fetuses. This topic is also functional for the exposition of theories on monstrosity often linked back to the maternal. We should get into the issue of the positive or negative outcome of a human repopulation dependent on nonhuman entities, as well as the coexistence between the parties. A robot "may not injure a human being" wrote Asimov "or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm". What about giving birth to human beings in a Posthuman future threatening like a snowstorm?

# From Aesthetic Appreciation to Ecological Action: Art as a Means to Address the Challenges of the Anthropocene

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Ever since Hepburn published his foundational essay on environmental aesthetics in 1966, the ways of perceiving, appreciating and experiencing nature have been studied in depth. However, little attention has been paid to those parts of the environment that we do not perceive aesthetically: either because we are not trained to do so, or because we do not know that these matters can indeed be appreciated aesthetically. Whereas authors such as Saito have been warning us that the environmental aesthetics discipline leaves a lot behind, such as everyday experiences (Saito, 2007), this presentation will argue that what we exclude is even broader than we think.

Matters such as air pollution, animal suffering, the loss of biodiversity or the accumulation of waste, if appreciated aesthetically, would take an entirely unexpected course. Eaton calls this "the problem of nonperceivables" (2000, p. 186), which is that what is ignored, avoided by perceptual apparatuses. Who is to say that if we were to aesthetically experience space debris, so distant and impossible to grasp, we would not begin to give the subject the importance it deserves? Various artistic practices have taken on the challenge of expressing these emerging sensibilities, or more precisely, of suggesting fresh perspectives for aesthetic appreciation. Among these ventures are Ana Teresa Fernández's beach installations envisioning the likely rise in sea levels (2023), Catherine Sara Young's luxurious soaps made from sewage (2016), Daan Roosegaarde's interactive displays addressing space debris (2019), and the METALOCUS multidisciplinary collective's installation exploring air pollution (2017), to name a few. These artworks have the power to introduce new avenues for experiencing climate change. What makes these approaches outstanding is their knack for translating complex environmental scientific data into something tangible and immersive. Furthermore, beyond just pleasing the senses, the artworks go a step further by prompting participants to reflect deeply on the consequences of environmental damage.

The non-perceivables, then, are aesthetic omissions that lead us to think that matters such as those mentioned above do not exist or, at least, do not belong to our experience, thus exempting us from taking responsibility for their outcomes. We hold the belief that environmental aesthetics should acknowledge these oversights and view art as a means to confront the challenges of the Anthropocene era. It is the very lack of awareness stemming from these aesthetic omissions which prevents us from taking actions that could be decisive in counteracting the effects of the planetary emergency we are facing.

## Virtual and Hyperreal Intersections: Baudrillard and Deleuze in Alain Damasio's novel Les Furtifs

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Literature is perhaps the preeminent art form produced by the advent of modernity. However, if a literary genre is inextricably linked with the arrival of the industrial age, it is undoubtedly Science Fiction. As technological innovations and their consequences intensify, Science Fiction novels multiply in the field of literature and attempt to explore the implications of this impact. Especially after the gradual emergence of the Information Age, Science Fiction is no longer a literary subgenre of mass culture but a constitutive mode of writing that is replacing modernist "high" literature in importance. Ironically, just as Science Fiction rose in popularity, Jean Baudrillard would herald its demise. In the chapter on Science Fiction in Simulacra and Simulation, he argues that it no longer exists because the reality it dissects and opposes does not either. In the hyperreal world of the implosion of the real, the fantasy/reality distinction becomes irrelevant, making science fiction not absent but ubiquitous. Science Fiction authors of this epoch, unable to imagine something radically different from the present, limit themselves to fictionally emphasizing already existing aspects and potentialities. According to Baudrillard, this new, postmodern type of science fiction is represented by Philip Dick and J. G. Ballard. Today, with the new qualitative advancement of artificial intelligence, Baudrillard's verdicts seem not to lose but to gain validity. The substitution of the real for the virtual continues, making any possibility of distinction nearly impossible.

Can science fiction regain a critical dimension against this condition of virtual seduction, constituting not only an apology for the present but also a projection of another future? In this presentation, I will argue that the French author Alain Damasio's recent acclaimed novel The Furtifs (2019) is such an example. He achieves this by drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, whose presence is more than evident in the novel. The dystopian depiction of the near future that the novel presents brings to mind the Deleuzian society of control. Damasio shows that one can escape the power of virtual reality not by returning to the real but by demonstrating that this division never existed. The Furtifs (Invisibles), the little creatures in the novel whose existence no one can perceive with their senses, are the literary embodiment of the Deleuzian virtual. When one of them is detected by the novel's protagonists, it leaves its dead, actual body behind, being simultaneously actualized while retreating in its virtuality. The unbroken unity of real-virtual is the only threat to the society of control and the only threat to the intensifying implosion that, especially with the advent of AI, replaces the real with the hyperreal. Through literature, Damasio brings into dialogue two different conceptualizations of simulacra and virtuality: Furtifs, as phantasms/simulacra, are irreducible to the society of simulation. As Deleuze argues: "For between the destruction which conserves and perpetuates the established order of representations, models, and copies, and the destruction of models and copies which sets up a creative chaos, there is a great difference."

