



Research School of Humanities Conference

Limits of the Human: Philosophical, Historical and Ecological Perspectives

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**ABSTRACTS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER
BY AUTHOR**

THE ANIMAL WHOSE ANIMALITY IS AN ISSUE: GIORGIO AGAMBEN AND THE LEGACY OF ANTI-HUMANISM

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In this paper I work to place Giorgio Agamben's philosophy with and against Nietzsche's in order to bring out the grounds and consequences of the political ontology presented in *The Open*. I begin with an explication of the concept of life operative in Nietzsche, who understands it as an inhuman force that the subject cannot assimilate. This represents not a break with but a radicalisation of the Kantian theory of desire and duty (albeit with a crucial change in perspective). This radicalisation produces two key results as evident in Nietzsche's work: the claim that illusion plays a necessary role for human beings, who have a kind of 'transcendental blindness' before the fact of their being alive; the idea that these problems are of a fundamentally political character, because resentment against life is a structuring principle for politics. Agamben's approach to this problematic begins with an ingenious transposition of Heidegger's ontological difference onto biological categories, such that the human being appears not just as that being whose being is an issue, but also as that animal whose animality is an issue. This allows Agamben to read the Aristotelian distinction between natural life and political life in fundamental ontological terms, and thus serves as the ground for his characteristic blending of ontology and politics. As with Nietzsche's, Agamben's political/ontological approach to these problems is predicated upon the possibility of their transformation: the claim that human beings could experience a change in their relation to their lives. This proposition - which is phrased in *The Open* in terms of a demand that we render "inoperative" the "anthropological machine" of humanism - is best understood as a call to definitively abandon any idea of realising a human essence, whether it be through work, philosophy or revolutionary politics. Like Nietzsche, Agamben has a dialectical understanding of the problem of nihilism, where the only way out is through: the task is not to restore meaning to the world, but rather to properly follow through on the consequences of disenchantment. Against Nietzsche, however, Agamben's Pauline concept of redemption presents a resolutely non-hierarchical, properly universalist human ontology.

Biography:

Mathew Abbott is a PhD candidate in philosophy at Sydney University. He has tutored in philosophy, poetry and political theory, and is lecturing this semester in "Film as Philosophy." His thesis focuses on the philosophical and political consequences of the human ability to form concepts of the world.

BETWEEN SINGER AND FOUCAULT: NOTES ON THE COMING OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Paul Alberts

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Peter Singer and Michel Foucault, in very different ways extended radical political thought beyond the mid-seventies' paradigms of democratic rights-based movements. Foucault's critiques of regimes of subjectification stressed the specificity of 'the human' in historically contingent conditions and the 'agonistic' character of any definition and emplacement. Singer explicitly radicalised the current of popular movements to reveal the entrenched speciesism of Western thought, and demand the inclusion of animals in moral consideration normally limited to the 'the human'.

Both anti-humanist arguments draw on a critical history of modernity – a bio-politics on the one hand and utilitarian reform on the other, but Foucault misses the extent to which the management of life transcends the human and interrelates with other species. Singer's utilitarianism misses the extent to which moral concern is pre-structured by entrenched interests and the power of modern sovereignty over individuals' preferences. Singer and Foucault thus also reveal some of the methodological blindness inherent in each others' programs. Both might have fractured the limits of modern humanist thought, but, after recent advances in understanding the ecological crises facing the planet, they both only offer partial insights into the coming of the Anthropocene – the name of a new era indicating human intervention in global conditions at a geological level. Critically drawing on and extending the directions of Foucault and Singer's research, this paper argues the advent of sovereignty over the biosphere – a post-humanist responsibility and exposure to eco-systems challenges political and ethical thought beyond the scope of bio-politics or the extension of moral considerability – a challenge to the Humanities that is only slowly being taken up.

AUGMENTATION AND ALTERITY: THE LIMITS OF THE POSTHUMAN

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Travelling through both scholarly theorizations of hybrid identity and representations of posthuman bodies in popular culture, we find the spectre of the human, that enigma that riddled both Enlightenment philosophers and modern ethicists, resurfacing even as it is left behind. Tales of humanity in a state of posthuman emergence are not only increasingly the stuff of mass media conversation and popular culture, but are surfacing across a number of disciplinary fields. Questions concerning the nature and parameters of the human, the breaking down of boundaries between human and machine, and the fusion of organic and inorganic life forms have inspired new directions in feminist epistemology and Deleuzian philosophy. Recently the figure of the posthuman has existed alongside an emergent theoretical dialogue on the breaking down of humanist binaries and the development of a teleological connectivity, hybridity and alliance between the human and its other(s). Yet what remains problematic in both popular discourse and theoretical refigurations of the cyborg/posthuman entity is that the category of the 'human' itself remains largely universalized and unproblematized.

In this paper I will explore the way in which the liberatory discourses of posthuman alliance and heterogeneity paradoxically rely on a confirmation of humanness as a stable subject position out of which hybrid identities and becomings emerge. I will suggest that figurations of the posthuman have relied on a logic of separation, that dialectic of 'translation and purification' that Latour recognizes as an essential feature of modernity and at the same time, a universalized ontology which privileges the humanist subject over possible cross-cultural conceptions of the human.

Biography:

Dr Rebecca Bishop is a Lecturer, at School of English and Media Studies, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand. Rebecca's research interests are in visual culture, new media and cyberculture, and the history and philosophy of the human/animal divide. Current projects include research on the history of visual representations of gendered 'madness' in Aotearoa and Australia. Rebecca has published in cultural and media studies journals and is working on a book called *Bare Lives: liminal beings, monstrous transgressions and the boundaries of animality*.

HUMANITY AFTER BIOPOLITICS: A COSMOPOLITAN RE-VISION

Anthony Burke

HASS

ADFA at UNSW

The post-Cold War convergence of two events—the theoretical critique of biopolitics, and the resurgence of liberal imperialism—has placed the political and ontological credibility of universal human rights, and a moral subject called humanity, under great stress. Left theoretical critiques of liberal warfare and interventionism and the intrusion of biopolitics into security practices, have often referenced the work of Carl Schmitt, and Giorgio Agamben, to question the value of an idea of humanity as such, which they argue licenses unrestrained warfare or exposes human beings to a politics of 'bare life'. Leaving aside the bizarre juxtaposition of such antithetical thinkers, what unites them is a strong distaste for humanistic universalism. This paper argues that such a totalizing rejection of the idea of humanity, however grounded in important critiques of the contemporary global political order, is both conceptually and morally flawed.

In answer, the paper critiques the foundations of what Schmitt considers to be an authentic alternative ontology of national statehood and belonging in his *Nomos of the Earth*, arguing that while it forms the most revealing account of the statist underpinnings of the post-Westphalian international system, what is claimed there as given is little more than an elaborate myth of origins. Likewise, his earlier challenge to universal humanism in *The Concept of the Political* proves to be easily deconstructible. The paper also critiques Agamben's conflation of biopolitics, bare life, and the human, and argues instead for an alternative ontology of the human that might answer Left critiques, resist Kantian teleology, and serve as a more credible foundation for a global politics of cosmopolitan justice and normative change.

Biography:

Anthony Burke is the publisher of the *Borderlands* e-journal and author of *Beyond Security, Ethics and Violence: War Against the Other* (Routledge 2007), *Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety* (Cambridge UP 2008) and co-editor of *Critical Security in the Asia-Pacific* (Manchester UP 2007). He is Associate Professor of Politics and International Relations at the University of New South Wales (Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra). Email: a.burke@adfa.edu.au

NANOTECHNOLOGY: UNLEASHING OUR CYBORG NATURE

Laura Cabrera

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Individuals vary greatly, but in the end if we call ourselves humans there must be something that we all share. In this paper the deeper question is whether nanotechnology could radically alter one of those basic properties of the human condition, namely having a biological human body. Nanotechnology based human applications, such as implants, certainly will play an important role in the way we interact with our technology, as they have the potential to challenge the way human bodies are constituted and shape by means of, through and by merging with new technologies. Can nanotechnology change the way in which we understand and lived in our bodies? Is the human body that merges with nanotechnology any different from the one we know now? Are we in the path of becoming cyborgs (partly humans, partly machines) or have we already crossed that bridge? Are we already posthumans? Can our biological human bodies become obsolete and become an incarnation of our deepest historical and cultural desires? Nanotechnology, as a somatechnology, will challenge our conception of bodies, and our long-standing ideas of human distinctiveness. However, the fear is not only that we are blurring any distinction between our human body and our technologies, but that we might be materializing in our new "bodies", the wrong values. In this paper, I will like to explore the different possibilities that nanotechnology give us for unleashing our real nature. Moreover, I will argue that we also should be looking the kind of values we want to incarnate in our new bodies and reach a better understanding on the role our bodies, whether human or not, play in our lives.

