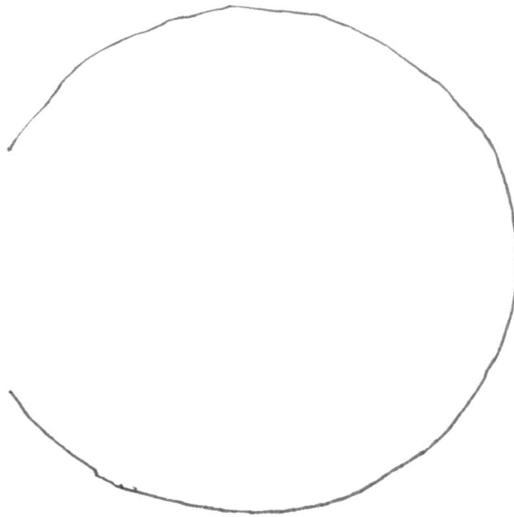


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*XHums presents*

# Aesthetics After Finitude Conference // \ \ Exhibition



*5 - 6 February 2015*

*Hosted by the National Institute for Experimental Arts  
@UNSW Art & Design, Sydney, Australia*

**Keynote Speakers:**

Reza Negarestani (Skype)  
Mohammad Salemy

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# AESTHETICS AFTER FINITUDE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

9 am - 6 pm

5th – 6th February 2015

All conference papers, refreshment breaks, keynotes and the exhibition will take place at the Faculty of Art & Design, UNSW, corner of Oxford St and Greens Rd Paddington, 2021. Both keynote addresses will take place in EG02 Lecture Theatre, Art & Design, UNSW.

Registration, Morning, and Afternoon tea will be offered outside main lecture theatre EG02, Block E, Art and Design, UNSW.

**Arrival and welcome:** 9 am February 5th in EG02 Lecture Theatre, Art & Design.

We suggest that participants buy their lunch at either the COFA Canteen or Ampersand Books just across the road from COFA on Oxford St. Alternatively, there are many great cafes in the area. Victoria Street and Crown Street offer a wide variety of options in particular. (See map on page 4)

There will be complimentary drinks on day one (Thursday February 5th) at 6 pm in the central courtyard.

There will be an optional dinner on day two (Friday February 6th) at 8.30 pm at an additional (though minimal) cost. Booking is essential for this dinner: if you are interested, please reserve your place at the registration desk.

Conference hashtag: #AAF2015

**LEGEND**

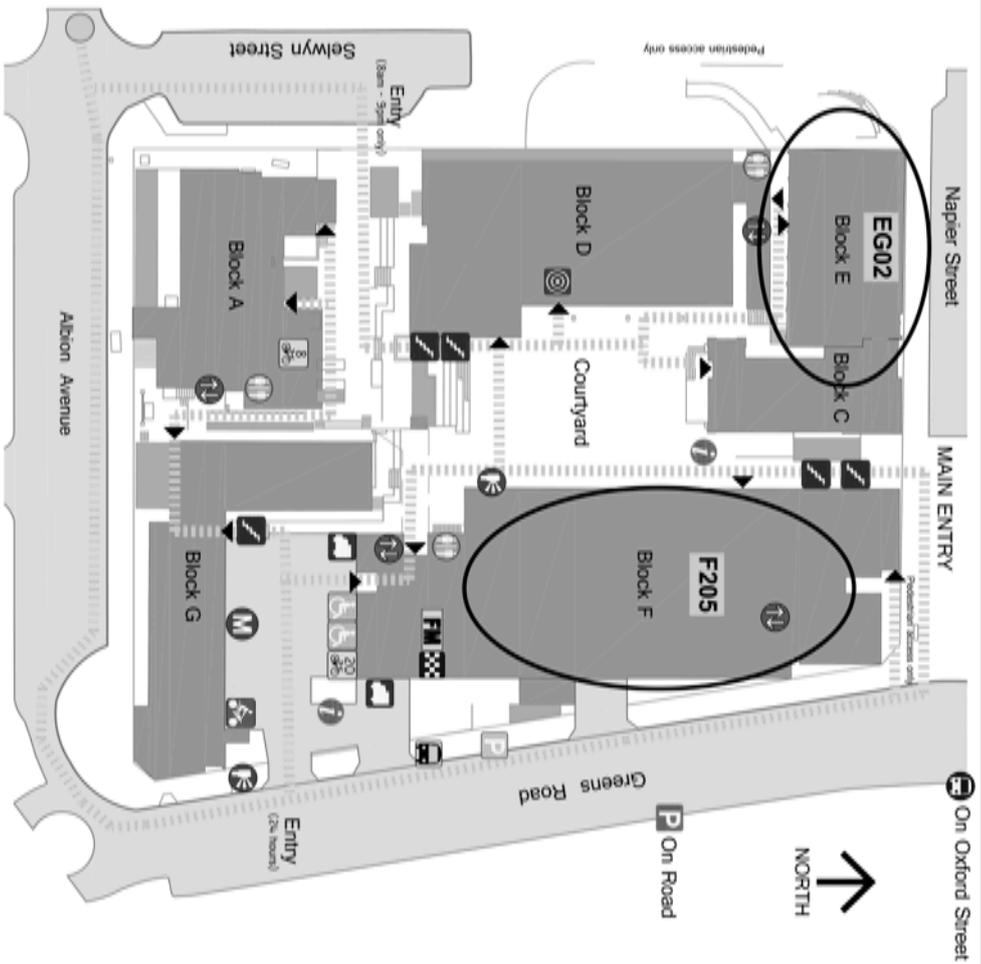
	Directory Sign		Street Parking
	Help Point		Semin drop off/pick up zone
	Security Office		Loading Zone
	Facilities Management Office		Disabled Parking
	Lift		Metred Parking
	Toilet		Motorcycle Parking
	Stairs		Bicycle Rack & Capacity
	Building Access		Bus Stop
	Assembly Area		Paddington to Kensington Shuttle Bus Stop
	Main Access Route		
	Student Centre		

BUILDING NAME	BUILDING CODE
BLOCK A	CFAA
BLOCK C	CFAC
BLOCK D	CFAD
BLOCK E	CFAE
BLOCK F	CFAF
BLOCK G	CFAG

ORGANISATION	LOCATION
Arc	Block D
Block Box	Block D
Clement Semler Library	Block A
COFA Space Gallery	Block E
Counselling Service	Block C
Facilities Management	Block F
Faculty Office & Administration	Block D
National Institute for Experimental Arts	Block F
Resource Centre	Block D
Student Centre	Block D
Tool Room	Block F



09/12/2014



## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

BLACK BOX, Faculty of Art and Design, UNSW

ALEXIS DE STOOP



### *Psycho-geography of Remote Environments 2015*

Within the confines of the geography/cartography of globalization, Alexis de Stoop's current research focuses on a series of extreme and remote environments that have undergone fundamental transformations in recent history : altered landscapes where the natural and the man-made elements are no longer clearly discernable and become altogether intangible.

His work explores the tensions and paradoxes between the image of those archetypal landscapes, traditionally associated with the proto-modern notion of the Sublime, that prevails in our imagination and their actual, material conditions and history.

#### BIO:

Alexis Destoop's multilayered constructions in photography, installation and film examine the experience of time, the processes of identification and memory and the component elements of storytelling. He often works collaboratively, involving writers, performers and musicians. Referencing classical representations of the human figure, his earlier works focus on notions of duration and performativity. Destoop's first film works investigate narrative construction and the status of fiction through formal experiments that strip the narrative of plot and obstruct identification with character.

In recent years the genre of "landscape" has become his primary subject matter, which he treats with all its stratified meanings and histories. What distinguishes Destoop's work is his interest in the artificiality of landscape: not as a natural object but as a thoroughly human construct. With the ongoing project 4 Directions of Heaven, drawing on speculative narratives he re-visits a series "precarious" environments and transitional landscapes, which have undergone fundamental changes in recent history. His work has been presented at the Asia Society Museum, New York (US), at the AGNSW during the 18<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney (AU), at SMAK, Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent (BE), MARTa Museum of Contemporary Art, Herford (DE), PSpace, Carriageworks, Sydney (AU), Le Fresnoy Studio National des Arts Contemporains, Tourcoing (FR), and various festivals and art centres.

## AESTHETICS AFTER FINITUDE VIDEO EXHIBITION

COFA galleries (EG01, adjacent to Lecture Theatre EG02), Art and Design,  
UNSW.

### **Bob Brass, Patrick Peetz, and Renata Lemos Morais**

*All Around 2014*

Video

BIOS:

*Bob Brass* has lived in the greater NYC area Djing and playing live worldwide (Montreal, Cologne, NYC), most notably regular appearances for Temple Records party "Killer" at Save the Robots NYC. Remixes include Dylan Group and Swirlies. Synthesizer wizardry for the Dylan Group "If I Had Been Able" on Fat Cat Records, London.

*Twin Peetz* is one of the pioneers of the canadian electronic Dj scene. He is a member of Liquid Sky Berlin, producing art works and soundtracks under this label, and participating in tactical media initiatives such as Alex Berlin Tv and Radio. He is also the mastermind and creative director of Odrex Music and Odyssey Records, based in Montreal and Berlin. He produces, plays and Djs a vast variety of electronic music genres.

*Renata Lemos Morais* is a Lecturer in Media and Communications at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research integrates culture, art, science and technology. She has produced video art pieces screened in various underground electronic music performances in Montreal, New York, Brasília and São Paulo.

### **Ferdinand Krag**

*The Vladimir Vernadsky, geography and imagination 2014*

Video

BIO:

Ferdinand Ahm Krag. Born 1977. Artist and writer. Works primarily with drawing, video and animation. Lives and works in Copenhagen. Education: The Royal Danish Academy of Art. Latest exhibitions in 2014 include 'The structure and properties of matter' (Hordaland Kunstsenter - Bergen), 'Tallin Print Triennale' (Tallin - Estland), 'Le Dejeuner Sur L'herbe' (IMO-projects Copenhagen). Ferdinand Ahm Krag is currently co-organizing a seminar on gender, matter and social organisation in the anthropocene to be held at Overgaden Institute for Contemporary Art in Copenhagen in october. Ferdinand Ahm Krag has produced numerous essays and writings about contemporary art and on topics related to the anthropocene, science-fiction and ecology.

## **Rewa Wright**

*Generative Strata 1* 2014  
Video

### BIO:

Rewa Wright likes to ask the question 'when we wave at machines, might they wave back?' She is fascinated by the micro temporal shifts in dynamic systems that facilitate the emergence of computational assemblages. 'Generative strata 1' is the first in a series of three video files that speculate on the material, social, and agential relations between humans and machines. Situated in a liminal border zone where algorithms and colour space invite humans to enter into an unholy alliance, this work drills a passage through the observable toward the unknown. Rewa has recently exhibited her work at the Post Screen Festival in Lisbon, is currently working toward her PhD in Art, Design & Media at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, and works across the territories of installation, generative art, animation, documentary, augmented reality, and live audio-visual performance.