# A Multispecies Translation and Ethical Aesthetics Approach to Reimagining Human-Plant-Soil Relations

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This paper explores the vital necessity of reassessing our perceptions of soil and plant existence, probing their symbolic, aesthetic, and collaborative roles spanning human and non-human realms. Through a multidisciplinary lens informed by translation theories, particularly influenced by philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's insights, it critiques communication and meaning production, revealing embedded colonial power structures.

To expand translation beyond human language, the paper proposes a speculative exploration of plants' narratives within contexts of expansion and colonization, drawing from artworks by The Plant Contingent collective. The collective's creative research, rooted in Andean Indigenous cosmovision and 19th-century spiritual seances, challenges Western understandings of subjectivity and offers an ethical aesthetic mediation through their speculative titles "di-venation" and "seance-sorium."

By reclaiming translation politics through the local, diverse narratives are embraced, fostering interdisciplinary dialogues to deepen understanding of colonial nomenclature inscribed on soil and plants. Inspired by the legacy of Miguel A. López's "chronodissidence," the essay unfolds how the Plant Contingent invites reconsideration of our relationship with soil and plants beyond enduring colonial impacts.

The paper also questions the colonial model's promotion of a "rational justification" for exploitation, prompting reflection on whether non-humans, such as insects, fields, and soil, are perceived either as enemies or merely recourses (or both). Through this exploration, possibilities for more livable futures in collaboration between human and non-human offer expansions to philosophical and creative research horizons.

# Autopo(i)etics and Authorial Technique in the Work of Holly Herndon and Sasha Stiles

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Samuel Beckett once asked "What matter who's speaking?", and my talk reformats his query to ask instead: What matter if machines are "writing?" Drawing on the work of two contemporary artists who incorporate AI into their creative practices—multidisciplinary artist and electronic musician Holly Herndon, and the algo-asemic poet Sasha Stiles—I argue that machine-generated synethetic media collapse constitutive distinctions between writing, programming, and generation (in all senses of the word). Herndon's and Stiles' artistic practices also point toward an emerging trend in Critical AI studies which tends to wax nostalgic for authorial authenticty and for the artwork's aura. As synthetic media force us to examine (yet again) the theoretical relations between authorship, intentionality, and ultimately life itself, my talk reexamines the philosophical problems—and biopolitical implications—synthetic media pose for creativity, thought, and life itself.

# The Rights of Nature and Multi-Species Political Community

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Western philosophy, especially its modern iteration, tends to maintain a strict, hierarchical division between human and nonhuman being. In conjunction with producing and maintaining gendered and racial hierarchies between human beings, this human exceptionalism makes it difficult for many of its practitioners to imagine ethics and justice extending to other than human creatures and multi-species communities. Many Indigenous philosophies, however, do not work with the assumption of human separability from the more than human world and thus enable thinking of more than human beings in ethical and political terms. Tasha Hubbard engages an Indigenous epistemological framework to give an account of the disappearance of the buffalo from the North American plains as genocidal extermination rather than extinction. Drawing from a range of Indigenous thinkers, theologians, and traditional knowledges, Hubbard centres Indigenous ways of seeing nonhuman animals as persons as an anti-colonial refusal of human separability from and superiority over nonhuman beings. Her account of the genocide of the buffalo challenges the assumptions that political violence can only be done to human beings, that community is a form of sociality that is exclusively human, and that extinction narratives which describe biocultural loss in passive terms rather than naming the active agency which brings about this destruction.

One approach to countering anthropogenic ecological destruction has been legal recognition of the rights of nature, specifically the granting of personhood to rivers and watersheds. This legal intervention on behalf of other than human beings has occurred on several continents; most recently in 2021 the Mutehekau Shipu river in Canada was granted the status of legal personhood and as such given rights. The alliance of different groups responsible for protecting the river's rights includes Indigenous Guardians who will monitor the well being of the river. To what extent, however, is legal recognition of the rights of nature an effective way to curb anthropogenic ecological destruction? In Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt develops a scathing critique of the idea of universal human rights. She argues that there is no such thing as a natural human right and that the rights of any human being are only secured by membership in a political community. Whether or not we declare that we recognize basic rights for all human beings, she tells us that only those whose words and actions are heard by others in their political community will have rights; rights are based in and secured by political community. Might it be the case that exclusion from political community renders all entities (ecosystems, plants, waterways, animals, and humans) precarious and open to violence and abuse?