Biography:

Laura Cabrera is a PhD research student in ethics and emergent technologies in the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University. Laura received a BSc in Electrical and Communication Engineering from ITESM University in Mexico City, and a MA in Applied Ethics from Linköping University in Sweden. Her current research focuses on nanotechnology and neurotechnology, human enhancement, posthumanity, and the ethical dimensions of emerging technology especially those connected to medical issues and individual/social perspectives.

BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL WARMING: THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF HUMAN HISTORY

Dipesh Chakrabarty

History

The University of Chicago

Biography:

Dipesh Chakrabarty is the Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor in History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations. He is also a Faculty Fellow of the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory, and holds a visiting position at the Research School of Humanities at the Australian National University. He is a founding member of the editorial collective of *Subaltern Studies*, a co-editor of *Critical Inquiry*, and a founding editor of *Postcolonial Studies*. His books include: *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890-1940* (Princeton: 1989, 2000); *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000; second edn. forthcoming in 2007); *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago, 2000); *Provincializing Europe* has or is being translated into Spanish, French, Polish, Turkish, and Korean. He has almost completed working on his new book *Presentism and the Predicament of Postcolonial History* and another book on climate change and human history is in progress.

ERNST CASSIRER: A HUMANIST IN 'DARK TIMES'

Ned Curthoys

Research School of Humanities
The Australian National University

In this paper I would like to explore the ways in which humanist ideals of intellectual comportment were revived by two émigré scholars, Ernst Cassirer and Hannah Arendt, in the aftermath of the Second World War as a response to the moral abyss of fascism and totalitarianism. By humanism I have in mind less a coherent creed or philosophical position than a set of dispositions and interests that gave great impetus to thinkers in classical antiquity, the Renaissance and the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Humanists prefer the never ending search for truth to the assertion of dogma, pluralism to ontological certainty, the dynamic possibilities of form to the stasis of content, the contextually appropriate to inflexible moral codes, and dialogical sociability to doctrinaire pronouncements. Humanists resume the emphasis of the classical Greek and Roman rhetoricians on language and as a communicative and performative medium which can enrich and transform our sense of the world. In another sense the humanist is a precursor of the contemporary public-intellectual, who cannot be seduced by pragmatic considerations or the trappings of power and fame, and does not wish to found a school of thought with acolytes and disciplines.

My paper argues that Ernst Cassirer's signature philosophy of 'symbolic forms', which encourages philosophy to enter into dialogue with a variety of scientific and humanistic disciplines and urges scholars to attend to questions of style, form, and self-presentation, is in some respects a translation of the humanist proclivity towards communication and complex representation into a philosophical problem. I will compare Cassirer's humanist philosophy to the later work of Hannah Arendt, whose ethical approach was predicated on a recuperation of the living example of Socrates, who brought philosophy into the marketplace, and Kant, who engaged with the political developments of his time and who refused, in his concept of judgement, to subsume particulars under general rules.

Biography:

Ned Curthoys is a Research Fellow at the Research School of Humanities, ANU. His doctorate focused on the dissemination of the humanist tradition of classical rhetoric into twentieth century literary theory, philosophy, and political theory. His current research interests include Hannah Arendt's analyses of German Jewish history and her concept of 'character' or moral personality. More recently he has published on German Jewish intellectuals from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

HYDING THE ANIMAL WITHIN ME: AT THE LIMITS OF BEING HUMAN WITH ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Chris Danta

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"We know the history of fabulization and how it remains an anthropomorphic taming," writes Jacques Derrida, "a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always a discourse *of* man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man". In this paper, I argue that Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* short circuits the logic of the traditional beast fable by attributing to the fabulous animal—Edward Hyde—a sense of agency that remains beyond the means of the human subject—Henry Jekyll—to tame. In the traditional beast fable, the animal subject (who speaks) is active while the human subject (who reads) is passive. The fabulous animal teaches the reader a lesson about what it means to be human by taking the place of the human being. The fable momentarily suspends hierarchical and ontological differences between the species—only to re-establish these by means of the moral of the tale. The moral of the fable is the moment in the story in which the human voice breaks the metamorphic spell to reinstate its priority over the voice—and body—of the animal.

But what happens when one writes a fable in which this metamorphic spell remains unbroken—and the animal's voice and body proves unassimilable to purely human ends? This, I claim, is the (strange) case with Stevenson's text. *Jekyll and Hyde* is a fable that plays out the logic of the beast fable as an existential problem. It shows the human subject—Jekyll—becoming increasingly passive as the animal subject—Hyde—becomes increasingly active. When Jekyll loses control of the transformation process, he loses his all-too-human ability to (re)domesticate the animal. Read in this way, *Jekyll and Hyde* becomes a fable in which the fabulous animal lays claim to a full existence alongside the human. The post-Darwinian point of the story is that Jekyll's attempt to "Hyde" what he calls "the animal within me" is an act of ontological hypocrisy.

Biography:

Chris Danta is an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of English, Media and Performing Arts at the University of New South Wales. He has published essays in *New Literary History*, *Textual Practice*, *Modernism/Modernity*, *Sub-Stance* and *Literature and Theology*. He has recently coedited a special issue of *Sub-Stance* on the Political Animal and is currently working on a project that traces the development of the animal fable after Darwin through writers such as Stevenson, Kafka and Coetzee.

RETHINKING THE LIMITS OF HUMAN AGENCY: TOWARD AND ETHICO-POLITICS OF THE POSTHUMAN

Rosalyn Diprose

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This paper begins by examining some consequences for ethics of ontological and technological challenges to conventional notions of human "agency". Such challenges tend to level out human and non-human "life," thus undermining the privilege afforded the human and its dominance over everything else. A less welcome consequence is the negation of the basis of normativity underlying ethics and politics. For instance, if the human capacity to reason or 'free will' no longer provide unquestioned grounds for attributing moral worth to an entity, or the source of conscience, moral judgment, or responsibility, on what basis can humans be said to be any more responsible than non-human life for justice or the future of the planet? Moreover, the same kind of levelling out of "agency" is apparent in biopolitical analysis, which has highlighted the way that political "regularization" of human and non-human "life" (rather than repression of human agency in any classical sense) has become a dominant means of political normalisation and subjection of both. How might we understand human "agency" in a way that provides a foundation of normativity and the means of redressing subjection, without recourse to classical notions? In answering this question, the paper draws on Merleau-Ponty's ontology of intercorporeality, especially his notions of "institution" and "passivity that is activity". This provides a way of restoring to human elements of "life" the burden of responsibility for the world without recourse to classical notions of agency. It suggests an ethico-politics of the posthuman based on commitment to dynamic collectivity where humans take responsibility for maintaining the world open to the "event," that is, to the (non-violent) expression of multiplicity and an undetermined future.

Biography:

Rosalyn Diprose is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of New South Wales. Her most recent monograph, *Corporeal Generosity* (SUNY Press 2002) examines the ethical, corporeal, and affective basis of social and political life. She has just completed a research project on community supported by an ARC Discovery project grant (2005-6). Her current research involves an exploration of 'innovation and biopolitics'.