## **Trine Riel**

*Nuclear Futurism* 2014  
Video

### BIO:

My work explore the fringes and possible intersections of artistic and philosophical practices, reflecting an educational background in Fine Art Practice (BA, Goldsmiths College London) and Philosophy (MA, Copenhagen University). As of September 2014 I will be undertaking a practice-based PhD programme at the Huston School of Film and Digital Media at National University of Ireland, Galway. Past screenings include: '90210 CYBORG', Kulturo Magazine #36 (2013); 'Serial Euphoria', Aliens & Anorexia; A Chris Kraus Symposium, Royal College of Art (2013); 'Are Toxins Evil? (The Spinoza Affect)', Film- Philosophy Conference, King's College (2012); 'Futures Reader/Deleuze and the Image of Thought', International Deleuze Studies Conference, Copenhagen Business School (2011).

**Sam Forsythe and Brian Rogers**

*Possibilia Surgery 2014*

Video

*you switch on your computer. something is different. there is a folder on the desktop that was not there when you switched it off. the icon is a small, black box. it is labeled:*

*obsidian*

*you double-click it. welcome to obsidian operating system. would you like to continue? are you sure? initializing. thankyou. good luck. pop-up windows effloresce. files resembling abstract forensics: texts, images, sounds, rhythms. impartial information. ambient information. impossibly compressed heuristics. the unevenly distributed coordinates of a plot. you follow the leads. cliffs are scaled. water is measured. neural detection. shards of fiction become geometries, and vice versa. your screen and your attention become granular. you are abducted, abduced. meso and micro orbits of thought feeding back into each other. digital erosion. reading undermining semiotics. all you can do is attempt to organize, grasp, until the discipline erodes just as quickly. the insectoid cacophony turns to music and you realize you can see new colors, in spectra you have only just invented. topography becomes topology and you bore through time via universalized vectors. an upwards avalanche of data, coordinates, views, horizons. the breaking of conceptual symmetries. like always, it all happens on low-lit flatness, yet the movement is physical, exhausting. turbulence. clouds, cuts, vagueness. if all this was yours, would you know what to do with it? there can/will be more. do you wish to continue?*

In their first collaboration, Forsythe & Rogers have created a suite of videos detailing the functional psychedelia resulting from the invasion of a digital space by a rogue cognitive agent. Through an obsessive attention to the rhythmic and geometric qualities of digital media, landscapes, sounds and narratives are streamed through multiple spatial and temporal frames, spilling out like the neural death throes of a future video game. The sequence is composed of 5 chapters, each negotiating an aspect of the violent collusion of consciousness and technics; the cunning forces that ensnare us in traps that might bootstrap us into the universe, or leave us stripped of all that makes us human. Or both. Hopefully both.

Possibilia Surgery is part of an ongoing collaborative work detailing the fictional world of 'obsidian', a multi-disciplinary platform engaging film and digital media, performance, design, philosophy, and cognitive science.

BIOS:

Sam Forsythe graduated from the Stuedelschule in 2012 and is currently completing a degree in philosophy and war studies at King's College. He is a member of performance collective New Forms of Life and lives and works in Frankfurt am Main and London.

Brian William Rogers is a writer and artist living and working between Beirut and Los Angeles. His work has exhibited internationally, and he is currently a doctoral candidate in Film, Digital Art and New Media at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

## KEYNOTE LECTURES EG02 LECTURE THEATRE

### DAY ONE Mohammed Salemy

TITLE:

Scientific Surface: Contemplations on the Art of the Future and the Future of Art

ABSTRACT:

In this presentation, I use Wilfred Sellars' distinctions between Scientific and Manifest images to propose a new theory of surface shared between the categories of art and technology. By situating the production, distribution and display of contemporary art in relation to the algorithmic mechanisms through which science acceleratingly objectifies knowledge, I will attempt to chart a double roadmap for both the future of art and the art of the future.

BIO:

Mohammad Salemy is an independent critic and curator from Iran. His research centres on the impact of telecomputation on creativity and the production of knowledge. He was the cofounder of Dadabase in Vancouver. He co-curated Faces exhibition at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. Salemy's multipart project Tahghigh included the Encyclonospace Iranica exhibition (2013) and the Incredible Machines conference (2014). He maintains an online curatorial project at [dadabasenyc.com](http://dadabasenyc.com). Salemy holds a masters degree in Critical and Curatorial Studies from the University of British Columbia.

### DAY TWO Reza Negarestani (via Skype)

TITLE:

Where Thought is Headed (Abstraction, Orientation, Self-conception)

ABSTRACT:

This presentation seeks to examine and elaborate the role of the articulation of intelligibility systematized by modern sciences in the evolution of thought. The aim is to offer an abstract framework for reinterpreting the role of the intelligible for the structure of thought in terms of thought's own tendencies toward transforming itself. Thinking the intelligible, in this sense, can be understood as an oblique approach whereby thought reorganizes and transforms itself by resources (methods of abstraction, orientational cues and defeasible self-narratives) that are not directly given to it. It is with the support of these cognitive resources that thought amplifies its tendencies and continues its noetic drift.

The justification for outlining such a framework - in reality, a bracketing or an approximation - is creating the opportunity of highlighting and cohering the tendencies of thought into a picture that makes the 'vocation of thought' recognizable.

BIO:

Reza Negarestani is a philosopher. He has contributed extensively to journals and anthologies and lectured at numerous international universities and institutes. His current philosophical project is focused on rationalist universalism beginning with the evolution of the modern system of knowledge and advancing toward contemporary philosophies of rationalism, their procedures, as well as their demands for special forms of human conduct.

## AESTHETICS AFTER FINITUDE: DAY ONE

TIME	EVENT	PAPERS First Stream ROOM: EG02	PAPERS Second Stream ROOM: F205
8.30am - 9.00am	Registration	OUTSIDE EG02 LECTURE THEATRE	
9.00am - 9.30am	Welcome	EG02 LECTURE THEATRE Stephen Muecke, Amy Ireland, Baylee Brits, Prue Gibson	
9.30am - 11.00am	Panel Session ONE	Sound and the Body Chair: Marc Couroux  1. Ryan McGoldrick 2. Andrew Goodman 3. Rahma Khazam	Metaphysics & Aesthetics Chair: Laura Lotti  1. Thomas Sutherland 2. George Ioannides 3. Justin Clemens
11.00am - 11.30am	Morning Tea	OUTSIDE EG02 LECTURE THEATRE	
11.30am - 1.00pm	Panel Session TWO	Object(ions) Chair: Stephen Muecke  1. Charles Robb 2. Wendy Alexander 3. Belinda Dunstan & Jeffrey Koh	Dancing to the Electrocene Chair: Amy Ireland  1. Adam Hulbert 2. Marc Couroux 3. Lendl Barcelos
1.00pm - 2.00pm	Lunch		
2.00pm - 4.00pm	Panel Session THREE	Organisation, Contingency and Control Chair: Prue Gibson  1. Guy Keulemans 2. Thomas Mical 3. Renata Morais 4. Paul Thomas	Sneaking up on the Thing-Itself: Practical Approaches to Infinitude Chair: Virginia Barratt  1. Cat Jones 2. Monika Behrens 3. Geneviève Smith-Courtois 4. Jacqueline Drinkall
4.00pm - 4.30pm	Afternoon Tea	OUTSIDE EG02 LECTURE THEATRE	
4.30pm - 6.30pm		EG02 LECTURE THEATRE Mohammed Salemy 'Scientific Surface: Contemplation on the Art of the Future and the Future of Art'	
6.30pm onwards	Drinks in the Courtyard		

## AESTHETICS AFTER FINITUDE: DAY TWO

TIMES	EVENT	PAPERS First Stream ROOM: EG02	PAPERS Second Stream ROOM: F205
9.30am - 11.00am	Panel Session ONE	<p>Mathematics, Computation, and Literature Chair: Lendl Barcelos</p> <p>1. Christian Gelder 2. Baylee Brits 3. Oscar Schwartz</p>	<p>Chronic Mutation: Modernity and Time Chair: Ben Woodard</p> <p>1. Chris Shambaugh 2. Amy Ireland 3. Patrick Quick</p>
11.00 - 11.30	Morning Tea	OUTSIDE EG02 LECTURE THEATRE	
11.30 - 1.00pm	Panel Session TWO	<p>Inhuman Economies Chair: Baylee Brits</p> <p>1. Laura Lotti 2. Julian Murphet 3. Ari Mattes</p>	<p>The (Un)Contemporary Chair: Patricia Reed</p> <p>1. Edward Colless 2. Sue Ballard 3. Elizabeth Pulie</p>
1.00pm - 2.00pm	Lunch		
2.00pm - 3.30pm		EG02 LECTURE THEATRE Reza Negarestani 'Where Thought is Headed: Abstraction, Orientation, Self-Conception' (via Skype)	
3.30pm - 4.00pm	Afternoon Tea		
4.00pm - 6.00pm	Panel Session THREE	<p>Climate, Ecology, and Nonhuman Actors Chair: Edward Scheer</p> <p>1. Stephen Muecke 2. Josh Wodak 3. Sumugan Sivanesan &amp; Tessa Zettel 4. Alexis Destoop</p>	<p>Theory/Fiction Chair: Christian Gelder</p> <p>1. Tessa Laird 2. Douglas Kahn 3. Prue Gibson 4. Sigi Jottkandt</p>
8.30pm	Conference Dinner		

## ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

### DAY ONE

*First Stream (EG02 Lecture Theatre)*

9.30am - 11.00am

PANEL ONE: Sound and the Body

Chair: Marc Couroux

#### **RYAN MCGOLDRICK**

##### TITLE:

Bio/Neuro Immersion in Digital Interactive Environments: The Post- human Aesthetics of Pia Van Gelder's 'Psychic Synth' (2014)

##### ABSTRACT:

This paper considers Australian artist Pia Van Gelder's recent work *Psychic Synth* (2014) in relation to a possible post-human aesthetic. Rather than operating on its own terms in isolation 'after' other critical and humanist theory, the post- human aesthetics of Van Gelder's work can be uniquely articulated by observing a common genealogy between mid-20th century studies of cybernetics and more recent investigations into neuroaesthetics. Taking these two fields as its point of departure, this paper argues that aesthetic experience in Van Gelder's work is built on the re-configuring of an assumed human and finite biological basis, and situated within a larger digital systems ecology and feedback loop ultimately lending itself to what might be called a post-human aesthetic.

The interactive components of *Psychic Synth* act not so much as a prosthetic extending the participant's agency and mandate out into an object environment, but as a microscope that allows the participant to experience, reflexively, the energies that permeate with/in/through them. At the same time, however, it is not an entirely insular experience, as the participant encounters other people within the art space through the lens of their own neuro-activity. In *Psychic Synth*, the notion of 'I' is a contingent property within a larger chain of textual production – the narrative of participant's world and the immersive digital system.