Arendt's insight about the necessary relation between rights and political community tells us that nonhuman creatures might not be protected by the law unless there is a political community to affirm and enforce the law. In other words, there is good reason to think that finding ways to conceptualize nonhumans as active participants in political communities may be necessary in order to overcome the destructiveness that characterizes much human action towards the nonhuman world. The final part of this paper will survey contemporary ecopolitical philosophies which propose ways of thinking more than human beings as active agents in political community.

# Intersect, interact, Imagine: Relational Becomings, Inclusive Encounters and New Materialism in Museum Education

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Florida State University

This paper explores the intersections of new materialism on museum education. We live in a world overrun by mass-produced, neglected and discarded things. The relationship between a thing and its environment is crucial, as the interplay of the object and its surroundings – whether that be a strange grouping of trash next to a shop, or an art piece installed in a museum – allows us to see the thing in a new way. New materialism's interest in the vibrancy of matter, foregrounding the nonhuman and its innate vitality and "thingly power" (Bennett, 2010), provides an interesting framework in which to consider interaction between museum objects and museum visitors. Outside of the museum we can get away with ignoring the objects that surround us, but inside this space of wonder, the object becomes the main focus. By viewing seemingly inanimate objects through the lens of new materialism, things take on an agency. This approach could bolster a methodology of inclusion within museum education. As opposed to the unidirectional, authoritarian, curatorial voice, new materialist perspectives invite and welcome participants to investigate museum objects in ways that allow for multiple perceptions, which is a fundamental aspect of inclusive museum practices. Recognizing that human beings are made of the same vibrant matter as all other things destabilizes the hierarchies that one auto-imposes on oneself in respect to one's seemingly superior or inferior neighbor. Further, by identifying the shared matter between the human and the thing, this lens also acts as a mirror for people in respect to other people, highlighting our innate commonalities. This is a particularly useful tool for envisioning inclusive museum education programs that bring together people from different cultural, linguistic, or socio-economic backgrounds. Following Hood and Kraehe (2017), practicing new materialist art museum education supports inquiry and interpretation that imbues objects with the same equality as human beings. As human beings tune in to the vitality of objects, this approach to museum education eliminates knowledge hierarchies, confronts face value and encourages people to question their assumptions about the world, things, others, thus serving as an important community-building tool. Thus, museum pedagogy that engages with the force of objects to re-imagine our human-centric world provides a fertile testing ground for the ethical capacity of new materialism.

# Spacing (as) Coexistence: Nancy and Morton on 'World' and 'Nature'

Matteo Maria Paolucci

Università degli Studi di Milano 'La Statale' – Università degli studi di Bari 'Aldo Moro'

Our paper aims to delve into a close reading, not usual among scholars, of Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of world as an 'intersection of singularities' and Timothy Morton's conception of 'nature'. In both cases, what is at stake is the need to rethink these concepts (and thus 'philosophy' as well) when co-existence does replace existence. Exposition to otherness is what links Nancy and Morton in their questioning (and sliding away from) anthropocentrism and 'ecologocentrism', to use the title of Morton's article. This article – Ecologocentrism: Unworking Animals – takes action explicitly quoting the best-known Nancy's book, The Inoperative Community. Such an 'inoperativeness' – what Morton does refer to with 'unworking' – is, according to Nancy, the fact that community has not be grasped as a production, for example, of human contracts; on the contrary, 'community' is what has always been at stake: it has to be grasped as 'being-in-common'. What it seems interesting to us is that Morton, in this article, does not become aware of the exigence felt in that book by Nancy to not confine such a 'community' to human's one. Existent as such does exist exposed to others. That of 'being-in-common' is a 'writing' that has always preceded any human discourse about any so-called 'Nature'. It is a 'writing', because it is a differential game – a materialistic one, we could say from a Nancean standpoint. In fact, prior to what humans say about it, each body, be it a rock's one, a tree's one, a cat's one, or a human's one, is 'what in a writing is not to be read', as Nancy says (Corpus), for it does articulate that 'game', i.e. 'world' as a space of reticular and intersectional co-existence. As such, world has no center nor result, Nancy declares in Being Singular Plural. In addition to their common Derridean heritage – or rather, because of this –, Nancy and Morton do share an anti-essentialist and anti-teleological perspective. Derridean 'outside-the-text', in Morton's case, far from indicating a nominalism that bends things to designation, is instead read as an empiricism, that is, as a device for the study of relations between things and of the latter as systems of relations – nature 'itself' (this is the problematic point, according to Morton) is not an 'extra-textual sign' (Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology). Based on the notion of 'relation', i.e. 'spacing', deeply shared by both, we propose ourselves to have Nancy and Morton talk together. In both authors, spacing gives rise, on one hand, to the rejection to reduce world and nature only to the signs to which human discourses univocally bend them, on the other, to the opening of philosophy to a fractal and interactive effectiveness that puts many dualisms out of play, starting with the 'organism-environment' one. As Morton puts it in his last stinging article we referred to, 'environment' – as well 'world' according to Nancy – is nothing but a 'name' for a field of forces without independent existences.