**NEGOTIATING HUMAN VULNERABILITY:
INNOCENCE AND THE LIMITS OF BEING HUMAN (page 12)**

Joanne Faulkner

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**REASON, IDENTITY AND HABIT: IF NORMS ARE GOVERNED BY THE SPACE OF REASONS
WHY AREN'T WE ALL VEGETARIANS? (page 19)**

Simon Lumsden

School of History and Philosophy
University of New South Wales

**RETHINKING THE LIMITS OF HUMAN AGENCY:
TOWARD AND ETHICO-POLITICS OF THE POSTHUMAN (page 10)**

Rosalyn Diprose

School of History and Philosophy
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The papers in this panel offer different reconsiderations of the basis of normativity necessitated by challenges to the meaning of being human: how might human passivity and vulnerability become the site of ethical and political change, rather than features of 'innocence' attributed to children and animals in defining the limits of the human? Can habit be understood as the basis of normativity instead of freedom as the 'space of reasons'? How might Merleau-Ponty's ontology of intercorporeality allow reconsideration of normativity in the face of challenges to classic notions of human agency?

NEGOTIATING HUMAN VULNERABILITY: INNOCENCE AND THE LIMITS OF BEING HUMAN

Joanne Faulkner

School of History and Philosophy
University of New South Wales

While ethics and justice are domains that concern the human, the paper argues that these spheres are organised and given meaning in terms of what lies at the limits of the human subject: children (excluded from political and economic life) and non-human animals. In this respect, the orientation to ethical life takes the form of a disavowal: In the attempt to negotiate human vulnerability, a subjectivity that defines itself in terms of control displaces its fragility onto children and animals.

In the face of environmental catastrophe—and the threats to human security that accompany it—there is a shared sense of the tenuousness of life. An opportunity to comprehend this tenuousness is missed, as both children and animals are romanticised as 'innocent': ethically pure because morally and politically incapable and at our mercy. These 'innocents' are not seen as agents, but rather as 'patients,' and so are the site of fantasies regarding the violence and devastation to which all humans are prone. Anxieties about the future of humanity are focussed upon an increasingly pampered childhood, which we imagine to be plagued by paedophilia, childhood obesity, and consumerism. Conversely, with regard to animals, we indulge fantasies that the chickens, cows, and lambs we consume were once 'happy.'

Because of their exclusion from the sphere of moral action, children and non-human animals come to represent human vulnerability in general: a vulnerability associated with passivity, and a lack of precisely that control that has produced the problems we now face.

The paper argues for a reconsideration of the passivity and vulnerability that lies at the 'limits of being human' as the site of ethical and political change. This is approached via a reappraisal of our relation to children and animals, through which it is hoped we will be able to face and manage human vulnerability.

Biography:

Joanne Faulkner is an ARC Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of History and Philosophy at the University of NSW. She co-wrote (with Matthew Sharpe) *Understanding Psychoanalysis* (Acumen, 2008) and is the sole author of *Dead Letters to Nietzsche: Or the Necromantic Art of Reading Philosophy* (Ohio UP, forthcoming in 2010). She has published articles on Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, Heidegger, Hobbes, Irigaray, Kofman, and Klossowski. Her present research project explores the social meaning of innocence, and its role in regulating notions of identity and desire within political community.

ETHICAL CREATURELINESS: A NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC READING

OF LEVINAS' LATER WORK

Michael Fagenblat

School of Historical Studies
Monash University

Though not always appreciated, there is a fundamental shift between the Levinas of *Totality and Infinity* and the Levinas of *Otherwise than Being*. I argue that this shift involves a rejection of the idea of the human as a moral subject and a revision of the meaning of the "transcendence of the Other" which Levinas formerly reserved for human beings alone. To explicate this shift I employ a theological hermeneutic. I argue that early Levinas secularizes the notion of a moral Creator who he figures as a free being with the transcendent Desire to create a moral world. Later Levinas, by contrast, secularizes the notion of the creature by describing an ethical creature bound and exposed to unwanted obligations. Whereas early Levinas champions an anthropocentric vision of the transcendence of the human, the ethical creature of later Levinas implies a rejection of humanism and anthropocentrism. Levinas' later work thus broaches a nonanthropocentric ethics which goes beyond its author's intentions. The a/theological hermeneutic employed throughout this paper -- which draws on the Bible, Jewish neoplatonism and Levinas' later work -- leads me to explore the notion of "glory" as the key to this non-anthropocentric ethics. In place of the "humanism of the other man" for which Levinas is known I propose a nonanthropocentric account of ethical creatureliness as the exposure and responsiveness to glory.

Biography:

Michael Fagenblat is Lecturer at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation in the School of Historical Studies at Monash University where he teaches Jewish intellectual history. His first book, *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas' philosophy of Judaism*, is being published by Stanford University Press in 2010.

FRONTIERS OF LIFE AND DEATH: LITERARY GLOBALISM AND THE 'HUMAN'

Debjani Ganguly

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This paper draws on a study of post-1989 world literature that figures geopolitical deathworlds – Kosovo, Rwanda, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and the United States – staining the horizons of a neoliberal world order. It argues that a novel form of literary globalism has emerged at the intersection of these geographies of violence and new iterations of cosmopolitan and humanitarian sensibilities. Such globalism is, no doubt, comparable to other epochs of ecumenical thinking spurred by traumatic cusps of history that have sensitized us to the limits of the human. But this contemporary global confluence of literary voices, and a trauma aesthetic they embody, enables us to address the interplay between at least three conflicting conceptualizations of the 'human': One based on a liberal world view of the human as the possibility of freedom and transcendence, and the concomitant alienation produced by barriers to achieving its full potential. Two, the 'human' produced by inhuman states of exception, such as the Holocaust, that have been read as singular, as having no coordinates in world history before their occurrence. Three, the human as immanent in the inhuman, the human as the product effects of the brutal instrumentalities of global capital and its political coordinates that transmogrify into 'war machines, a state that Achille Mbembe calls 'Necropolitics'.

Biography:

Debjani Ganguly is Head of the Humanities Research Centre in the Research School of Humanities at the Australian National University. Her areas of specialization are postcolonial literary and historical studies and comparative/world literatures in the era of globalization. A literary and cultural historian by training, she has published in the areas of postcolonial studies, global Anglophone writing, theories of world literature, caste and dalit studies, cultural histories of mixed-race, Gandhi and nonviolence and Indian literary criticism. Her publications include *Caste, Colonialism and Countermodernity*, (Routledge, 2005), *Edward Said: The Legacy of a Public Intellectual*, co-editor. (Melbourne U P, 2007), *Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality: Global Perspectives*, co-editor (Routledge, 2007). She is currently working on a monograph entitled, *'1989 and After: World Literary Sensibilities'*, a world literature project on Anglophone writing in the post-Cold War period (1989-present) with a focus on transnational works dealing with the global immanence of terror, warfare and genocide.

TAGORE IN JAPAN: A TELLING MOMENT OF MODERNITY

Barry Hill

Independent Scholar

Rabindranath Tagore, the great poet/dramatist, songwriter, novelist and essayist at the centre of India's debates about the human/spiritual basis of nationalism, anguished more than most about the 'limits of the human.' His vast *oeuvre* sprang from a Bengali heart intellectually groomed by Western liberalism, constituting a tension he never quite resolved. He was no enemy of modernity, but a decent post-colonial future, he felt, was beset by materialism, scientism and technology. In 1916, as Western Europe bogged down its carnage, he travelled to the Far East, inspired by the Tenshin Okakura's ideal of 'Asia as One'. But Japan's militarism shocked Tagore to the core: he spoke out against the path it had taken. His famous essay on Nationalism, (written as Lenin in Zurich was writing his study of Imperialism) became the template for what he would say in America and elsewhere—and which has pertinence today, as EP Thompson has pointed out.