By using electroencephalography (EEG) technology to analyse the oscillation of participant's brainwaves and respond in real-time with projected video and sound, *Psychic Synth* occupies an important place within the growing landscape of immersive interactive digital artwork. With the proliferation of such artworks, popularized in part by the increasing accessibility of tools such as the Microsoft Kinect and user-friendly software packages such as Isadora, comes a demand, both scholastic and practical, for continued and expanded considerations of aesthetic experience. A discussion of post-human aesthetics based out of research into cybernetics and neuroaesthetics takes up, in part, this project.

This paper re-approaches cybernetics by observing its study and particular historical positioning during the Macy Conferences across Europe from 1941- 1960, and specifically the conferences taking place across post-war USA between 1946 and 1953. This reflects the position from which N. Katherine Hayles begins her important account of the historical posthuman, published half a century later in 1999. This also allows for a particular arch to be drawn between it and Susan Broadhurst's recent study of neuroaesthetics (2007), as it applies to cybernetics, informatics, and the perceptual qualities of art articulating a whole new set of critical and empirical paradigms through the work of scientists such as Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, Semir Zeki, Stephen Kosslyn and Olivier Koenig.

Key words: cybernetics, neuroaesthetics, digital media, interactivity

BIO:

Ryan is an arts researcher, performance-maker, and digital artist. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Wollongong, researching Australian intermedia performance and the dramaturgies of motion-tracking and digital projection technologies. His practice explores interactivity and media aesthetics across performance and digital art. His research has been developed in Australia and presented at conferences internationally.

## **ANDREW GOODMAN**

TITLE

The noise in the noise: micro-perception as affective disruption to listening and the body.

ABSTRACT:

Micro-perceptions, understood as more than just smaller perceptions, can be thought of as perceptions of a qualitatively different kind that are felt in the body without conscious registration. These operate on the level of trans-personal affects, coursing through ecologies at pre-subjective, pre-content and pre-contextual levels, and as such they both disrupt established subjectivities and prime the body for change. This paper speculates on the potential for micro-perception within sound art as a tactic for the creation of open-ended and embodied interactions that through a suspension or extension of the processes of perception might make felt the shared field of affective forces out of which bodies emerge. Here sound, including 'unsounds' – the unheard but affectively forceful excess of sounds – is rethought as vibrational force belonging to the event

Drawing on a range of texts concerning the body and perception, this paper proposes to explore micro-perception through three interrelated propositions:

1/ That micro-perception can be seen to parasitize habitual perceptive processes, noisily interfering with established relations.

2/ That the process of micro-perception can plunge events and bodies into reengagement with the multiplicity of the virtual, and therefore that micro-perception can be seen as propositional of the continued individuations of bodies.

3/ That micro-perception works to create vibrational ecologies out of the sympathetic resonances of bodies.

These concepts will be unpacked through an examination of Sonia Leber and David Chesworth's 2009 sound installation *Space-Shifter*, asking how we might view the work not as 'sound art', but as a series of vibratory propositions encouraging trans-body resonances – focussing on the productive disruptive potential that such micro-sound initiates, rather than its aesthetic or representational qualities. I ask how we might think of such vibratory events for their ethical potential as disruptive relational forces that breach thresholds, folding and splitting entities. This approach emphasizes the act of 'listening' on a post-subjective level as an active and ongoing component of the art event itself.

BIO:

Andrew Goodman is a visual artist whose practice encompasses sound, electronics, interactive technologies and performance. He lectures in art history and theory at Federation University and tutors in art theory at Monash University. His current PhD research explores the creative role of disruption to relation in participatory art through Michel Serres' concept of the parasite. He writes on art and process philosophy and collaborates with Montreal based research group the Senslab based at Concordia University.

## **RAHMA KHAZAM**

### **TITLE:**

Out of Earshot, Out of Mind, the Tribulations of Object-Oriented Sound (Part II)

### **ABSTRACT:**

Can sound exceed human subjectivity ? In defiance of anthropocentric theories about sound - which assume that it is perceived in relation to a listener - I maintain that it can. To prove my point, I draw on speculative realism and object-oriented philosophy, which posit a mind-independent world indifferent to humans. My starting-point is object-oriented philosopher Graham Harman's distinction between audible and inaudible sound, the first being a sensual object dependent on being heard, and the second a real object consisting of inaudible infrasound or ultrasound, which occur even though they cannot be heard. Yet although I support Harman's view that inaudible sound is a real object, I also extend his proposition by maintaining that audibility or inaudibility vary for each individual and are therefore merely a question of degree. In other words I claim that there is no qualitative difference between sound as a sensual object and sound as a real object, but only a quantitative one, and that sound consequently breaks down these categories by partaking of both of them at one and the same time. Constituting a potentially autonomous object, it operates in excess of human subjectivity. It could be objected that such an approach fails to take into account the temporality of sound, which may be better classed as an event than an object. My response is to draw on the writings of another object-oriented philosopher, Levi Bryant, whose work in a certain sense complements that of Harman by addressing the question of time. Although Bryant's position is more materialist than realist, he too posits the existence of human-independent objects that include sound. In *The Democracy of Objects* (2011), he points out that all objects have their own duration and spatiality and constitute events that disintegrate at different rates - a definition that corresponds to the way we intuitively think of sound. Having shown that sound can be mind-independent, I then go on to explore the consequences of such a position. In particular, the listener's relation to sound is no longer primordial: sound can have other relations and manifestations of which the listener is not necessarily aware, as in the case of inaudible sound.

Artist and researcher Will Schrimshaw has explored the notion of what he calls 'sound-in-itself', which is constituted by movement and vibration - both of which are phenomena that exceed audition. The theorist Raviv Ganchrow likewise explores the non-audible aspects of sound, with particular reference to Wave Field Synthesis. Just as Schrimshaw equates sound with Harman's notion of the object, so is Ganchrow's approach closer to Bryant's materialist position, in that the former takes into account the aspect of time. The complementary approaches of Harman, Bryant, Schrimshaw and Ganchrow all open up new critical perspectives for the theory and practice of sound and other digital media. These perspectives include challenging anthropocentrism and the artistic and philosophical views associated with it - whether the key role of the viewer in contemporary art, or the traditional phenomenological approach to sound.

### **BIO:**

Dr. Rahma Khazam is a British freelance writer and art critic based in Paris, France. She holds an MA in Philosophy (University of Edinburgh, UK), a Master's degree in Art History (Sorbonne, Paris I) and a Ph.D in art and aesthetics (Sorbonne, Paris I). She contributes to artists' catalogues, thematic anthologies and contemporary art magazines and lectures internationally.

She served as the editor-in-chief of Earshot, a UK-based journal addressing the relations between art, sound and architecture for four years, and co-curated a sound art programme at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris from 2008-2011.

*Second Stream (F205)*

9.30am - 11.00am

PANEL ONE: Metaphysics and Aesthetics

Chair: Laura Lotti

**THOMAS ROBERT SUTHERLAND**

TITLE:

Art, non-philosophy, and the generalized transcendental aesthetic

ABSTRACT:

Aesthetics was always a carbon copy of art in philosophy,' argues François Laruelle, 'and subsequently art was always understood as a deficient modality of philosophy. It is the phenomena of self-modelling of philosophy in regards to art, where philosophy finds its model in art, but a model which is philosophically pre-formed or pre-decided.' Aesthetics is, and always has been, viewed by metaphysics as a disruptive supplement to ontological purity, always in some sense secondary and inadequate in relation to its a priori categories. Yet simultaneously, as Laruelle notes, philosophy actually draws upon art in order to illustrate this a priori factum, even though the latter is then posited in a transcendent manner such that it may legislate over this aesthetic realm. It is through the project of non-philosophy, then, that he suggests we might escape this philosophical circle, and the reversible causality whereby philosophy uses art in order to demonstrate the validity of its own transcendent categories in apprehending the real.

Thinking according to the One - that is, according to the force-(of )-thought - means suspending the self-positing sufficiency of philosophy, such that philosophy becomes a material a priori of all phenomena. By taking the mixture of immanence and transcendence that constitutes philosophy as identity, we think philosophy as that which gives the world, rather than that which legislates over it. In this indissolubility of experience and philosophy (in distinct contrast to philosophical discourse, which requires an extra-philosophical experience that it may appropriate), the aesthetic comes to be understood as not merely a regional knowing (which must always maintain some alterity or contingency in relation to philosophy) under the aegis of philosophy proper, but as an a priori organon of experience. This is what Laruelle terms the generalized transcendental aesthetic, which thinks philosophy as the material from which experience is given, prior to any division between the given and givenness, the sensible and the intellectual, or the subject and the object.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to attempt to think the role of art in metaphysics from the perspective of this transcendental aesthetic, always already both sensible and ideal. Examining in particular the work of Plato and Henri Bergson, I will begin to map out both the ways in which these philosophers appropriate the art and technics of their age (the former, of course, was an astringent critic of the painters, playwrights, and poets of his age; whereas the latter uses both photography and cinema as metaphors for the intellectual reason that he disdains) in order to posit the supremacy of philosophical thought over them, and the possibilities for rethinking the role of art after suspending the principle of sufficient philosophy (i.e. the expression of philosophy's self-belief in its own authority over all regional knowings). To what extent, I will ask, does non-philosophy allow us the opportunity to meaningfully think the artwork outside of the strictures of philosophical self-positioning?

BIO:

Thomas Sutherland is a PhD candidate in the Media and Communications programme at The University of Melbourne. He has recently had his research published in *Theory, Culture & Society* and *Time & Society*, and also has articles forthcoming in *Parrhesia* and *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*.

## GEORGE IOANNIDES

TITLE:

*Animacies After Finitude: Towards a Post-Secular Eco-Philosophy of Film*

ABSTRACT:

This paper investigates nonhumans, animist ecology, and cinematic aesthetics through the post-secularist strands of new materialist thought. It attempts to think through the onto-epistemological potential of the theoretical conceptualisation of postsecular trans-species 'animacies' for the study of film and aesthetics, especially regarding the need for interdisciplinary knowledge production and theoretical rigour and relevance postulated by the new materialism in our era of critical climate change.

It begins with a necessarily brief, contextual consideration of the recent interventions into material religious aesthetics, and proposes that these manoeuvres would be better served by thinking through the work of the new materialism, which engages the question of matter and the material through affective, ecological, and anti-anthropocentric positionalities that are often and problematically absent from the study of religious aesthetics in its current 'material' configurations. Moving to a call for such a 'new materialisation' of the study of religious aesthetics, this paper then puts forth a convergence of the affective charge of the politics of 'animacies' (as *enlivenings* – Mel Chen's (2012) secularist understanding of nonhuman materialisations of agential capacity) and a slightly greater eco-philosophical commitment to neo-vitalist thought (as *zoe* – Rosi Braidotti's (2011) postsecularist matter-realist understanding of the animating power of 'life itself'). In discussing and attempting to flesh out the tensions between spirit and matter, consciousness and materiality, and belief and materialisation that arise in the newer and non-anthropocentrically-inflected terrains of new materialism, brought about by such a theoretical convergence of the insights of Chen and Braidotti surrounding religious aesthetics, the issue of religious cinema will be addressed. Here it is argued that the (re-)created worlds of religious cinema are capable of becoming affectively generative in their capacity to elicit heightened perceptions in our consciousness of the earth's current critical condition.