# Things, Objects and Reality

Rita Serpytyte

Vilnius University

Perhaps we would not be mistaken in noting that for quite some time now the different trends of "realisms" have been the very brand of contemporary philosophy – in the guise of both the Speculative Realism and New Realism. As superfluous this reminder may appear, their central problem is the question of reality. In the past, I had often begun my analysis of a range of the authors, representing the said trends of realisms, from a simple question – what (kind of) reality is of the question here? Sometimes this question served a merely rhetorical purpose in order to emphasize that what is important is not solely the result, that is, a particular conception of "reality," but the very premises of these philosophical considerations, and insofar as premises are concerned, they can be twofold.

In this context is very important to remind, that the problem of the relation and the difference between things and objects is one of the most decisive moments for the conception of the real. After all, these words are usually used interchangeably – not only in their everyday but also in their philosophical usage. There are some contemporary philosophical positions that consider almost "everything" as an object; the things here are, as it were, "swallowed up" by objects; on the other hand, there are proponents of a strict separation of objects and things – there are "legions" of them.

How did it happen that the concept of thing (res) and object (obiectum) not only began to theoretically "compete" with each other, but also sometimes came to represent differently conceived realities, and what is yet more surprising – even occasionally came to represent an identical conception of reality?

This paper, on the one hand, discusses the philosophical strategies that reveal the difference between objects and things and enable such a conception of reality which takes into account the Kantian distinction between Realität and Wirklichkeit. It reconstructs Giorgio Agamben's project of modal ontology. Agamben's take on the question What is real? is oriented towards the modus of being and could be traced back to the recognition of the difference between objects and things as well as the "restoration of the life of things themselves."

On the other hand, the paper makes a rivendication of the "classical" concept of the distinction between things and objects from the perspective of New Realism. What are the common points and what are the differences regarding relation between Thing and Object in the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben (of heideggerian origin,) in OOO and in New Realism?

# The Compossibility of Coexistence

Kristupas Sabolius

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The presentation juxtaposes an analysis of two terms: 'milieu' and 'environment'. As it can be seen in the Serres' thought, the idea of 'environment' primarily points to the distinction from the individual and operates on the basis of isolationist approach. Conversely, the concept of 'milieu' displays the features of interconnectedness, entanglement and mediation. By projecting the biological understanding of symbiosis within a framework of Simondon's theory of imagination, I argue that 'milieu' can be conceptualized as both ontological and epistemological gateway for the inclusion of and the interaction with heterogeneity—the aspect that becomes important in critically revising the role of human exceptionalism and the anthropological relationship to other species. Subsequently, the relational and transitional potential of the milieu may be interpreted through the lens of the problem of symbiotic transitions that open the space for negotiation between interacting species.

In this light, the concept of compossibility will be proposed as an alternative option to think creation in terms of relational interaction. Although compossibility is best known for its importance in Leibniz's philosophy—where compossibilitas could be conceived as 'the possibility of togetherness'—its intriguing but not sufficiently analysed role can be found in Simondon's thought. In Imagination and Invention, the idea of compossibility describes the disposition of a living being to include otherness and open up for a co-creation of shared milieus. In my talk, I will provide both an analysis of the concept of compossibility and its re-elaboration in the context of the more-than human project.

# The Promethean Drift of Dante's Transumanar.
# Between Personalism and Post-humanism: Transhumanism. What It Is,
# Why It Emerged and Why It Is Possible To Assume It Will Not Last.

Martina Todaro

AFI – Associazione Futuristi Italiani

In The Divina Commedia, Dante used the word "Transumanar" (to become transhuman, to go beyond human) to describe his fictional approach to Heaven. That expression helped explain that the human condition prevented humans from being able to perceive the presence of God in the way Dante was experiencing it. To some extent, we might say Dante became God himself thanks to a transcendental push. Many humans kept the dream of going beyond the human condition and today, transhumanists believe technology is the only way to achieve this dream (the Promethean drift).