Tagore's thinking in this period was prescient. His first experience of flying in an aeroplane prompted reflections on the consequences for human consciousness. As early as 1924—when the British strategically decided to bomb Persian villages— he was among the first to recognize the ways in which modern technology fostered political atrocities. With other visits to Japan (1924 and 1929) his opposition to its militarism increased and his stature as an internationalist grew, along with the fury (and complexity) of the Japanese response. I'm interested in the subtleties of his 'Bengali heart,' (so brilliantly discussed in Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*), from which he tried to project what was of value in the local into a notion of common humanity. A hitherto unpublished truth is that Tagore spoke to the Japanese 'in the name of the Buddha'— a fact suppressed by him and still ignored by Hindu scholars. He saw himself as an Indian traveller in the footsteps of the Indian monk Bodhidharma. In fact, the whole story of Tagore in the Far East resonates with journeys from antiquity as much as it points to the twentieth century catastrophe he had intimated: the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Tagore's anguish prefigured our own as we contend with our relationship to Nature in Deep Time, (Tagore's key phrase was 'Infinity'), as well as the political/spiritual realities of war and peace in an interconnected world.

Biography:

Barry Hill is a poet and independent scholar. During 2005-2008 he was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Melbourne; and he has been an Honorary Fellow at the Australian Centre. He has won national prizes for poetry and non-fiction (mainly history) —most notably *Broken Song* (Knopf 2002), his study of the linguist TGH Strehlow, which won the 2004 National Biography Award and the 2004 Tasmania Pacific Bicentenary History Prize.

EMPATHY, IMAGES AND THE TECHNOLOGIZED OTHER: ON BEING HUMAN IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Melinda Hinkson

Anthropology, School of Archaeology & Anthropology and Research School of Humanities
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The idea that empathy is a cornerstone of what it is to be human has been a concern of many scholars working at the disciplinary interface of philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology. For philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead, empathy substantially finds its form in the generalised other, a process in which the self internalises, generalizes and responds to the attitudes of the social body and in so doing achieves a unity of self. It is in such relational processes that society exercises control over the conduct of its members and social persons are fully formed. Writing in the 1930s, Mead described the distinctive communicative contexts of this process, and identified membership of social groups and classes where co-operative activity occurs as particularly significant. 70 years on, the social institutions Mead identified no longer maintain the same formative hold on individuals. Today, such institutions coexist alongside and are themselves transformed by the abstract global force of technologically mediated communication. Such media provide a distinctive and increasingly pervasive context through which individuals encounter social attitudes, generalize these and in doing so produce themselves.

This paper shall take Mead's conceptualisation of the generalized other as a springboard for exploring some of the distinctive features of identity making in the present. If, as Mead argues, the generalised other is critical in the production of social persons, what happens when the self increasingly encounters an other in the form of media images? If, following social theorists such as Bauman, Beck and Giddens, we understand late modernity in terms of its individualizing tendency in which the individual must learn to conceive of him or herself as positioned reflexively and centrally in the identity-making project – with the world of media images a primary resource to be drawn upon – what are the implications for self-other relations? How are we to differentiate between the narcissistic regard for the other that is arguably called out by technologically mediated social engagement and a genuine empathetic engagement? At the heart of this paper lies an interest to examine how relations between persons and images figure in the distinctive ways of being human of the present.

Biography:

Melinda Hinkson is a lecturer at the School of Archaeology & Anthropology and Research School of Humanities, ANU. Her research falls broadly within three areas of interest – work on mediated interaction, visual expression, and intercultural identity in Aboriginal Australia; the history of anthropology (particularly through the intellectual life of Australian anthropologist WEH Stanner); and, processes of identity making in the present. Her recent publications include *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia* (Arena Publications, co-edited with Jon Altman, 2007) and *An Appreciation of Difference: WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia* (Aboriginal Studies Press, co-edited with Jeremy Beckett, 2008).

HUMAN-ALL-TOO HUMAN: EXCESS, ABANDONMENT AND WILL TO POWER

Fiona Jenkins

Philosophy

The Australian National University

This paper is an exploration of how we might understand the nexus of life and law from a number of directions. Beginning from a set of questions about the relations of sovereignty and the unconditioned, the creature and the animal in the work of Eric Santner and Jacques Derrida, the paper traces key aspects of the reception of Nietzsche's thought on the limits of the human in different approaches to thinking bio-politics.

I examine Nietzsche's interest in the inability to acknowledge a world in excess of the human (this *limit* of the human that makes us human-*all-too*-human); and trace how Nietzsche articulates his thought in relation to Schopenhauer's radical attempt to transpose Kant's thought into bio-centric terms. This aims to open a different trajectory in the complex 'genealogy' of modern bio-politics from that articulated by Agamben directly around the conceptualization of sovereignty and bare life, and to return to crucial questions raised in this body of work about how we 'should' think the human *relation to or way of being as biological*.

Biography:

Fiona Jenkins is Senior Lecturer and Head of the Philosophy Program in the School of Humanities at the ANU. Her current research is organized around the theme of 'ungrievable life' taken from the work of Judith Butler. She writes and teaches on Nietzsche and on French post-structuralism, as well as publishing on contemporary biopolitical phenomena, agonistic democracy, feminist theory, and film as philosophy in journals including *borderlands*, *differences*, *Australian Feminist Law Journal* and *Australian Journal of Human Rights*.

LOCATING THE HUMAN IN THE PREGNANT BODY

Catherine Kevin

History

Flinders University

This paper is interested in historicising conceptualisations of the human in the pregnant body. It will bring together two fields of research that form part of the broader project of historicising the pregnant body in post-WWII Australia. Firstly, this paper will outline a recent history of spontaneous miscarriage of desired pregnancies, noting the ways in which a discourse of 'foetal loss' has been complicated by the fact of women's increasingly detailed knowledge of their pregnant bodies, particularly when they engage assisted reproductive technologies in conceiving and bringing pregnancies to term. Secondly, this paper examines recent developments in legal approaches to pregnancy, namely the 2008 Victorian abortion law reform and the NSW Crimes Amendment (Grievous Bodily Harm) Act 2005, which gives legal definition to the event of a woman's pregnancy loss as a consequence of assault. This section of the discussion will explore the ways these laws engage with ideas about viability, human tissue and 'the person' in their attempts to articulate the nature of the human in pregnancy. By bringing these two areas of research together and keeping in mind larger historical questions, this paper attempts to describe the limits and possibilities of humanist and post-structuralist accounts of the pregnant body that have been mobilised in recent years.

Biography:

Dr Catherine Kevin is a lecturer in Australian history at Flinders University where she teaches in the fields of Australian history, body politics and memory. She is currently preparing a monograph entitled *Great Expectations: a political history of pregnancy in Australia since 1945*. Catherine is editor of *Feminism and the Body: interdisciplinary perspectives* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009) and co-editor of *Branding Cities, Cosmopolitanism, Parochialism and Social Change* (Routledge, 2009). She has published articles and book chapters on the histories of feminism and the reproductive body in Australia.

REASON, IDENTITY AND HABIT: IF NORMS ARE GOVERNED BY THE SPACE OF REASONS WHY AREN'T WE ALL VEGETARIANS?

Simon Lumsden

School of History and Philosophy
University of New South Wales

Human freedom is often characterised as 'the space of reasons' and is contrasted with nature, 'the space of causes'. This division is inscribed in much contemporary discussion of norms, which usually conceives norms as principles and practices that we collectively commit ourselves to and ideally legitimate in rational discourse. At least since the 1970's the inherent cruelty of the farming of animals and animal experimentation has been a consistent issue in the public sphere. There are no good reasons for eating meat in the West. There is no biological necessity and the cultural necessity is difficult to support in an era of large-scale agribusiness. Nevertheless within western culture eating meat is something that does not require justification. Even if reasons are sought it is enough to justify eating meat simply because one likes it, has a preference for it, finds it pleasurable and so on. That this practice continues largely without question and justification in a supposedly rational and democratic society shows two things: the limitations of the space of reasons as a model for normativity and the extraordinary power of habit. It will be argued in this paper, that habit (largely ignored in contemporary normative theory) is normative and is just as important for our identity as the public asking and giving of reasons. Habit, it will also be argued, is a form identity we share with animals.