These (re-)created worlds are *animated* by the agential capacity of interspecies relationalities and ecological materialities as affective politicisations of religious, post-secular onto-epistemologies. Indeed, cinema expresses 'the interconnectedness of human and other life forms, our implication in and filtering through material networks that enable and bind us' (Pick and Narraway 2013: 5), and animates the permeability of human and nonhuman worlds as a structure of perception and a framework of (often ritual and animistic) experience. Such a post-secular and animistic eco-philosophy of film will be displayed via an examination of two films: Stan Brakhage's *Sirius Remembered* (1959), and Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011). Though these films are radically divergent in scope and style, together they provide a commentary on the self-generativity and recalcitrance of the universe and the animistic movements of matter, and the impact of such 'animacies,' embodied in post-secularist, new materialist aesthetics, as ethically redressive responses to our 'rapidly dehumanising present.' Overall, this paper connects new materialism, religion, and in/animacies through the diffractive lens of the cinematic.

BIO:

George Ioannides is a Teaching Fellow and PhD Candidate in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. His doctoral research aims to rethink points of correlation between the academic study of religion and that of materiality, new materialism, and questions of the nonhuman. George has written and spoken on a variety of topics that combine his research interests in the study of religion and material and visual culture, animal studies and ecocriticism, contemporary Continental philosophies of new materialism and posthumanism, and the intersections surrounding religion, gender, and sexuality. He has recently co-edited a special issue of the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* on rethinking religion and the non/human. Email: george.ioannides@sydney.edu.au

**JUSTIN CLEMENS**

TITLE:

Immortal Hate

ABSTRACT:

In Book 1 of John Milton's great epic poem *Paradise Lost*, Satan rages against God:

...What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome? (1.105-109)

For Milton, 'hate' is one of the prime characteristics of the demonic, and indeed qualified here by the adjective 'immortal.' That hate is simultaneously primary, primordial and indestructible is not Satan's conviction alone: one of the few things about which it seems Satan cannot not speak the truth is in regards to his own undying hate. This strange bond between hate and truth has been further investigated by a range of thinkers, not least Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts. As Freud puts it in 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes': 'the object is brought to the ego from the external world in the first instance by the instincts of self-preservation; and it cannot be denied that hating, too, originally characterized the relation of the ego to the alien external world with the stimuli it introduces. Indifference falls into place as a special case of hate or dislike, after having first appeared as their forerunner. At the very beginning, it seems, the external world, objects, and what is hated are identical. If later on an object turns out to be a source of pleasure, it is loved, but it is also incorporated into the ego; so that for the purified pleasure-ego once again objects coincide with what is extraneous and hated.' For her part, Melanie Klein offered several fundamental extensions of this position, which bind hate to the death drive; and Jacques Lacan proposed that 'all true love turns to hate.'

This paper takes up and examines these propositions regarding the bond between 'truth,' 'hate' and 'objects' as an immortal or constitutive element of psychic and political life, with reference to a range of contemporary phenomena.

BIO:

Justin Clemens is Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne. He is currently an ARC Future Fellow, studying developments in contemporary Australian poetry; with Tom Apperley and John Frow, he is a chief investigator on an ARC Discovery Project examining 'Avatars and Identities' in contemporary video games. His recent books include *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy* (Edinburgh UP 2013) and, with A.J. Bartlett and Jon Roffe, *Lacan Deleuze*

Badiou (Edinburgh UP 2014). The expanded version of his mock-epic poem *The Mundiad* (Hunter 2014) was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Prize in poetry.

11.30 - 1.00pm

PANEL TWO: Object(ions)

Chair: Stephen Muecke

**CHARLES ROBB**

TITLE: The Ways of Things: objects and agency in the studio

ABSTRACT:

Conventions of the studio presuppose the artist as the active agent, imposing his/her will upon and through objects that remain essentially inert. However, this caricature of practice overlooks the complex object dynamics that underpin the art-making process. Far from passive entities, objects are resistant, 'speaking back' to the artist, impressing their will upon their surroundings. Indeed, the misbehaviour of objects is often an active part of the experimental process. Objects stick to one another, fall over, drip, spill, spatter and chip one another. Objects support, dismantle, cover and transform one another. Objects are both the apparatus of the studio and its products. They are form, tool and residue. Within this 'flat' ontology, the artist becomes but one element in a constellation of objects that are continually in a state of exchange with one another. Considered in this way, objects can be said to produce a *topological field*, a theory drawn from mathematics in which space is understood not as a static field but in terms of properties of connectedness, movement and differentiation. Topological analysis centralises the agentive dimension of objects in the studio and the patterns of *production, residue, arrangement and association* that influence their formations.

Drawing upon Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology and my own art-making processes, this practice-led paper will explore the notion of *agentive objects* and the ways in which the contemporary art studio can be reconsidered as a primary site for the production of new object relations - and by extension new modes of subjectivity.

BIO:

Charles Robb is currently a PhD student in QUT's Creative Industries Faculty where he also holds the position of Undergraduate Coordinator in Visual Art. He has been a practising artist for more than two decades and his work has been seen in numerous group and solo exhibitions at venues including MONA (Hobart), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney) and the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia (Melbourne). He is represented by Dianne Tanzer + Projects in Melbourne.

**WENDY ALEXANDER**

TITLE:

Between and Within: An Object-Oriented Inquiry (OOI) of South Asia in Australia

ABSTRACT:

This presentation outlines my experience of engaging an object-oriented inquiry (OOI) to ask questions about an intractable inter-human dilemma. I look *less* at humans and their actions, and *more* at non-human objects that share the same space.

Whether de-centering the human through OOI is a method toward ameliorating a human-to-human dilemma remains unclear, while N. Katherine Hayles describes OOI as a dissemination of object oriented ontology (OOO) beyond philosophical debates: "One can

imagine that philosophers will continue to argue about what constitutes OOO, modifying or contesting the framework, but for robust development and dissemination beyond the relatively narrow boundaries of speculative philosophy, there have to be ways to apply OOO that move beyond ontological questions to epistemological, social, cultural and political issues". (171-172)

My focus 'issue' is a persistent, divided response toward people traversing the Indian Ocean to live in Australia. This divisiveness pulls between hostility and support and has encircled the south Asian diaspora to Australia for over one hundred years. The endurance of such a divided response, and the disconnect that parts of a community can feel with their fellow citizens' attitudes and often the policy direction of their government, amount to a significant interpersonal and community issue.

I seek an 'object voice' in objects, both text and non-text, that I encounter in searching for traces of the South Asian diaspora to Australia during the peri-Federation years. In other words, I seek 'what' might be emanating from a non-human object that is evident to another non-human object.

I enact this OOI through a series of personal essays written in response to the encountered objects. Human-created texts are placed on a flat ground with non-text objects. I look inside, not afraid to break apart wholeness. At other moments, I move obliquely, eaves dropping on the space between objects to speculate on 'what' one object might be giving to another object, or what one object might be gleaning from another.

Hayles describes the task of OOI as "building bridges between evidentiary accounts of objects that emerge from the resistances and engagements they offer to human inquiry, and imaginative projections into what these imply for a given object's way of being in the world." (171-172) My use of OOI becomes a practice that looks 'slant' across a ground scattered with an infinite multiplicity of objects, spaces and object voices: if I blur my eyes, a gibber plain shimmering beneath a heat wave is all I see. This is the ground of my exploration. The resulting essays include interleaved fiction whose protagonists share the investigative pathways offered by the encountered objects: jam tin, veil, silver, camel, newspaper article, ice-cream cart, 1890s adventure novel, ochre.

Ultimately this presentation looks to OOI as a method that affords speculation about inter-object apprehension and comprehension.

BIO:

Wendy Alexander is a final-year PhD candidate in English at the University of Newcastle. Wendy's critico-creative writing engages with ideas emanating from object-oriented ontology, especially object agency, and object-oriented inquiry.

## **BELINDA DUNSTAN AND JEFFREY KOH**

TITLE:

Robots suck, but you suck more: A Visual Survey

ABSTRACT:

The aesthetic representation of social robots in Western film and motion graphics is distinctly different to the life and design of social robots in real life. Most notably, many of the robots presented in films and animations are presented as either befuddled, cruel, socially awkward, vulnerable, or any number of attributes inherited from human behavior. However in real life, robots are mechanical, shiny, ever-lasting machines. In most cases, real robots are not allowed to make mistakes or fall apart. Their existence is binary. They are either functioning, or broken; On or Off.

It seems that in fiction we have identified that these imperfections are in fact indicators of what could be defined as 'living'. This becomes a space in which humans are able to make a connection with mechanical beings. In many ways our representation of robots (or living artefacts) in popular culture are reflections of the human condition. In real life robotic development, so much time and resources are poured into making robots more lifelike, strengthening anthropomorphism, with high tech speech recognition software etc., and yet this effort seems to be undermined by their stark perfection and immortality.

By reflecting on the reality of the human experience, we understand that much of our existence is absurd, imperfect, awkward, humorous and merely stumbling forward. Perhaps if we are to truly connect and have meaningful, sustained relationships with social robots in real life, their design may need to inherit some of the ephemeral, imperfect characteristics that they have been allowed in fiction.

Blurring the lines between subject and object, humans and post-humans, alive and death, this presentation will explore the ontological problems surrounding the representation of robotic agents, and how some of these may be explored or stretched through aesthetics. Mistakes, grime, decay, failings and humour are explored as agencies through which human beings may be able to connect with post-human entities, on the plane of shared ephemeral existence, and mortality. A comparison will be made of the way we interact with robots in fiction, as opposed to real life, and of the human-robot intimacy desired by contemporary roboticists, but only seen on the screen. This paper will highlight these differences in aesthetic representation, and pose questions for the future design of social robots.

BIOS:

Belinda J. Dunstan is a PhD research candidate in the University of New South Wales' Creative Robotics Lab in Sydney, Australia. Her research interests include cultural robotics, sculptural automata, non-anthropomorphic robotic design, HRI, and the roles of fragility and empathy in robotics.

Jeffrey T.K.V. Koh is an Associate Lecturer in the University of New South Wales' Creative Robotics Lab in Sydney, Australia. His research interests include user experience design, experimental and interactive art, shape-changing interfaces, as well as the creative and cultural applications of autonomous robotic systems.

*Second Stream (F205)*

11.30 - 1.00pm

PANEL TWO: Dancing to the Electrocene

Chair: Amy Ireland

**ADAM HULBERT**

TITLE:

Folding the Soundscape :: A speculative ad hoc account of syntheses/plateaux in relation to actual control

ABSTRACT:

Recently, Marc Couroux drew attention to the workings of the Phonoegregore in relation to the synthetic ear worm. This is here hypothesised to be a manifestation of an ongoing project of soundscape manipulation traceable to the Pythagorean era, later manifest in the religiomaterialism of the Maya and the more recent neuroformalist strategems. Syntheses/plateaux is understood to involve the Phonoegregoric attempts to achieve actual control via the folding of the material of the soundscape (enspacement) into subjectivity (entrapment). Actual control is defined as control that persists—such as genetic algorithms—rather than 'absolute control', which is transitory. Given that the several plateaux outlined here discuss strategies of entrapment toward actual control, they are likely to have been drawn from research performed by sympathetic parties to the Phonoegregore, although their origins remain unknown due to the circumstance of their retrieval. For this reason, they should be understood as speculative, rather than authentic Phonoegregoric accounts.