Bioethics (according to Potter "the science of survival") is the discipline that best outlines the philosophical perspectives on the relationship between humans, nature, and technology. Take the three sets described by the possible definitions of humans, nature, and technological artefacts. Schematically, you can either believe the human set (HS) is a subset of the nature set (NS) or not. If the latter holds, the HS might be believed to stand completely above or intersect the NS. The intersection between the HS and the NS is made possible by technology, (anything which follows the laws of physics and is controlled by human intentions). Artificial Intelligence (AI) increases complexity. With this scheme, it becomes easy to define Anthropocentrism (HS above NS), and Post-anthropocentrism (HS $\subseteq$ NS).

Anthropocentrism has a descriptive stance: the human being is special, at the centre of the cosmos. Meanwhile, Humanism has a normative function: the human being should be, must be at the centre.

Transhumanism emerged for two reasons: (A) the astonishing progress in AI and (B) the decoupling between Humanism and Anthropocentrism.

(A): the rapid diffusion and tremendous impact of AI systems have brought new hopes and new fears (growing uncertainty). Transhumanists believe AI will save humanity from pain, death and human error. At the same time, other people fear becoming obsolete by delegating too much agency to machines. Transhumanists are concerned about being replaced by machines but are willing to delegate as much responsibility as possible to navigate uncertainty safely.

(B): until some decades ago, Humanism implied Anthropocentrism. Today, transhumanists exemplify the possibility of being humanists without being anthropocentrists. They place humans inside the NS (h $\in$ NS) since they believe in mind uploading which implies that the human mind is computable. At the same time, they believe humans deserve a predominant position in the world order hence, they push for human-centric regulations.

Digital Humanism is necessary to justify the transhumanist shifting but its premises are easily shown to be inconsistent. As Godel stated: "Either mathematics is too big for the human mind or the human mind is more than a machine." Since no other compromise seems possible, transhumanists might need to choose a less arrogant approach to nature and align their beliefs to the personalists' or post-humanists' ones.

# On vicarious causation and the third, new object

Leonardo Geri

Università degli studi di Roma Tor Vergata

Beginning with the texts of Graham Harman, the aim of this talk will be to critically discuss the conception of vicarious causation through Harman's personal and original object-oriented ontology. In the course of his work, especially since Guerrilla Metaphysics, Harman is very careful to investigate the concept of relation, which is no longer understood through the man-object dynamic alone, considered too anthropocentric, but a special case of the more generic object-object relation that includes man himself, considered as an object like any other (flat ontology). To such an enlargement of the concept of object to which belongs a double subdivision within it between sensual object and real object, where the former turns out to be nothing more than the correlate of the experience of another object while the latter the object considered in itself with its own inwardness, it happens that an impossibility comes about for two real objects to enter into a direct relation and that the only possible direct contact capable of explaining the everyday interaction between objects is the asymmetrical one between a real object and the sensual object it experiences.

In this way initially, in Harman's view, there's always only one real object involved in any relation, so that should I perceive a tree as the sensual object of my intention, it too would probably perceive me, albeit as part of a different relation formed by the real object tree and the sensual object it addresses. The element of great novelty, however, lies primarily in the implication of Harman's own reading of Husserlian intentionality. For while it is true that in relating myself to a (sensual) object we both retain an identity of our own, it is equally true that we both find ourselves in a unified relation, so that we have the strange result whereby in my intention of the sensual object we find ourselves, separate, within a third element: the intention as a whole. This third element, the result of the relation of two objects (real-sensual), is itself understood as a real object, given its independence from anything else happening outside of it and irreducibility to its components.

However, from the understanding of a relation as a new object a fundamental problem arise, which I will develop in its implication. No mention is ever made of what would happen at the moment when this new real object (which as such must also be able to enter into relation in order to then "withdraw", a movement proper to every real object) turns to its components. In this case one would in fact have, on the one hand, a vicious circle, since if the real-object-intention-as-a-whole turned by making sensuous the initial real-object that composed it, it would create a new empty pseudo-real-object, and on the other hand, a contradiction, since one would find oneself having to perceive an object already made sensuous by the initial-real-object that formed it. Therefore, if Harman's philosophical position is to be maintained, the very concept of real-object itself must be revised.

# Feralizing the Plantationocene with weedy rice

**Agata Kowalewska**

Jagiellonian University

This paper proposes feral rice as a partner in reimagining the wasted worlds of the Plantationocene. By delving into the intricate materialities of the feralization process of weedy rice, the consequences of its presence, and the entanglements it weaves, the paper examines the materially metaphorical potential of the feral rice to feralize the theory of Plantationocene, the story we tell about it. Feral rice is the wasted growth, the unproductive, defiant, uncooperative rice that does not contribute to the plantation. Its seeds shatter, meaning they spread around before or during harvest rather than being collected. And that is how it secures its future.