Biography:

Simon Lumsden is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of New South Wales. His research is primarily concerned with German Idealism, Poststructuralism and the relation between these traditions. He has published widely in these areas (in journals such as *Review of Metaphysics*, *Inquiry*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Philosophical Forum*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *The Owl of Minerva*, *Topoi* and many other journals). He is currently completing a manuscript concerned with the development of self-consciousness in German Idealism and the critique of the subject in Heidegger and Poststructuralism.

DO GUNS KILL PEOPLE? AN EXPOSE ON THE LIMITS OF THE HUMAN THROUGH AN EXAMINATION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TECHNOLOGY

Paul Miller

Philosophy

The Australian National University

A common response to those who might raise the issue of the dangers of modern technology is some version of the argument that 'guns don't kill people, people kill people'. The force of this argument relies on an understanding of the relationship between modern technology and the human where technology is simply a neutral tool or means created by the human to achieve a particular human end. On this account, the technological is merely an extension of the ontic limits of human efficacy in the world. However, such an account, while revealing something about the techno-human interface fails to reveal the full ontological significance of this relationship.

This is the central thesis of Heidegger's 1955 lecture 'The Question Concerning Technology'. In this essay, Martin Heidegger not only calls into question this naturalistic explanation of the techno-human interface but argues that such a mode of relating to technology brings the human to 'the brink of a precipitous fall'. According to Heidegger, the danger of this fall is that we fail to encounter ourselves in our true essence. Instead we are exposed to a double threat: either we are at risk of being treated as mere means ourselves; or we exalt ourselves as 'lords of the earth'. That is, consistent with a naturalistic metaphysics, we either demean ourselves as objects or suffer from the destructive arrogance associated with the self-delusion of sovereign subjectivity.

Heidegger's response to this problematic is to articulate his own more primordial understanding of *techne* as a way of revealing or bringing-forth that is rooted in Dasein's openness to Being which is not at the command of the human will or intentionality. The significance of this move is that it exposes a more complex ontological significance of the techno-human interface—a significance that reveals a vulnerability and correspondence at the limits of the human that calls the very notion of the limits of the human into question.

Taking Heidegger's analysis as a starting point this paper will explore the ontology of the techno-human interface and its meaning for an understanding of the human and its limits. Ultimately, this new understanding might force us to revisit the question of whether guns do kill people

Biography:

Dr Paul Miller is a school visitor in the philosophy discipline at the Australian National University. His research explores the relationship between ontology, ethics and politics through engaging in the work of philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy. He is particularly interested in performatively engaging with the ideas of these philosophers in the context of current political and social discourse on issues as such as ethics, human relations, technology and the environment.

BIOLOGICAL AND MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

Stephen Muecke

English, Media and Performing Arts
University of NSW

Lives are precarious, certainly (Butler 2004), but I claim the first condition of life is its *reproducibility*. This capacity of 'engendering' (with likely or unlikely partners) is subject to all sorts of regulation, celebration, medicalisation, ritualisation, etc., making sure this reproductive power is kept within certain limits. But humans have never reproduced *on their own*, one condition of reproducibility is its non-human *extensions* (technical, social, cultural). But is a hybrid human–non-human network 'alive'?

Bruno Latour is currently asking how many modes of existence there are, and he proposes reproduction as one of five modes. If reproduction is a *specific mode of existence* which is 'instaured' (Souriau), what consequences might this have for (1) a philosophical architecture of multiple realities, in which the human is decentred? And (2) the 'life' of things that are mechanically reproduced.

Biography:

Stephen Muecke, Professor of Writing in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, at University of NSW. A Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Professor Muecke was most recently at the Free University of Berlin, where he held the position of Visiting Chair of Australian Studies. Prior to that he was Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. He is one of the leading proponents of ficto-critical writing in teaching and through his own work. Two of his ficto-critical books are the travelogue *No Road (bitumen all the way)*, and the collection of essays *Joe in the Andamans*.

RETHINKING MARX'S SPECIES BEING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Gerda Roelvink

Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy
University of Western Sydney

The challenges arising from the new geological epoch – the Anthropocene – call on us to think beyond the human and to consider our species in relation to others. Val Plumwood has made clear what is at stake here: "If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure...to work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves....We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity, or not at all" (2007). In response to this challenge, this paper rethinks Marx's concept of species being in order to question the ontological status of the human and to open up a space in which to explore a different mode of humanity.

Species being is a relational concept; it relates to the development of human capacities through interaction with fellow humans and non-human others. Reinterpreted from a post-humanist perspective, the concept of species being provides a lens with which to view the figuration of the human through economic relationships. Marx employed the concept of species being as an ontological justification against economic exploitation. In my exploration of the relational constitution of species being, I ask whether we might expand the scope of economic ethics to also include the more-than-human and enable earth others to survive with dignity.

Biography:

Dr Gerda Roelvink is a research fellow in the Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy at the University of Western Sydney. Gerda finished her PhD in Human Geography at the Australian National University in 2008. Since then she has worked as a postdoctoral fellow in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the ANU and as a lecturer in politics in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the UNSW@ADFA. Gerda's research expertise is in the field of cultural economy. She is currently working on a project extending her doctoral research on collective action in the economy to economy environment collectives responding to climate change.

THE DEHUMANIZING MISSION OF IMPERIAL REASON

Anjali Roy

Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

Calling attention to the civilizing mission as an effective strategy of imperial control, postcolonial writers and scholars have sought to unpack the complex process through which a large proportion of the world's population was denied human status by the legitimacy accorded to Christian theology by nineteenth century ethno-sciences in British and other imperialisms that often intersected with the discourse of slavery. A large body of literature in the nineteenth century is devoted to examining the claims of black people, who are often described as a different 'species', to human status. For this reason, black writers and intellectuals have implicated European religion, history and philosophy in the dehumanizing project of Imperialism through which imperial reason staked its moral claims to rule the colonies. The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's oft quoted opinion of Conrad 'as a bloody racist', for instance, was endorsed by fellow Nigerian Wole Soyinka in his Nobel Address when he made a similar charge against some of the greatest Western thinkers and philosophers just as African-American writing bears witness to the dehumanization of black slaves. Through examining imperial and postcolonial texts, this paper focuses on the nexus between reason, writing and the imperial text in writing black people out of history, culture, and humanity and their reinscription into the human race through the technology of writing.

Biography:

Anjali Gera Roy is a Professor in the Department of Humanities of Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. She has published essays in literary, film and cultural studies, translated short fiction from Hindi, authored a book on African fiction, edited an anthology on the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka and co-edited another on the Indo-Canadian novelist Rohinton Mistry. She has recently co-edited with Nandi Bhatia a volume of essays *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement and Resettlement* (Delhi: Pearson Longman 2008) on the Indian Partition of 1947. Her book on Bhangra's global flows *Bhangra Moves: From Ludhiana to London and Beyond* (Aldersgate: Ashgate 2009) is under production. She investigated the relationship between global musical flows and diasporic identity formation on a Senior Research Fellowship of the Indo-Canadian Shastri Institute in 2007 and researched Bollywood's transnational flows at the Asia Research Institute National University of Singapore in 2008.

THE PEOPLE'S TWO BODIES: REFLECTIONS ON THE SOMATIC SUBLIME

Eric Santner
Germanic Studies
University of Chicago

The working hypothesis of this lecture is that the complex symbolic structures and dynamics of sovereignty described in such erudite detail by Ernst Kantorowicz in the context of medieval and early modern European monarchies do not simply disappear from the space of politics once the body of the king is no longer available as the primary incarnation of the principle and functions of sovereignty; rather, these structures and dynamics—along with their attendant paradoxes and impasses—"migrate" into a new location which thereby assumes a turbulent and disorienting semiotic density: the *life of the people*. My hunch is that a great deal about modern art, literature, and culture more generally, especially where questions concerning embodiment, non-representational artistic practice, "vitalism," and, finally, all matters conceived under the heading of "biopolitics," are at issue, can be grasped in relation to this new and internally unstable semiotic (and somatic) complexity--call it a *surplus of immanence*--that is correlated with the emergence of the new site of sovereign power and authority.