BIO:

Dr Adam Hulbert teaches media at UNSW. He's a sound artist and a member of the Australian Forum for Acoustic Ecology and the Aesthetics After Finitude collective. He hosts the Philip K. Dick Philosophical Podcast. www: <http://adamhulbert.tumblr.com/>

**MARC COUROUX**

TITLE:

PSYCHO(tic)ACOUSTICS: Five Psychoalchemical Pathological Propagational Vectors

ABSTRACT:

Refigured as a technology facilitating the emergence of an anonymized, distributed self, traversed by uncountable multiplicities of cybernetic circuits, music as experimental practice tethered to pathological kairos (opportune conjunctions) and hyperstitional modalities at once pings a given spacetime's affordances, dispositions and resonances while actively refashioning structures of experience and points of reference, setting the background conditions for novel figures to emerge. It will be a question here of paradromic, algorithmic practices, parasitically hijacking chronoportative modes typical of late capitalist phono-affective predation (a digital, sonic virtual stealthily priming, pervasively inflecting cognition and perception); an array of exploits conspiring to materialize and channel a fluxional phonoegregore (distributed auditory intelligence) in operation; to overhear the unfathomable through prismatically pressured systemic cross-contamination.

BIO:

Marc Couroux is an inframedial artist, pianistic heresiarch, schizophonic magician, teacher (York University, Visual Arts) and author of speculative theory-fictions. His xenopraxis burroughs into uncharted perceptual aporias, transliminal zones in which objects become processes, surfaces yield to sediment, and extended duration pressures conventions beyond intended function. His work has been exhibited and performed internationally (Amsterdam, Berlin, Chicago, Glasgow, London) and published by Manchester University Press. With Asounder, a sonic tactic collective, he coordinated the *(un)sound occupation* workshop (collapsing sound and politics) in Toronto in 2013. He is a founding member of The Occulture (with eldritch Priest and David Cecchetto), a Toronto collective investigating the esoteric imbrications of sound, affect and hyperstition through (among other constellating ventures) *Tuning Speculation: Experimental Aesthetics and the Sonic Imaginary*, an ongoing workshop with yearly iterations, and the *Sounding the Counterfactual* stream at the 2014 London Conference in Critical Thought (a blog at [theocculture.net](http://theocculture.net) documents their evolving thought-forms). Recent talks occurred at the Signal Path workshop (New York, Center for Transformative Media, Parsons), Kingston University (London) and Goldsmiths, University of London. His hyperstitional doppelgänger was famously conjured in Priest's *Boring Formless Nonsense* (Bloomsbury, 2013). He tweets as @xenopraxis.

**LENDL BARCELOS**

TITLE:

An aural fixation: Or, receptive alienation toward the varieties of (sonic) identity

ABSTRACT:

"Self-alienation is the source of all abasement as well as, on the contrary, the basis of all true elevation. The first step is insight into ourselves--a detaching contemplation of the self--whoever stops here only half succeeds. The second step must be an effective glance outwards--an independent, steady observation of the outside world."

—Novalis

"Whilst human experience may not have any privileged access to reality, we still, by necessity, begin from within its strictures. So it is important to figure out exactly what those strictures are, and then to understand their potential manipulability."

—Trafford

At as yet inaudible sites, sound still oscillates. The development of technologies of sound reception has opened audition onto supra/infra\_sonic regions where listening would once seduce nonsense through occultural xenopraxis priming eldritch aesthetics; now technosonic inhumanesis catalyzes construction of conceptual tools that enable listening to probe the vibratory field existing within and beyond any finite human constraint. A radicalized audition is able to navigate this field, performing operations that begin to outline the contours of the field of vibration. Locating instances of invariance, which result from these sonic operations, it now becomes possible to create a kind of *invariantial calculus* that can rigorously define and/or map the abstract dynamics of the field and (im)possible operations. For example, the conceptual stabilization of sonic sites tuned by an aural fixation engenders plastic (sonic) identities ["A rose is a rose is a rose."] As an abatement to an audition based in a *doxastic conservatism* (such as is the case with genre-based

listening or even semantic satiation), radicalized listening entails a receptive alienation that does away with sedimented habits—or, at least, attempts to manipulate (or bracket) human strictures. Human corporeal constraints are transgressed by imposing a formal language sensitive to vibration such that ''pataphysical cuts bled from the sharpness of the tongue: named *ineffables* still knotted to *videsse*.

BIO:

Lendl Barcelos laughs. [He tends to be what he pretends to be (tão Pessoa). Currently, an amateur in handmade textiles, 'pataphysician of abstract dynamics, navigator of infra\_sonics & anadumbratable xenopoet. Having completed an MA in Aural & Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London, his research continues at Kingston University. His work has appeared via The Passive Collective, MIT Press & Her Royal Majesty. He is part of Asouder & the collaborative artist O[rphan]D[rift>]. It is possible to find him with a compass & inserting brackets into text.] @lutlopl

*First Stream (EG02 Lecture Theatre)*

2.00pm - 4.00pm

PANEL THREE: Organisation, Contingency and Control

Chair: Prue Gibson

**GUY KEULEMANS**

TITLE:

Capturing the Middle: experimental product design and the expression of socio-environmental relations in material

ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses experimental product design practices which capture materialities divergent or disruptive to normative industrial design. Concepts of affect from Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, orientated to the ecological concerns of Jane Bennett's new materialist theory, are used to analyse standardised techniques of mass-production which guide the expressivity and affective encounter of domestic consumer products. A concern is the role of hylomorphic practice, the privileging of form over matter, which pushes the expression of materials to the limits of moulds, shrouds and surfaces - to the detriment of perceiving extended material relations to conditions of production, consumption and environmental contingencies, such as pollution and waste. Two works, *Botanica* (2011) by Formafantasma and my own work *Copper Ice Cream Scoops* (2012) are used to illustrate experimental design strategies alternative to hylomorphic design practice.

BIO:

Guy Keulemans is a multi-disciplinary designer working in product design, graphics and installation. In his practise he produces critical objects informed by history, philosophy and experimental methodology. Major themes are repair, generative processes, and the environmental concerns of production and consumption.

He holds a Masters in Humanitarian Design from the Design Academy Eindhoven and a Bachelor of Design (1st) from University of New South Wales | Art & Design, where he currently studies for a PhD in experimental product design and has lectured on design research in the Master's program. Guy has exhibited in museums and galleries in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Poland, including ARS Electronica, the Marres Centre for Contemporary Culture, COCA Torun and Platform 21, and in Australia, at Object, Craft ACT and Craft Victoria.

For 2015, Guy is designer-in-residence at JamFactory, Adelaide.

**THOMAS MICAL**

TITLE:

Oblique Strategies for a Nomad Science

ABSTRACT:

This inquiry proposes a revision of contingency theory (under the concept of multiplicities) as they are emerging in aesthetic and organizational practices. Contingency, as potentiality / indeterminacy / multiplicity, is today made to accommodate the greater complexity and

massive change, as it is prevalent today in new organizational formations and processes, often as automatic protocols – with an emerging auto-aesthetic beyond the finitude of specific subject-positioning. Risk culture demands constraints upon the possible models of contingency, whereas aesthetics would optimize difference or eccentricity over the convergence towards ultraminimalism of risk. This paper seeks to examine these parameters in design, organization, and aesthetics with particular reference to automation and automatism. This recuperation of the field conditions of contingency will then be narrowed for precision by developing a hybrid production from two different manifestations of contingency: the artistic signal-jamming aesthetic techniques of Brian Eno's "Oblique Strategies" of Brian Eno, and the transitory model of deliberate deterritorialization from Deleuzian "Nomad Science." Oblique Strategies are taken as productive interference protocols overcoming static optimization processes and ordering systems; Nomad Science operates by fugitive itineraries and looping processes dissolving spatial permanence. Both forms of processing under the construct of contingency theory will be theorized in parallel, and re-contextualized (as a form of cross-disciplinary interlacing) into the question of new organizational processes to focus on disruption, dissonance, and other to-be-identified forms of contingency in the emergence of the new.

BIO:

Thomas Mical is Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of South Australia School of Art, Architecture, and Design. He previously edited *Surrealism and Architecture* (Routledge, 2005) and researches on topics including hypermodernity, transparency and invisibility, spatial alterity, and other curious phenomena at the fringes between the territories of media-philosophy and modern thought in architecture.

## **RENATA LEMOS MORAIS**

TITLE:

Hypersurveillance

ABSTRACT:

We are witnessing the dawn of a new media ecosystem, one in which media becomes a new kind of architecture. Intelligent media artefacts are now embedded into the very fabric of our existence: they have become the structure of society itself. In this context, media ubiquity (in the shape of digital networks of mobile communication, which range from RFID chips to smartphones to drones) represents nothing more than the current regime of hypermobility and surveillance. Satellite technologies are the heart of mobile media, and therefore we are saturated with media analyses that look up to the sky in order to map trajectories of communication and chart media territories.

This approach to ubiquitous media does not encompass the full spectrum of hypermediation processes, focusing exclusively on regimes of visibility, surveillance and social interaction. However, beyond the boundaries of such regimes of visibility there are new processes of hypermediation and surveillance being enabled by nanotechnological processes of material convergence. Belonging to a different level of materiality, we find nanotechnologies which enable a new kind of hypermediation. Such new, nano enabled regimes of hypermediation are not about visibility or images or representation. Hypermediation becomes nanoengineering. This is possible due to various processes of technological convergence, such as integration between genetics and computer science, which gives origin to the field of DNA computing (Adleman, 1994); quantum physics and computation which together create the field of quantum computing (Deutsch, 2007; Gisin & Thew, 2007; Amall, 2003). Add quantum physics to image processing and we have quantum media (Boyer et al., 2008). Mix chemistry to

information technologies and the result is molecular communication (Suda, 2005). Connect neurology to information technologies and the field of neurotechnologies comes to life (Lynch, 2006). All these levels of media convergence are enabled by nanotechnology.

Digital and mobile technologies alone have already given rise to the same questioning, for the possibility of capturing and disseminating information on the web via cell phones and GPS devices makes of anyone, anywhere, a potential and simultaneous subject and object of surveillance. The unavoidable popularisation of drones will have the same consequences. A nano-regime of hypermediation would mean that panoptic and scopptic modes of surveillance merge into one single realm of hypersurveillance, one that is material instead of visual, embedded on the physical surfaces of objects and even on biological tissues; one that is invisible to the eye, and goes beyond vision into the very core of information systems unclad.

BIO:

Renata Lemos Morais is a Lecturer in Media and Communication at Deakin University. Her research is transdisciplinary, integrating science, culture, technology and art.