The feral is neither domesticated nor wild but remains in tension with both. It represents that which has broken free from systems of domination, whether through escape, abandonment, or violent rejection. It does not promise nature and freedom, nor a safe space and protection. However, it is essential to avoid oversimplifications; domestication does not always equate to oppression. Domestication also means inviting more-than-human others into your home and creating multispecies alliances (Swanson, Lien, and Ween 2018). Feral is not the kind of theory that has never been wrangled (or gone willingly) to conform to the realities of domestication.

Following the materiality of feral rice — which is the best-studied case of feral plants — and the trajectories of its feralization, the paper maps strategies for theorising and thinking the Plantationocene that reject the dichotomies of wild and domesticated, or wasted and flourishing. In its vivacity, weedy rice presents a challenge to the global food supply, lowering the yields of rice plantations (Scossa and Fernie 2021; Delouche et al. 2007). Given that rice is a staple for half of the world's human population, the implications are profound (Fukagawa and Ziska 2019). Feral strains of rice (e.g. Oryza sativa f. spontanea), which developed from cultivated varieties and became weedy are difficult to eradicate from plantations as they can mimic commercial cultivars (Delouche et al. 2007). However, feral strains gather additional capabilities, some of which may result in greater resilience to climate change, drought, and diseases, rendering them potentially helpful to the future stability of food production (Scossa and Fernie 2021). Crucially, feral strains are not simply reverting to pre-domestication states; their adaptations often occur in different sites of the genome (Scossa and Fernie 2021), they have a similar effect, but different ontologies.

The plantation contains within itself the conditions of possibility for erupting into the feral state. The weeds of feral rice weave themselves into the seemingly ordered commercial cultivar, creating new strategies that echo some of its pasts. Despite, or perhaps because of, the destruction they cause as infrastructures of industrial agriculture, the story I try to tell refuses to be indifferent to the life of the plantations (Chao 2022). Although it is not a very happy story — the material realities of global food production never stay far — like feral rice, it remains relentlessly open to multiple entangled futures.

# Shifting boundaries between the human and the nonhuman in The Stone Gods by Jeanette Winterson

Agnieszka Jagła

University of Lodz

Shifting boundaries between the human and the nonhuman in The Stone Gods by Jeanette Winterson is a novel difficult to solely classify to one literary genre, as it combines sci-fi, dystopia, with traits of post-apocalyptic novel. It is also marked by its striking postmodern quality, as the author amply includes literary techniques such as intertextuality and metafiction, which largely highlight circular aspect of the novel. Published in 2007, the novel is divided into four parts, each of them follows the recurring, somewhat altered love story between eponymous character Billie Cruse and Spike living in a totalitarian regime throughout the history of Earth across time and space. This paper focuses specifically on the human-nonhuman relationship between two characters in The Stone Gods present in the chapter "Planet Blue," in which Billie represents the human race and Spike represents a Robo Sapiens. I argue that genetical augmentation in form of "Gene Fixing" can be viewed as a representation of the transhumanist ideology, while the entanglement between the characters unravels the posthuman message of the novel. The goal of this paper is to illustrate how, through Gene Fixing, the dichotomy between human and technological nonhuman becomes erased and how this human/nonhuman encounter influences the concept of what it means to be a human. The article provides the background to the transhumanist thought, pointing out to the idea centred around the genetical enhancement of the human being and contextualizes it with commentary of posthumanist thinkers and philosophers Rosi Braidotti and Francessca Ferrando.