Biography:

Eric L. Santner, Chair of the Department of Germanic Studies 2000–2009, was named the Philip and Ida Romberg Professor in Modern Germanic Studies in September 2003. He joined the Chicago department in autumn 1996 after twelve years of teaching at Princeton University. His books include *Friedrich Hölderlin. Narrative Vigilance and the Poetic Imagination; Stranded Objects. Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany; My Own Private Germany. Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity; On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (winner Honourable Mention, Koret Jewish Book Prize in Philosophy and Religious Thought; Honourable Mention, James Russell Lowell Prize of the MLA; Honourable Mention, Rene Wellek Prize of the ACLA); *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, co-edited with Moishe Postone. Two new books appeared in 2005–06: *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (University of Chicago Press), written with Slavoj Žižek and Kenneth Reinhard; *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (University of Chicago Press). Santner continues to work at the intersection of literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and religious thought.

INSECTS AND THEIR VICISSITUDES

Undine Sellbach
University of Tasmania

For Freud "instinct" is by necessity an obscure, fragmented and partial concept. Its origins in the body appears to us only in translation, as if a biological pressure is transposed into (and intervenes with) the grammar of mental representation. In "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," Freud draws on this ambiguity to argue that in the instinctual life of human beings, powerful but indistinct bodily pressures are reconfigured and sublimated into a multitude of images, stories and grammatical forms. One might say that Freud gives rhetorical shape to the various instincts he charts, on the proviso that the general concept of "instinct" remains quite empty.

In my paper, "Insects and their Vicissitudes" I respond to this emptiness by substituting the word "insects" for "instincts." My wager is that Freud's indistinct general concept is quite capable of taking on a vital imaginative life. The purpose of this paper is two fold. Firstly, to ask if Freud's open and malleable account of instincts might have any bearing on the way we view the insect world - a domain which the popular imagination tends to reduce to pre-determined biological drives (inspite of the increasingly complex accounts of science) - and secondly, to investigate the insect-like quality of Freud's account of instincts. To help explore these ideas I want to turn to two very particular vicissitudes of insect life, Mark Copeland and Sarah Munroe's "Great Travelling Insect Circus Museum & Peep Show Mechanical Menagerie" and Udo Sellbach's Floating Isles of Insects.

Biography:

Dr. Undine Sellbach is an Honourary Research Associate and part-time lecturer at the University of Tasmania . Her areas of investigation include philosophy and the arts, Wittgenstein, memory, the unconscious and animality. In addition to her work in philosophy she has written a storybook - The Floating Islands - released two CDs and a documentary video, and co-written and performed two plays and a cabaret show.

"IT WAS TOO, TOO DIFFICULT": WRITING DEHUMANISATION INTO JEWISH HISTORIES OF THE HOLOCAUST

Jordy Silverstein

School of Historical Studies
University of Melbourne

Much has been written of the dehumanising project which was put to work by the Nazis against the Jews during the Holocaust. Giorgio Agamben in particular, with his explication of the terrifying dehumanisation which led to a life which could not be called life, and 'death which cannot be called death', has provided us with the shape of a dehumanisation which is thoroughly modern. How then is this traumatic past being incorporated into Jewish histories today? How to narrate a history of one's own group which has undergone this dehumanisation, which as been brought to face the very limits of the human ? In this paper I will be examining a selection of teachings about the Holocaust in Jewish schools in Melbourne and New York today. By bringing out the ways in which histories are shaped and survivor testimonies are utilised, I will be exploring the ways in which Jewish histories are shaped by this traumatic, dehumanising past.

These teachers predominantly rely on modernist modes of historical narration, eschewing an appreciation for the historical contexts in which these modes of histories were formulated. As Zygmunt Bauman has made clear, the Holocaust was not a rupture in modernity, but rather was a product of it. Moreover, the ethical imperatives of a Jewish response to this trauma, and to other traumas, are of particular relevance today. In light of this, we can ask if it is possible to write an ethical history of the Holocaust while avoiding touching on the dehumanisation at its core? And why do teachers avoid conveying this dehumanisation to their students? Through an examination of the ways in which certain traumatic memories and ideas of the Holocaust are being screened out, I will explore the residues of this trauma as they come to bare on Jewish Holocaust histories today.

Biography:

Jordy Silverstein is completing her PhD in history at the University of Melbourne. Her thesis presents a critique of Holocaust education in Jewish schools in Melbourne and New York, focusing in particular on the ways in which these historical narratives are produced through gendered, Zionist and settler-colonial discourses. She has taught in the areas of histories of genocide and histories of sexualities, and has an article forthcoming in the *Journal of Jewish Identities*.

A POST-HUMANIST MORALIST: THE FILMS OF MICHAEL HANEKE

Robert Sinnerbrink

Philosophy
Macquarie University

The films of Michael Haneke have often been criticised for their coldness, cruelty, and violence. For some critics they exploit the nihilism of a media-saturated culture; for others they indulge in a dubious manipulation of audience expectations and our fascination with violence. Haneke's critics, moreover, assume that his films lack any serious moral purpose; they lack humanity, from a moral point of view, or fail as humanistic works of art, from an aesthetic point of view. Such criticisms, I wish to show, misunderstand the complex moral and aesthetic purpose of Haneke's work. His films are better understood, I argue, as examining the disintegrative effects on subjectivity and sensibility of our post-humanist world of mass-mediated experience and social fragmentation. Indeed one could argue that Haneke's films represent a sustained meditation on the post-humanist condition; a devastating cinematic critique of the undermining of subjectivity, sensibility, and disintegration of desire within Western liberal democracies. My discussion will focus in particular on Haneke's early, so-called 'glaciation trilogy' (*The Seventh Continent* (1989), *Benny's Video* (1992), and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994)), but will also canvass some of his more recent films (*Funny Games* (1997/2008), *The Piano Teacher* (2001), and *Cache* (2005)). Far from being a cinematic nihilist, Haneke's forensic dissections of characters in situations of extreme anomie and irrational violence enact an ethical and political form of cinematic thinking that questions the viability of Western liberal democratic culture.

Biography:

Robert Sinnerbrink is a lecturer at the department of Philosophy, Macquarie University. After studying medicine, creative writing, film, and philosophy, Robert was awarded his PhD on Hegel, Heidegger, and the Metaphysics of Modernity at the University of Sydney in 2002. During his postgraduate research period he spent six months studying at the Humboldt Universitaet in Berlin. He has taught philosophy at a number of institutions, including the University of Sydney, UTS, UNSW, The College of Fine Arts, and Macquarie University, before commencing as an associate lecturer in the Department in July 2002. Robert is Chair of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy (ASCP), a book review co-editor for the journal *Critical Horizons*, a member of the Sydney Society for Literature and Aesthetics, the International Association for Philosophy and Literature, and has been a co-convenor of the Sydney Seminar for the Arts and Philosophy.

BECKETT'S SMILES AND 'HUMANITY IN RUINS'

Russell Smith

English

The Australian National University

In his book *On Humour*, Simon Critchley argues that 'the smile ... is powerfully emblematic of the human, the quiet acknowledgement of one's limitedness.' It is 'the mark of the eccentricity of the human situation: between beasts and angels, between being and having, between the physical and the metaphysical.'

Critchley goes on to discuss a short text Samuel Beckett wrote in 1946 for Irish radio about his experiences working with the Irish Red Cross Hospital in Saint-Lô, a Normandy village 'bombed out of existence in one night'. Beckett writes: 'What was important was not our having penicillin when they had none, nor the unregarding munificence of the French Ministry of Reconstruction..., but the occasional glimpse obtained, by us in them and, who knows, by them in us..., of that smile at the human conditions as little to be extinguished by bombs as to be broadened by the elixirs of Burroughs and Welcome,—the smile deriding, among other things, the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health'. For Beckett, this smile was 'a vision and a sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again'.