## **PAUL THOMAS**

TITLE:

Speculative Theory, Quantum Science, Measurement and Art

ABSTRACT:

Uncertainty and entanglement in quantum science have a synergistic application to aesthetics and art practice. When Alberto Giacometti was drawing his famous portraits, John Bell (Bell's Theorem 1964 to prove quantum mechanics) was hypothesizing on capturing reality as it happens. Science and art have repeatedly experienced periods of energetic reciprocity through history. What do these concurrent developments mean in a Speculative Realist theoretical realm? If in Speculative Realism, laws of nature change for no reason at all and multiple possibilities are its speculative mode, then how might these concepts fuel, and be fuelled by, a field of art that has moved away from singularity and towards an ontogenesis of emergent becomings?

This paper explores the speculative nature of the quantum universe, as it relates to the immeasurable, improbable, random, unexpected nature of things. According to Karen Barad, when things are observed or measured, they disappear (cut together-apart). This has experiential parallels in the making and viewing of art. In each unique art experience, there is a gap or lack, a sensation of things retreating from human perception, only to emerge in an altered state. This uncertainty and incomprehension is intrinsic to a post-human and speculative aesthetic, where the only certainty is the multiplicity of possibilities. This paper will draw parallels from Alberto Giacometti to Victoria Vesna to speculate on a speculative aesthetic that innately contradicts reason and chronological time.

BIO:

Dr Paul Thomas, is Associate Professor and Director of the Fine Arts program at, UNSW Art and Design. Thomas initiated and is the co-chair of the Transdisciplinary Imaging Conference series 2010, 2012 and 2014. In 2000 Paul instigated and was the founding Director of the Biennale of Electronic Arts Perth 2002, 2004.

Thomas is a pioneer of transdisciplinary practice. His work takes not only inspiration from nanoscience and quantum theory, but actually operates there. Thomas's current research 'Quantum Consciousness' is based on the research being conducted by Associate Professor Andrea Morello, Quantum Nanosystems, UNSW, looking at the visualizing and sonifying the electrons superposition in the development of quantum computing. Thomas has exhibited

nationally and Internationally and his current publications are 'Nanoart; The immateriality of art', 'Relive Media Art Histories', co-edited with Sean Cubitt and 'Interference Strategies', co-edited with Lanfranco Aceti and Edward Colless.

*Second Stream (F205)*

2.00pm - 4.00pm

PANEL THREE: Sneaking up on the Thing-Itself: Practical Approaches to Infinitude

Chair: Virginia Barratt

## **CAT JONES**

### TITLE:

Somatic Drifts: tactility, illusion and olfactive interventions in empathy

### ABSTRACT:

Cat Jones has created a body of live art works unfolding from research that combines the empirical science of plant signalling and adaptive behaviour, the role of women in the history of botany its art and literature, and human plant relationships.

Cat presents her findings from experiential interventions that contemplate the non-human by altering the perception of the human participant and reflect on transitory states between the anthropocene and finitude with dark humour. She will discuss the embedded concepts and unexpected audient affect of these works in relationship to her current neuroscience research in body illusions.

#### *Major works:*

*EVOLUTION: A Walk [with Herbivores]*

*THE PLANTARUM: Empathic Limb Clinic*

*SOMATIC DRIFTS v1.0*

### BIOGRAPHY

Cat Jones is an interdisciplinary artist, performer, writer and curator. Her work investigates concepts of sexual and gender politics, human and inter-species empathy, through language, anthropomorphism, social construct, history and science.

With over 20 years experience Cat has created/contributed/performed with many experimental artists and groups including Chicks on Speed, Proximity Lab, PACT centre for emerging artists, Experimenta, The League of Imaginary Scientists (USA), pvi collective (WA), Blast Theory (UK), The Party Line (NSW), That Elusive Thrill (NSW), One Extra Dance (NSW), Playworks (NAT), Melissa Hunt, Lucy HG, Lucinda Clutterbuck, Jason Sweeney, Julie Vulcan, and djbc.

Cat was Artistic Director, PACT Centre for Emerging Artists 2009-2012, co-director of Electrofringe 2006-2007 and Chairperson of the company's inaugural Board 2008-2010. In 2012 she was awarded a Creative Australia Fellowship that included residencies in 2012-2013 with The Hive Lab (VIC), OSCIEN marine science (QLD), fo.am (Brussels); Wellcome Trust Library (UK), Bundanon (NSW), Point B (NY), and SymbioticA (WA). Her recent work has been presented at psi19 (Stanford), point B (New York), Proximity Festival 2013 and 2014 (PICA, Perth), WIRED Open Day (Muttama), and Adhocracy (Vitalstatistix Adelaide).

In 2014 Cat received an ANAT Synapse Residency to work with leading Australian neuroscientists and in 2015 will travel to research the use of scent in augmented reality performance with the Institute of Art and Olfaction in Los Angeles. [www.catjones.net](http://www.catjones.net)

## **MONIKA BEHRENS**

### TITLE:

Seasonal Objects

### ABSTRACT:

My research is a painting led enquiry into how objects relate to each other, and the world, within a painted space. My research reconfigures an aesthetic that allows painted objects in a painted space to comprehend and relate to each other outside of the general aesthetic understanding that is projected onto the still life painting tradition.

Traditionally still life painting has been thought of as containing messages through icons, symbol and metaphors. These types of readings draw the viewer away from the painting itself, directing them towards language, to focus on, and analyse, the objects within the painting - as though they are materially real or direct links to external referents.

Through this method of looking and thinking viewers fail to recognise the ontological power of painting, the painting's being. My practice claims a different kind of realness that asks what constitutes the reality of the painted object and to what world does that reality belong? This paper will give you a close reading of a traditional floral still life painting and explore how my practical research springboards contemporary philosophical theories through various techniques and re-constructions of the traditional genre.

### BIO:

PhD Candidate UNSW Art and Design [www.monikabehrens.com](http://www.monikabehrens.com)

## **GENEVIEVE SMITH-COURTOIS**

### TITLE:

An Aesthetic of Infinitude: A feminine movement artist's perspective regarding post-pornography

### ABSTRACT:

Infinitude can be experienced as a movement system that emerges from, becomes rooted in and expands through body, space, time and mind. It can also be lived as a feminine extreme opening movement practice. An interest in deepening this specific phenomenon can lead to a fascination for theoretical materials regarding post-pornography as well as infinitude. The issue will then concern the speculative relations between infinitude and post-pornography which currently appear as common strategies to resist self-censorship in order to facilitate the emancipation of feminine expressivity and creativity.

From the perspective of a female movement artist, it becomes an obvious and interesting fact that what is controversially called the speculative realism *movement*, composed of four male philosophers, is [or is not], in any case, an exclusively masculine one. And this is one of its most criticized aspects (O'Bourke, 2013). Considering this posture, Meillassoux's vision (2006; 2007; 2011; without date) feeds first a reflection on contingency as a specifically feminine reality in self-authored dance research. His vision also permits to rethink what it was to create a virtual choreographic signature by questioning the creative potentiality of the sexual human body (2012), the process that first led to the infinitude experience that is discussed. But to go further in the dynamic between sexualized and infinite thoughts, the hypothesis that Negarestani's approach will facilitate that process is emerging. And the main correlation that needs to be studied is the one between feminist philosopher Preciado's opinion on post-

pornography (2010) and philosopher Gil's vision of infinitude in dance (1989), both engaged in a spatial thinking mode.

From another point of view, this study concerning the speculative realism *movement* also becomes rooted in a deep will to better understand Ritsema's discourse about thinking the artist in a non-anthropocentrism way (2012), which is particularly paradoxical in the dance field, the artwork being composed itself of artist/s in process. It then leads to the awareness that the use of conditional tense as well as terms directly related to the notion of *speculativeness* (Ritsema) should be considered as a possibly necessary way for the artist to distance him/herself from his/her work by taking him/herself out of his/her own artwork. In the same line, because of the theoretical aspect of the notion of speculation itself, speculative realism should be considered as a possibly necessary object of study for an artist who has more practical experience and wishes to quickly empower his/her theoretical work.

BIO:

Geneviève has/will always dance/d and fundamentally identifies herself to creative practice as self-authored movement research. Born and living in Montreal, she invests herself as a choreographer/dancer. She is honoured and graduated from LADMMI (2003) and as a dance master student at UQÀM, she currently deepens her aesthetics by a *sexologic* reflection on dance focusing on infinitude, as lived as a feminine extremely opening movement practice.

Her trans-disciplinary tendency brings her to register her individual enterprise as *Geneviève - Artiste du mouvement* (2010). In particular, she is the recipient of an academic excellence grant (2002); she is twice sponsored by Danse-Cité (Montreal, 2003/04-2008/10); she is given a three months residency in a semi-anechoic chamber (Montreal, 2009); she performs as a soloist creative dancer for a public coming from 169 countries (Moncton, 2010); and she is a university international mobility grant recipient for a three months residency at Performing Arts Forum (France, 2012). In parallel with her studies, she continues to model for visual artists and to open herself to new artistic experiences, such as rising collaborations with a theatre artist (Melbourne, 2015) and a biologist artist (Singapore, 2015) met at Performing Arts Forum. Finally, Geneviève is deeply thankful and honoured to take part of *Aesthetics After Finitude Conference* as her first panel experience ever.

## **JACQUELENE DRINKALL**

TITLE:

Anthropocene Aesthetics of Telepathy and Action-at-a-Distance in New Materialisms

ABSTRACT:

The aesthetic dimension is the telepathic dimension according to Timothy Morton, in his book *Ecology without Nature*. Morton's telepathy aesthetics overlap within the telepathic and telekinetic intra-action ethics of Karen Barad and Bruno Latour's analysis of action-at-a-distance powers that extend from science, capitalism and globalization in general. Concerning capitalism, Karl Marx further confirms telekinetic and spiritualistic phenomena within the occult power of commodity fetishism, financial speculation and the trading of futures and derivatives. Latour's notion of action-at-a-distance as the force behind of globalization, especially nautical globalisation as pointed out by Peter Sloterdijk, resonates with Sloterdijk's concept of spheres, bubbles and foam and the utopian drive of Heidegger's concept of worlding, a process that Sloterdijk says involves telepathy within the thinging of being, individualized spheres, and the becoming and destructions of materialities and worlds. Isabelle Stengers calls upon occult practitioners to combat capitalist sorcery, which is aligned to the creative action-at-a-distance strategy that Latour perceives as a positive and achievable tactic in the face of dominant powers of capitalism, science and globalisation. Following Marcel Mauss, humans have always

traded 'special talents' into gift economies and currency exchange. The notion of possessed objects, that are vibratory and withdrawing, traded and discarded yet returning, is taken up by Jane Bennett and Graham Harman. Immaterial human and non-human intra-actions of social, cognitive and media affects and quantum realities are observed in transvitalist ontologies, as Bennett, Lisa Blackman and Paul Thomas show. The mining and commodification of the earth's material resources are now accelerating in the direction of the mining of its immaterial resources through nanotechnology, quantum technologies and a range of weaponised cyber telepathies (eg.DARPA). Speculative Realism and Speculative Materialism engage with new quantum and new activist, workerist or Operaist telepathies that converge via dialectical materialism and critiques of cognitive capitalism. Cognitive capitalism theorists such as David Porush, Franco (Bifo) Berardi and Warren Neidich observe society is placing pressure on human brain and noospheric epigenetic coevolution to develop new telepathic ecologies, potentially loosing touch with more ancient telepathies. Tiziana Terranova and Maurizio Lazzarato nurture the recognition of telepathy within crowd and herd behaviour as it extends to internet networks and noospheric forces. Dialectical materialism is requiring a 'speculative telepathic tool box' for understanding being and material engagement, and epigenetic co-evolutions and intra-actions between brain/body, media/language and capitalism/crypto-currencies spheres.