# Evaluating and Re-Engineering AI's Social Impact: A Conceptual Engineering Framework

Irene Olivero

University of Genoa

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in various domains of our lives introduces socially disruptive technologies (SDTs)—from robotic friends and virtual assistants to deepfakes generators and self-driving vehicles. These technologies bring forth ethical and social dilemmas that necessitate a reconsideration of their design and function. In this talk, I aim to argue that Amie L. Thomasson's method for conceptual engineering (2020) provides a robust framework for reshaping these technologies to better align with societal values and needs. Thomasson advocates for a pragmatic approach to conceptual engineering, i.e., that recent trend in philosophy that focuses on reassessing and improving some of our concepts. Her method emphasizes the importance of our concepts' function in practical applications (2020, p. 440) and consists of three fundamental steps: (1) employing reverse engineering to trace a concept's genealogy and understand its historical functions; (2) identifying the functions the concept should serve, aligning with contemporary goals and objectives; and (3) actively re-engineering the concept to fulfill these identified functions (cf. also Haslanger 2000). This approach is advantageous for addressing the ontology and metaphysics of emerging SDTs, allowing us to consider also these technologies' ethical and social implications. Just as we evaluate concepts by understanding their functions, analyzing the roles SDTs serve and should serve becomes pivotal in determining what aspects to retain and whether certain technologies should be kept at all. Applying this method to SDTs involves three similar steps: (1) engaging in a detailed historical analysis of each SDT to determine how it has evolved and what purposes it was initially meant to serve. For example, examining the development trajectory of self-driving vehicles from automated assistance to full autonomy can reveal shifts in expected functionalities and societal impacts. (2) Define the desired functions of SDTs through a collaborative process involving stakeholders such as technologists, ethicists, and end-users. This step is crucial for contents of some SDTs like, e.g., deepfakes, where determining acceptable uses—such as in entertainment with explicit consent—versus harmful applications—such as spreading misinformation or engaging in deception —is essential. (3) Specify the reshaped functions into technical and policy specifications that guide the redesign or potential phasing out of the SDT analyzed. This involves not only technological adjustments but also regulatory measures to ensure that the deployment of these technologies aligns with their newly defined roles. For instance, modifications to virtual assistants could focus on enhancing user privacy protections and transparency in data usage. Philosophers and ethicists play a critical role in this process by engaging deeply with each of these steps to ensure that the re-engineering of SDTs results in technologies that are both effective and ethically sound. An example of this method in action is the analysis of deepfakes; by investigating and defining their proper role in society, we can guide the re-engineering of the technology that generates them so as to prevent its misuse. This method shifts the focus to normative, endorsing a re-evaluation of SDTs based on their actual uses and the unforeseen consequences they might entail. The significance of the approach proposed here lies in its provision for a repeatable ethical post-assessment, which reassures us that technologies can be continually adapted to serve our evolving societal needs more effectively.

# Being (Together) Online: Intercorporeality and Social Togetherness

Regine Torbjørnsen

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

My presentation explores the role of intercorporeality in online social spheres, and critically assesses the notion of online encounters as inferior to co-present ones qua being online. Humans have traditionally been exposed to one another primarily as embodied beings – as present others with whom we share a physical environment. Our interactions have been grounded on intercorporeality, understood as the bodily togetherness that allows us to communicate through body language, to sense one another's moods and emotions and, ultimately, to experience with the other (Fuchs, 2014; Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 1964b). In our increasingly prevalent online social encounters intercorporeality plays a less central role, and it has been argued that such encounters are therefore generally less rewarding or meaningful. For instance, prominent philosopher and psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs argues that online sociality removes us from "reality", and considers it as a tide of images and projections that must be stemmed (Fuchs, 2021). The presentation critically assesses Fuchs's clear-cut, normative distinction between co-present and online social interaction in the light of cases where people experience online interactions as meaningful and rewarding. I begin by explaining why it is not productive to categorically dismiss all virtual encounters as 'unreal' and thus inferior to co-present ones, and then go on to introducing the presentation's guiding question: How can people's experience of certain virtual encounters as meaningful and rewarding be reconciled with the idea of intercorporeality as the core principle of human interactions? In an attempt to answer this question, I first discuss a few cases in which individuals experience severe limitations in co-present encounters, either due to social anxiety or movement disorders (Bortolan, 2023; Osler & Zahavi, 2022). In such cases, the online environment can be utilised as a replacement for complicated or even impossible co-present interactions. I then introduce cases where people describe their online interactions as being better aligned with their identity and social needs than shared physical ones. One example of this is people using virtual platforms as a safe space in which they can test and live their preferred gender identity by customising an avatar that better reflects their 'true self' (Freeman & Acena, 2022; Freeman & Maloney, 2021). Here the virtual is experienced as an enhancement of the co-present. Based on the cases mentioned above, I suggest that both the need for physical togetherness and the desire to free oneself from it can be explained by the notion of intercorporeality as fundamentally important to human interaction. More concretely, I will show that it is helpful to look closer at perceived negative aspects of intercorporeality – e.g., the physical other as a potential threat – and to consider how these aspects are handled in online social spheres. It is moreover helpful to consider the specific forms of interaction that online environments do afford – social togetherness realised across biological and virtual dimensions – and to explore the extent to which intercorporeality and social togetherness online are driven by similar fundamental needs and desires.

# Homo Economicus as The New Cyborg

François Zammit

University of Malta

The notion of homo economicus is a central figure of free market thinking. Free market thinking interprets human beings as market participants and contributors to the economy. In these theoretical frameworks humans are defined as homo economicus thus accentuating the economic function of people as opposed to other characteristics or qualities. This limits human activity to essentially being of an economic nature and that all their endeavours are guided by market logic.

Inspired by studies on cybernetics, Friedrich August Hayek applies it to the free market whereby he argues that price mechanisms and price equilibrium are a form on cybernetic system. Furthermore, the role of humans is not to control the market but to open and responsive to market signals and to react as required. Failure to respond to these signals leads to the economic and social failure of the individual.