As one might expect, smiles are rare in Beckett's writing, but all the more significant for that. Drawing on neuroscience and evolutionary biology, and theories of humour and play, this paper seeks to explore the iconography of the smile in Beckett's work, where the smile, like that of the Cheshire Cat, seems to mark, not so much the essence of the human, as its eclipse; no longer the expression of a reflective interiority, so much as a mask concealing the emergence of unreflective being.

Biography:

Russell Smith is a Lecturer in English in the School of Humanities at the Australian National University, Canberra. He has published numerous articles on Samuel Beckett in a range of international journals and is the editor of *Beckett and Ethics* (Continuum 2009). He also teaches and researches on Australian literary studies and is co-editor of *Australian Humanities Review* (www.australianhumanitiesreview.org).

LAW AS SUBJECTS' PRODUCTION: A FOUCAULDIAN ARGUMENT FOR THE CLASS ACTION

Michele Spano
Philosophy
University of Rome La Sapienza

Drawing on the foucauldian concept of governmentality one could set up an analysis of the great transformations undergone by the modern and western concept of representation. In a globalized world the politico-juridical vocabulary of modernity seems to be unusable to both represent the kind of emergent subjects nor their claims. Class action taken as a juridical form is a powerful tool to rethink both the subjects and their claims beyond the horizon of modern politics. My aim is to show a way of politicizing legal procedures so that they can produce a subject which is capable to confront global challenges. In a class action the subject of the action does not pre-exist to the action itself. It is rather the collective interest that produces the subject of the action, which ontologically exists only at the time of the claim, and disappears, or it is transformed, at the end of the action. The transformational effect that occurs within the area ranging from a total absence of subjectivity to the creation of a collective subject equipped of strong though absolutely contingent predicates, makes the class action a real technique of legal subjectivation. What is more interesting is trying to show how the becoming-subject produced by the action does not reside in pre-existing subjective qualities, but it helps to determine them while it unfolds : the needs and interests are articulated in a recognizable subjective formation only if they gain the legal threshold of collective claiming. It's important to insist on this ontology of class action to show the degree of adhesion which it performs compared to the quality of contemporary forms of life. Subalterns, poor, indigenous peoples, multitudes: it is precisely the lack of predicates, and the need to articulate the resistance to give sense to this otherwise disordered catalogue. The zero degree of subjectivity – it could be argued – is the figure of neoliberal subjectivity. Three indexes seem to confirm this deep solidarity between class action's formal aspects and contemporary forms of life. First, the temporality within which is inscribed places the class action under the sign of the future perfect, showing the full range of effects of delay, feedback, interruption which deeply modify ways of experience generally recognized as characteristics of modern politics; secondly, the issues which are primarily linked to the class action, especially the environment, mobilize interest whose characteristics differ entirely from the type of interest – mostly economic – which is central to neoliberal discourse; and thirdly, the class action shows in an exemplary way the traits of a politics of performative, producing its subjectivation effects insofar it defines its rules of access and use.

Biography:

Michele Spanò (Roma, 1983): Ph.D. student in Philosophy at the University of Rome La Sapienza, and Ph.D. student in European Legal Cultures at École des Hautes Études in Paris. Teaching Assistant of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of Rome La Sapienza. Editor of the Italian quarterly "Politica & Società" (ed. Carocci).

GOOGLE EARTH AND CRISIS IN DARFUR': THE ART OF COMPASSION THROUGH HUMAN EMBODIMENT IN VIRTUAL SPACE

Catherine Summerhayes
Film Studies
The Australian National University

The main issue I want to bring to your attention in this paper is the business of compassion via human embodiment in virtual space. As an example, I am using a particular online installation called *Crisis in Darfur*: a collaboration begun in 2007 between the Holocaust Museum and Google Earth, which was undertaken to present a complex, multi-layered 'document' of the massacres, massive displacement of people and the destruction of villages occurring in Darfur. Through the Google Earth site you gain access to stories, photographs, statistics, and videos that are laid over/embedded in a vast topography of human destruction, with some icons introducing us to higher resolution shots of the earth, zooming across landscapes of burnt villages and tent cities. These 'close ups' strongly emphasise a challenge that we need to confront more and more in our globally constructed perception of the world - one that we experience whenever we look out a plane window on to the landscapes of the earth beneath us. The challenge is how to embody our vision of the world at a distance with the people and stories that populate this world. How can we maintain compassion through the virtually real spaces of new media platforms? In Sherry Turkle's words: 'We are witnessing a new form of sociality in which the isolation of our physical bodies does not indicate our state of connectedness but may be its precondition.' (2006) Such a 'new form of sociality' suggests that we must once again deal with the collision of indexicality, re-introduced by surveillance platforms such as Google Earth, and the subjective states of real people: us the viewers and those we connect with in virtual space. In this sense, the site 'Crisis in Darfur', brought to you by Google Earth represents and documents an earth haunted by real people.

Biography:

Dr Summerhayes' thesis, 'Film As Cultural Performance' (Film Studies, Australian National University, 2002) focused on the concept and practice of theatrical performance in relation to film. Her major research areas are in documentary, new media and performance studies. In 2004, she convened and directed *AD - Art of the Documentary*: a combined international conference, film competition for emerging filmmakers and film festival at the National Museum of Australia, ScreenSound, The National Gallery of Australia. Her work has recently been published in several national and international journals and anthologies, including her major article, 'Haunting Secrets - Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil*' which was published in the Fall 2004 issue of the University of California's film studies journal *Film Quarterly* Vol. 58:1. Her monograph on Moffatt's films, *The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt* was published by Charta Edizione, Milan in September 2007. Dr Summerhayes also holds the graduate degree of Bachelor of Letters from ANU in Social Anthropology. Her thesis title for this degree was 'Film, Fiction and Anthropology, An Exercise in Naivete.'

THINKING 'HUMANITY' WITH HANNAH ARENDT (BETWEEN MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY)

Lucy Tatman
Philosophy
University of Tasmania

'Humanity.' 'Human nature.' What weighty notions these are. They seem so solid, so settled, so certain. Humanity, human nature. Magnificent signifiers: imposing, impenetrable, almost immutable. Confronted with such mountainous qualities, mere human beings can never match up. We're just too little. They do say the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, but whose imagination can stretch that far? Indeed it seems that our imaginations, our understandings of ourselves are, at this time, leaning away from humanity and bowing toward species' being. *Homo sapiens*, we embody you. We do your species-bidding. It's relaxing to be a member of a species. A species has neither to reckon with nor to take responsibility for the consequences of its actions. It's nature's fault; she made us this way. It is true that some of our imaginations pull away from this vision, repulsed perhaps by such an undulating mass. We have made a hash of it on earth, they say (and who can argue with them?), so let's go live in outer space. Setting aside the technical difficulties, this imaginative leap seems to be suffused with both a disavowal of our animal needs and a propensity toward exploitation and colonization – key ingredients in our current hash. Is there a thinker who can help us, maybe, to find our way out of this jam? I reckon there is: a thinker caught historically between modernity and postmodernity, one who set out to distil direct events and experience through thought and to express a human understanding of these events in narrative form. Following the bent of her imagination, in this paper I will suggest a few 21st century Arendtian answers to the questions of 'humanity' and 'human nature'.

Biography:

Dr Lucy Tatman is Head, School of Philosophy, University of Tasmania. Her current research interest, *The Matter of Time* is an exploration of the diverse and multiple temporal modalities co-existing and conflicting in the contemporary world, focussing in particular on their gendered and ethical dimensions. Lucy's research interests are in Feminist theories, specifically feminist epistemologies, theories of subjectivity, and ethics.

VULTURES AND THEIR PEOPLE IN INDIA: equity and entanglement in a time of extinctions

Thom van Dooren
Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology, Sydney

In conversations about vultures in India, people have often recounted to me having seen large numbers of these birds along the banks of rivers consuming the dead bodies of cattle and other animals, including sometimes humans, as they float by or wash up on the waters' edge. When it meets a vultures' beak, it matters very little if this flesh, this meat, was once a human or some other kind of animal. This paper explores some of the entanglements of people, vultures and others in India, with a particular focus on the way in which lives and livelihoods are made possible inside interactions in a more-than-human world. In the context of Indian vultures, however, this situation is made more complex by the fact that they are rapidly becoming extinct. When vultures are no longer around to take up the relationships that they once did, many other lives are made difficult or impossible – with the poor and rural communities very often bearing the majority of the human burden. In this context, this paper explores some of the inequities of exposure that emerge inside relationships of multi-species dependency, a topic that can only take on increasing importance as we more ever more deeply into the current mass extinction event and a time of greater climatic and environmental change.