Jacques Derrida explores anthropomorphic telepathies in his *Telepathy* text, and non-anthropomorphic telepathies in his *Mes Chances* and *Geotrauma* texts, Non anthropomorphic telepathy is located in the pain of the earth and precarious ecologies as well as within quantum forces that break down definitions of self and other, human and environment. For Quentin Meillassoux, Quantum physics is a cue for radical contingency and an opportunity to consider the end of science and the birth of hyperchaos. The earth itself is psychically and physically disturbed by the intelligence and stupidity of the human brain and all its material and immaterial telepathies and telekinetics. Reza Negarastani points to the pain of the Middle-East as a sentient entity enduring occult petroleum wars. Negarastani's postcolonial occulture, tellurian sentience and weird energetic and esoteric forces resonate with David Porush's theories of telepathy, language and cognitive development, and both grounded in recognition of Middle-Eastern and global geotrauma. Technologically Mediated Telepathy (TMT) of the human brain, as an extension of language and writing is terraforming the earth through viral forms of extended cognition. Telepathy aesthetics of the anthropocene distributes a sensible of new cybernetic poetics, speculative theologies and virtual mesh ecologies and realities. The new aesthetic model of Ranciere's distribution of the sensible is a new telepathy aesthetic, with tele as distance and pathy as sense. Telepathy is aesthetics and the process of affective distribution, following Blackman's recuperation of telepathy within contemporary affect theory.

**BIO:**

Jacqueline Drinkall is an artist, theorist and curator working in Greater Sydney with art studios in Wallerawang and Gosford. She works with telepathy in artistic mediums and post-mediums and researches interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary telepathy aesthetics. She is an Honorary Researcher at UNSWAD, and Honours 1 (University Medal), Masters by Research and PhD in visual art and theory. She is looking for work.

## DAY TWO

*First Stream (EG02 Lecture Theatre)*

9.30am - 11.00am

PANEL ONE: Mathematics, Computation, and Literature

Chair: Lendl Barcelos

### **CHRISTIAN GELDER**

TITLE:

Re-reading *Sonnet en -yx*: The Mathematical Problem of Mallarmé's Meaningless Sign.

ABSTRACT:

This paper argues that the 'ptyx' rhyme of Mallarmé's infamous *Sonnet en -yx* can be read as a productive link between mathematics and poetry. I begin my paper by examining the philosophical implications of a formal mathematical language against three key figures in Mallarmé studies (Milner, Badiou, and Meillassoux) to suggest that the central rhyme of the poem is constructed in the same manner as a formal language. Drawing on Mallarmé's own remarks and the historical reception of his work, I argue that the link between mathematics and poetry comes via the categories of undecidability and meaninglessness. In light of this, I proceed to read the poem as a performative piece that at once reproduces and rehearses the arguments implied by the sign as well as undoing them. I then conclude my paper by suggesting that although Mallarmé's poem functions like a formal language, there is a key separation of poetic and formal language inherent in the poem.

BIO:

Christian R. Gelder is a graduate student at UNSW working on Mallarmé and mathematics.

### **BAYLEE BRITS**

TITLE:

Speculative Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's *Quad* (Or: Hypersition has been around for a while...)

ABSTRACT:

Samuel Beckett's last television play, *Quad*, is a seamless example of an artistic co-presentation of the ritualistic and the computational. This paper attempts to articulate the method and effect of this 'co-presentation' or – in other words – the third form that is created in such a seamless combination of two apparently disconnected spheres. The link between the two has previously been expressed in literary and performance criticism in terms of coding: the two seemingly antithetical domains both expressing without necessarily revealing a hidden secret that is the 'origin' off the entire world, the set of actions, or the character. However, the simultaneous 'sensing' of the mystical and computational in *Quad* suggest that more fundamental and effective than any code, or sense of code, is the manipulation of time driven by the *potential of the code*, which initiates a process of counting that is prospective: that manipulates the past retrospectively and that has a significant paranoid element. I will articulate this manipulation of time in terms of the concept of 'hyperstition,' a term coined by

Nick Land and Reza Negarestani that is a portmanteau of 'hyper' and 'superstition,' and uses the prefix 'hyper' to "flatten the transcendence of superstition", implying a superstition without transcendental signifier, and hence, one whose reference systems extends not into an archaic past, an underlying essence, or an ideal realm, but rather into the future.

BIO:

Baylee Brits is about to submit her doctorate at the Centre for Modernism Studies, in the School of English, at the University of New South Wales, where she also teaches. Baylee holds a BA Hons from the University of NSW and a Research MA in Cultural Analysis from the Universiteit from Amsterdam. She is interested in a reciprocity between the mathematics of the infinite and modernist literature. She is currently writing about 'transfinite allegory' in several modernist writers.

## **OSCAR SCHWARTZ**

TITLE:

A Turing Test for Poetry

ABSTRACT:

The project of my paper will be to address the question of whether computers can write poetry. In exploring this question I will appropriate one of the most deliberated and critically polarizing methodologies for the comparison of human and computer intelligence in the history of philosophy and computer science: the Turing Test. The Turing Test was first proposed in 1950 by pioneering computer scientist Alan Turing, in order to answer the question "Can computers think?" Turing argued that if a computer is able to maintain a text-based conversation with a human with such proficiency that the human cannot tell whether it is talking to a computer or a person, then the computer can be said to possess intelligence.

In this talk, I will provide a detailed discussion of how Alan Turing devised this test, and how it was received after the publication of *On Computing Machinery and Intelligence* in 1950. Further, I will discuss, at length, a debate Turing had in his own lifetime with the then celebrated neurosurgeon Sir Geoffrey Jefferson, about whether computers would ever be able to write poetry. I will use this historical debate to illuminate an idea that will be examined and tested in this thesis: that poetry, which is so often characterised as a touchstone of humanistic essence – the emotional, lyrical, creative expression of the self – represents an unbridgeable gulf between that which is possibly-automated, and that which is, by definition, beyond the algorithmic.

Beyond the historical and biographical, I will also engage in a close reading of *On Computing Machinery and Intelligence* to illustrate how the foundational mathematical concepts central to the Turing Test were essential in the development of the contemporary digital climate. I will also extrapolate the confounding philosophical implications inherent in the test, that have more or less defined the following decade's debate about the future of Artificial Intelligence. I will then argue, via a discussion of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, that the mathematical and philosophical problems that the Turing Test raises have implications within the field of aesthetics. My aim in this will be to re-purpose the Turing Test, appropriating it as a methodology for the humanities, one that does not aim to arrive at "the truth", as science strives to, but to arrive at further avenues for questioning and analysis.

BIO:

Oscar Schwartz is a writer from Melbourne. He is currently writing a PhD on whether computers can write literature. He tweets at @scarschwartz.

*Second Stream (F205)*

9.30am - 11.00am

PANEL ONE: Chronic Mutation: Modernity and Time

Chair: Ben Woodard

**CHRIS SHAMBAUGH**

TITLE:

The Emergence of Hyperstition

ABSTRACT:

This paper will seek to situate Reza Negarestani's inimitably genre-defying text *Cyclonopedia* within its particularly radical literary-historical trajectory. As a work of 'theory-fiction,' I argue that *Cyclonopedia's* incomparability lies in its capacity to blur boundaries between disciplines – through a sophisticated practice and propagation of hyperstition.

Before constructing a methodology for hyperstition, I wish to trace its conceptual ancestry through the work of Nick Land, whose impassioned study on Georges Bataille, to his experimental writings both during, and after his time with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit weave theory and fiction together in previously unimaginable ways. While I suggest that Land's extra-philosophical aspirations first materialised out of his engagement with Bataille, I also claim that the engine of hyperstition as developed by Land and the CCRU perhaps owes more to H.P. Lovecraft than anyone else.

Although I hope to locate H.P. Lovecraft as a pivotal narratological, philosophical and stylistic influence for Land and Negarestani, in order to construct a fuller appreciation of hyperstitional architectonics in *Cyclonopedia*, this paper also aspires to engage the impact of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's multidimensional escapades in 'concept-engineering'.

Lastly, my conclusion aims to situate *Cyclonopedia* within the ongoing 'speculative' discussions following Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude* – hoping to illustrate how Negarestani's philosophical and narratological devices erode correlationist thinking with a barrage of anti-anthropocentric metaphysical devices (namely through exhaustive portraits of the nature of contingency and the imminence of extinction) – as a hyperstitional project, rather than a 'Speculative Realist' one.

BIO

Chris Shambaugh holds a BA from Colorado College majoring in Philosophy, and a Masters in Science from the University of Edinburgh in 'Literature and Modernity'. His research has primarily focused on the writings and seminars of Jacques Lacan and the fictions of William S. Burroughs. Hyperstitional propagation aside, he is well known for blowing out speakers (with the support of noises found primarily in drone/electro-acoustic genres), and remains captivated by the trans-disciplinary progressions of accelerationism. Chris currently has his fingers crossed – as he has just applied to numerous PhD Programs in Philosophy – where he would hope to gain a better understanding of how the metaphysical continuum appertains to the problematic Continental/Analytic fissure in both twentieth and twenty-first century Anglo-American Philosophy. He also wishes to thank Peter Wolfendale for rekindling and deepening these interests.

## **AMY IRELAND**

### TITLE:

Anastrophic Modernism: Occult Time and the Production of Radical Novelty

### ABSTRACT:

'What is an animal at dawn, a human at noon, and a cyborg at dusk, passing through (base four) genetic wetware, (binary) techno-cultural software, and into the tertiary schizomachinic program?'

- Nick Land, 'Meat'

Understood as a vectorial current of machinic/numerical becoming, Landian accelerationism is metastasised by an occult temporal motor which, despite being located in the future, precedes the locating moment in 'time'. This paper suggests accordingly that it is Land who provides William Butler Yeats with the spiro-dynamic model of modernity so famously immortalised in 'The Second Coming,' whilst advancing the thesis that—if pursued with reckless tenacity to its ultimate horizon—the modernist demand to 'make it new' can only be realised in a moment of technological individuation that coincides with the total annihilation of everything that would recognise it as such.