Additionally, Michel Foucault defines the neoliberal homo economicus as an 'entrepreneur of the self' implying that in a neoliberal society people must treat themselves as entrepreneurial subjects that have to be ameliorated to succeed on the market. This implies that humans are part of the market feedback mechanism and must actively respond to it. In such a system human behaviour and decision making is formed according to the requirements of the market. This form of reasoning and organisation has materialised itself in the form of new technologies that have been developed and steadily introduced into our daily lives. The proliferation of smartphones and wearable technology has led to the development of apps that track and process our behaviours and actions. We use these apps to provide us with the information we need so that we can improve ourselves and become better versions of who we are. This allows us to be more competitive on the social market, the job market, the dating market, and life. This becomes more accentuated and critical in the way apps are purposed in the gig economy and how they determine the behaviour of those of rely on them to earn a living.

By adopting Donna J. Haraway's definition of cyborg as the amalgamation of the organic and the machine, but also as a product of its social reality, this paper argues that the neoliberal homo economicus of our current times is a form of cyborg.

The most prominent debates on the cyborg as a form of life, focus on the role of technological augmentation and the amalgamation of the biological and technological. However, the cyborg is also an entity whose identity and behaviour are also reformulated because of the technological. In this context I argue that homo economicus who is already part of a cybernetic system, the market, and whose identity and behaviour is shaped by algorithms, is also a form of cyborg. I also argue that this cyborg life also challenges our understanding of what it means to be human under the socio-economic conditions of our current zeitgeist.

## Not an Abyss but a Dynamo: Alphonso Lingis and the Animal

Niki Young

University of Malta

In this talk, I analyse Alphonso Lingis' contributions to the ongoing philosophical debate on the "question of the animal." I explore how Lingis' philosophy challenges anthropocentrism by proposing a novel ontology of life that emphasises the shared ontological ground between humans and animals, promoting an understanding of life as characterized by excess, kinship, and interconnectedness. I then go on to link this to his ethical stance which is grounded in the phenomenology of the animal encounter.

# Saving 'nature' from humans with rights: ecocide, rights of nature, and the hidden dimensions of predation and use.'

Jasmijn Leeuwenkamp

University of Amsterdam

In an attempt to halt widespread ecological collapse, activists and scholars are increasingly calling for the need to reform the law's anthropocentrism into more ecocentric. directions. Well known strategies are 'rights of nature' (RoN), which means recognizing that 'nature' is a legal person with rights, and 'ecocide', where the idea is to criminalize severe or wide-spread destruction of the environment. Both strategies are grounded in the ecocentric idea that 'nature', 'natural entities', or 'environments' must be recognized as having its own needs and interests (Stone 1972; Burdon 2011; Boyd 2017). Despite the proclaimed ecocentrism of these proposals, they are often explicitly embedded within a liberal or humanist emancipatory tradition of inclusion. The extension of the principles of human rights and genocide (as a crime against humanity), paradoxically brings these 'ecocentric' proposals within the anthropocentric tradition of humanism.

However, this leads to a reinscribing of the nature/culture distinction that proponents claim to reject (Petersmann 2023). Centering the 'eco' against the 'anthropos' is a reordering of what should be valued but leaves the very distinction intact (Tănăsescu 2022; Giacomini 2022). The question is, however, if 'nature' can truly be 'saved' by becoming 'subject' (RoN) or 'victim' (Ecocide) in the same system of rights that always characterized it as (potential) property. Especially in RoN proposals, 'nature' is constructed as wrongly being treated as a mere object or property of humans, making humans that from which 'nature' should be protected – leading to demands for conservation and restoration of specific environments through the exclusion of humans. Not only does the extension of (human-rights-like) rights to nonhumans not challenge the system of (property) rights that enables capitalist/neocolonial modes of production, extraction, waste and degradation (Douzinas 2013), but it simultaneously hides the unscrutinized human need to use natural resources for its own survival, wellbeing and wealth. By pretending to 'save' a selective and romanticized 'nature' from humans, in order to achieve 'harmony with nature' (in the terms of the UN programme), these legal discourses do not account for the biological nature of humans themselves, and the necessity of use or predation – in short, for the necessary intra-action of humans with their (nonhuman) environments.

Drawing on critical political, anthropological, and indigenous perspectives (Ingold 2000; De la Cadena 2015; Simpson 2017; Viveiros de Castro 2017; Tănăsescu 2022), I argue that both the framing of nature vis-à-vis the human-as-perpetrator and vis-à-vis the human-as-savior comfortably hide the dimensions of the human-as-predator and -as-user. Arguably, such framings result in a schizophrenic relation to the nonhuman – some animals, environments or ecosystems are to be saved, while others are food or resources for production – and a simplified notion of human-nonhuman relations as either villain or savior, crucially overlooking the possibility of relations that are characterized by responsible use or predation, which do not so easily fit the anthropocentric/ecocentric dichotomy.