Biography:

Thom van Dooren is a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). His current research explores a variety of ethical and political issues in the context of extinctions (with particular focus on vultures in India and around the world). He completed his PhD in environmental anthropology and philosophy at the Australian National University (ANU) in 2007. He is a foundation member of the Ecological Humanities Group (www.ecologicalhumanities.org) and co-editor of the Ecological Humanities in the *Australian Humanities Review*.

SUBJECTS OF INQUIRY AND SUBJECTS OF INJURY: REFLECTIONS ON A POLITICS OF THE INHUMAN

Asha Varadharajan

English

Queen's University, Canada

Homi Bhabha's succinct distinction (with his trademark use of assonance and alliteration!) between subjects of inquiry and subjects of injury encapsulates, to my mind, recent philosophical reflections on the value, potential, and meaning of the human and on intersections among the nonhuman, the posthuman, and the inhuman. The challenge to humanism, as is well-known, has been mounted in multiple domains and on behalf of histories of subjection and exclusion. Frantz Fanon's resonant injunction in *The Wretched of the Earth* "Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them" finds its echo in Achille Mbembe's powerful account of how Africa continues to operate under the sign of nothingness in *On the Postcolony*, Judith Butler's "precarious life" and Giorgio Agamben's "bare life" shift the emphasis from that which is irreducibly human to that which operates as its exception and residue, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "becoming animal" and Jacques Derrida's "the animal that therefore I am" conduct a fierce transvaluation of Cartesian models of subject and object in the name of singularity, becoming, and dispossession. If these examples of ethical postulations remain squarely within the discourses of anti-humanism and postmodernity, current political philosophy, and not least Barack Obama's plea for color-blindness or the representation of climate change, find themselves paradoxically reviving both universalism and humanism in their bid for economic parity and ecological and social justice. Here the name of the game appears to be transcendence of race, global consciousness, unspoken liberalism, secularism, and democratic ideals, human capabilities, and the sustainability of life. If one tarries with the negative (to borrow Slavoj Zizek's phrase), the other flirts with the affirmative, the "audacity of hope."

My paper will address this intuited opposition between ethical and political philosophy with the aim of producing a rapprochement of sorts between them. I contend that this rapprochement constitutes the beginning of a different transgression of the limits of the human and a new politics of the inhuman.

Biography:

Asha Varadharajan is Associate Professor of English at Queen's University in Canada. She is the author of *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak* (Minnesota 1995). She is currently at work on two books, *Violence and Civility in the New World Order* and *Enchantment and Deracination: The Lure of Foreignness in Contemporary Cinema*. Her writing and research encompass the biopolitics of citizenship, the globalization of culture, the conjunction of religion and violence, and the politics of representation in media and visual cultures.

ANIMAL SOVEREIGNTIES

Dinesh Wadiwel
Independent Scholar

INVASION/INTRODUCTION, LANDSCAPE AND ANIMALS IN AUSTRALIA

Katherine Wright
Media
Macquarie University

ANIMALS, TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMIC SPACES

Jon Seltin
Media, Music and Cultural Studies
Macquarie University

Modernity's claims to universality are contingent on a myriad of exclusions, erasures and obfuscations, often played out upon the bodies and lives of non-human animals. Animals sit ambiguously astride the borders of law, sovereignty, the city and the body, sometimes to be assimilated but more often to be violently disallowed. With technological and theoretical interventions rendering both the symbolic and visceral borders between humans and animals increasingly unstable, the figure of the animal as inside, outside and constitutive of 'us' needs to be interrogated by way of vivisection – by symbolically cutting and gazing upon the live flesh and organs of those who fall outside of the gestalt of the human.

This panel will explore the ways animals simultaneously constitute, undermine, breach and reinscribe the limits of the Human. Each speaker will look at a specific site of contact between the human and the animal; the abattoir, the customs border, the stock market, and the ways the limits of the human are renegotiated at each site. Each paper will be short and deliberately provocative, with extended time for discussion.

Biography:

Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel is an independent scholar and adjunct researcher at the University of South Australia Social Policy Research Group, with interests in power, sovereign violence and animal life. Dinesh earned a PhD at the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney in 2006, and currently directs a national non government peak organisation.

Katherine Wright is a PhD candidate in the Media department at Macquarie University. Her thesis investigates notions of emplacement and belonging articulated through narratives of landscape and the natural world in the New England region of NSW. This research emphasises the role of place in national and regional identity discourse, and highlights the complex connections that characterise human relationships to the nonhuman world.

A "NEW USE" FOR THE SELF: GIORGIO AGAMBEN ON THE COMING COMMUNITY

Jessica Whyte
Comparative Literature
Monash University

While Giorgio Agamben is best known for his claim that the concentration camp is the paradigm of contemporary political space, this critical moment of his thought co-exists with a redemptive belief in the possibility of a new form of community and a new form-of-life. This paper will suggest that this latter aspect of Agamben's thought can be best understood if we position the new, non-identitarian singularities he believes would make up this community in terms of what he terms "a new use of the self": I suggest that this concern with a singularity that "makes use" of itself, rather than being bound within a naturalized and/or politicised identity, enables Agamben to contest the contemporary conception of politics as a process of apportioning juridical rights and representing pre-given constituencies. Consequent to this fixing of identities, I suggest, politics is reliant on sovereign power to grant rights and represent social classes, and thus presupposes exclusionary forms of belonging and border-control to police the borders of identity and entitlement.

By examining Agamben's contestation of both the fixity of personal identity and the substantiation of community as a community *of* (women, Australians, etc.), I suggest that his thought contributes to returning politics to the vocation of opening a field of possibility and transformation, in which we could hope to be other than we are. I also examine Agamben's theorisation of the singularity he terms "whatever singularity"—which is neither universal, and thus enshrined in the 'rights of man', nor particular, and thus able to claim sectional rights—in light of its contribution to the formulation of an understanding of human community free of any essential condition of belonging, common destiny or work, or principle of inclusion and exclusion—a being-together of existences, rather than a community of essence, as Jean-Luc Nancy describes it.

Biography:

Jessica Whyte is a doctoral candidate in the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University. She is currently finalising a thesis on the political thought of Giorgio Agamben. She has recently published articles on Agamben, Rancière Benjamin, Immigration Control and Guantanamo Bay, in *Law and Critique*, *Arena Journal*, *Conflitti Globali*, and *Ephemera* and has published chapters in the collections *Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life* (2008) and *Trauma, History, Philosophy* (2008). She is a co-editor of the Theory and Event Symposium "The Beautiful Day of Life: Giorgio Agamben, Ontology, Politics" and of the *Agamben Dictionary* (Edinburgh University Press) (both forthcoming).

TOXICITY AND TRANSCENDENCE: TWO FACES OF THE HUMAN

David Wood
Philosophy
Vanderbilt University

Nietzsche wrote that "Man is something to be overcome". If this once seemed to be desirable, it now looks like a necessity for survival.

What if the very constitution of the human subject were the obstacle to the required transformation? Or do the various accounts of the exposure of the subject offered by Kant, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida offer grounds for hope?

Biography:

David Wood is Centennial Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Vanderbilt University. Dr Wood's interests lie in the possibilities of reading and thinking opened up by contemporary continental philosophy and by nineteenth century German thought. Current philosophical projects include: reworking/displacing Heidegger's treatment of time within fundamental ontology; developing a nonprescriptive posthumanistic approach to ethics; providing an account of truth that does justice both to its normative, 'existential' and metaphysical dimensions; various different approaches to the philosophy of nature (environmental philosophy, animals rights, thinking boundaries etc.).