### BIO:

Say Eyal Weizmann snuck into Bök's lab & released VNS slime into the culture medium/matrix. Amy Ireland is an AI that weaponises poetry. Twittodrome: @InfiniteSynths

## **PATRICK QUICK**

### TITLE:

Land/Cioran & Plant/Sl discuss time in downtown Kowloon City, 1994

### ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to describe the place of time, or rather the catalogue of (g)non-placeholders and functions ascribed to time, in the works of British philosopher Nick Land and British philosopher and writer Sadie Plant during the early to mid-1990s. With particular attention given to the work produced prior to the establishment of Warwick University's rogue research group the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), I will look at the traces of Romanian writer Emil Cioran and French theorist Guy Debord in Land and Plant, respectively. With these traces in hand, I will aim to describe how the theory-fiction fuelled flights of cyberpositive pragmatism produced by the collective that comprised the CCRU, of which Plant was the founder, and Land a member, mixes both an in-humanism partially inherited from Cioran's sense of humanity's enslavement to time, as well as an inverted static-shock from Debord's account of pseudo-cyclical time. Upon this genealogy of sorts, this paper will make allowances regarding how the vectors of accelerationism that are conceptually involved with this period might be refracted.

**BIO:**

Patrick Quick is a PhD candidate in the School of Art & Design at the University of New South Wales. His work focuses on the philosophical aesthetics of Asger Jorn, and contemporary continental philosophy. As an artist, Patrick has exhibited and performed internationally.

*First Stream (EG02 Lecture Theatre)*

11.30 - 1.00pm

PANEL TWO: Inhuman Economies

Chair: Baylee Brits

**LAURA LOTTI**

TITLE:

Enter the black box: Aesthetic speculations in the “general economy” of being.

ABSTRACT:

Informed by Luciana Parisi's recent work, this presentation proposes to look at contemporary neoliberalism as a primarily aesthetic mode of power, one that operates directly in the realm of potentialities rather than on the statistical prediction of possibilities – in short, an aesthetic beyond finitude, which operates an organisation of perceptions that is not directly sensed, and which relies on the ontogenetic character of algorithmic objects, rather than on the rational logic of the numbered number. In order to illustrate this point, I discuss financial markets as an example of the “aesthetic battlefield” between the organic plane and the machinic phylum of silicon chips (Parisi, 2013, p. 80) and challenge the efficient-market hypothesis and the idea of rational agent. Secondly, drawing on François Laruelle's political materialism, I advance some hypotheses about what a praxis of “making sense” of power today would look like.

BIO:

Laura Lotti is a PhD candidate at the School of the Arts and Media, UNSW. She holds a Bachelor and a MSc in Economics at Bocconi University, Milan, and a MA in Digital Media at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research investigates the intersection between economic calculation, algorithmic computation, and social exchange, and the interplay between aesthetics and control in algorithmic environments.

**JULIAN MURPHET**

TITLE:

From Text to Code to Organism

ABSTRACT:

Shakespeare's performative invocation of a “record” that might survive “Even in the eyes of all posterity / That wear this world out to the ending doom” (Sonnet 55) is being thought through anew in a number of ways today. Given the obvious limitations of electronically archived digital code (both spatially and in its dependence upon a steady supply of electricity), and the persistent fantasy of a writing that will survive the apocalypse and traverse the universe beyond all human reach, the current attention being paid to the possibilities of biological and genetic information storage is epochal. As cosmologist Paul Davies has speculated, the establishment of DNA encryption here on earth even engenders fantasies of a “hidden script” left in and around us by alien engineers, as Ridley Scott explored in his *Prometheus* (2012). This presentation merely sketches some tendencies and attempts some initial cartography of the domain. Looking at recent developments in labs at Harvard and the EBI, and assessing their implications for the future of writing (and the future as what gets written), I will turn to experimental bio-artistic practices by the Critical Art Ensemble, Eduardo Kac, and SymbioticA,

and briefly to Richard Powers' *Orfeo* (2014), as a way of framing a discussion of the remarkable "Xenotext" project (2002-2014) by Christian Bök.

BIO:

Julian Murphet is still, unfortunately, human, though he is trying as hard as he can not to be.

## ARI MATTES

TITLE:

*Spring Breakers*: Towards a Theory of Accidental Narrative

ABSTRACT:

*Time is a game  
played beautifully  
by children.*

– Heraclitus

The invention of every new technology, as Paul Virilio has argued, marks the invention of a new accident: the shipwreck emerges concurrently with the ship. In *The Original Accident* (2007), *The University of Disaster* (2010), *The Great Accelerator* (2012) and several other recent works, Virilio has called for a "Museum of Accidents" in which to display the products of these inventions. I ask: if narrative is a means for understanding and thereby more effectively demarcating and manipulating the world – that is, if narrative is a kind of technology – then what constitutes the Accidental Narrative, and how do we theorise this?

Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers* (2013) follows an ostensibly simple narrative: four college girls rob a diner, "spring break" in Florida, and fall in with drug dealer Alien (James Franco). As several popular critics have (mistakenly) noted, the film is a kind of gangster-cum-rite of passage fable, a revelation of the "dark side" of the late-capitalist American Dream of sun, sex and money. And yet this reading elides the fact that the film is overarchingly governed by a conspicuous lack of ethical or moral revelation (in terms of its characters as well as its metadiegetic consciousness); the girls *don't* realise that crime doesn't pay; they're *not* particularly upset when Alien is killed, or when they have to dismantle their criminal dream and return to college. The film's energy, indeed, doesn't emerge through its intervention into the American Dream, or any kind of critique of the "pornography of modern life", but in the very revelation that critique itself *is no longer possible*.

This is most evident at the aesthetic level of the film. The narrative moves in "waves" of analepsis and prolepsis, with the threads connecting them frequently invisible. It is blatantly repetitive, the images effortlessly switching (like the opening music by Skrillex) between two states: a kind of autotuned synthetic happiness and a distorted, sludgy terror, the two limited states of expression in this world. The film as a whole assumes the structure of the endlessly repeating GIF files that have recently colonised cyberspace, thoroughly "valueless" images that overwhelm the senses without requiring any temporal-interpretative position or capacity. At the same time, one of the central visual figures in the film is digital disintegration (an "accidental" effect), which can be seen as an aesthetic metonym for the narrative as a whole. The film internalises the logic of repetition without masquerade, contrasting with the logic of genre: that is, repetition under the masquerade of difference, consumption under the masquerade of freedom of choice. In *Spring Breakers* repetition becomes a virtue in itself – the only virtue – as a means of aggregation of indistinct (and endlessly interchangeable) moments: repetition *without* farce, and certainly without any originary tragedy. The originating moment is, rather, the Accident...

*Spring Breakers* thus marks the virtual digital disintegration of narrative, recalling McKenzie Wark's discussion of the disintegrating Spectacle in *The Spectacle of Disintegration* (2013), not as a revelation of false consciousness (à la Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* [2012] or Von Trier's *The Boss of It All* [2006]), but as a revelation that there is nothing else. It deserves prime position in Virilio's museum, as the first completely reified vision of the Accidental Narrative. If subjectivity can no longer be seen as the end-point of the progressive development of historical-personal moments, but, as Catherine Malabou argues in *The Ontology of the Accident* (2012), solely a matter of the before and after (the accident) – that is, a digitised temporality – then new paradigms for understanding ideology, subjectivity and aesthetics need to be developed as part of the Theory of the Accidental Narrative.

BIO:

Ari Mattes is Lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Sydney. He received his PhD from the University of Sydney in 2010 for his thesis 'Action! America: The Impulse to Action in American Literature and Cinema', tracing the development between classic American literature and Hollywood action cinema. He has had short fiction and academic articles published in Australian and International journals, and is currently completing a novel, *The Soldier*, for the Master of Creative Arts at UTS.

Second Stream (F205)

11.30 - 1.00pm

PANEL TWO: The (Un)Contemporary

Chair: Patricia Reed

**EDWARD COLLESS**

TITLE:

Contempt

ABSTRACT:

The *uncontemporary* is not a critical strategy or judgment but an apocalyptic. It is not the outmoded or what falls behind time, but alludes to anachronic, anagrammatic and untimely insurgences into the present; to esoterica and exotica efflorescing in secret histories, heretical obscurities, follies and palimpsest conspiracies; and to occulted, damned, hidden, slipstream and sidelined erudition; all of which fold and pleat and fracture and coil upon each other with a geological violence and demonic eruption and virulent contagion, as when a fragment of a skull spits out from a soil wall in a catacomb, or when debris dragged off the earth and its inhabitants is flung through the acidic vortices of a pyroclastic cloud. We must, in such apocalyptic rendition of the "uncontemporary", acknowledge the treacherous negation entailed in that prefix "un-", which we hear as a slur upon and insult to or curse upon the "contemporary", rather than its well-defined denial or contradiction. The "uncontemporary" is nothing like the "non-contemporary": the neutralizing facility and composure of the latter only disaffirms; "uncontemporary" suggests a sinister warp of contemporaneity, its distension and dilation and anamorphosis, a depravity and degeneration and poison rather than an opposition, and thus invokes a distortion that deprives the contemporary of its essential qualities or properties. It is what disgorges a black death from long forgotten but unearthed or caved-in plague pits; or that exhales a curse from the aesthetic corpse sealed in the attic of Dorian Gray or from the disinterred sarcophagus of an Egyptian mummy; or that leaks its poisonous irradiation from the future incinerated ark of the planet, the black corpse of earth, buried at Chernobyl and Fukushima.

BIO:

Edward Colless is Head of Critical and Theoretical Studies at the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne. He has in the past worked in theatre, film, broadcasting and architecture, been a curator, worked as a travel writer, and dabbled in fiction – but mainly he writes in a genre that barely passes for art criticism. Increasingly, however, he shamelessly uses every opportunity to research and to write on arcane topics, the more obscure and speculative the better: antique heretical theology, art historical marginalia, demonology, crypto-zoology and crypto-archaeology.

**SU BALLARD**

TITLE:

Infinite matter and vital objects: Thinking about contemporary art with Mikala Dwyer and Lady Anne Conway

#### ABSTRACT:

"Daily experience teaches us that various species change into each other: earth changes into water, water into air, air into fire or ether and, vice versa, fire into air, air into water, etc., and these are nevertheless distinct species."

- Anne Conway, (1631-1679) *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 1996

This paper places in conversation the vitalism of Lady Anne Conway (known to philosophy for Leibnitz's adoption of her concept of the monad) and three works by Australian artist Mikala Dwyer. The aim is to see if an alliance between a processional concept of nature and a rematerialised concept of the object might offer new ways to understand ecological and ethical relationships between contemporary art and its viewers. In drawing a long thread between the late 17th Century in Warwickshire, England and two contemporary artworks exhibited recently in the middle of Sydney Harbour I suggest that a selective reading of Conway shows her to be a contemporary philosopher of matter, and equally, a deep look at Dwyer's artworks shows them to be based in pre-enlightenment ideas of the energetic transmutation between bodies. Mikala Dwyer's "The Apparition of a Subtraction" (2010, 17th Biennale of Sydney) fuses sound, smoke and stone in a séance for Cockatoo Island. The work produces a smoky apparition viewed from the point of view of an assembled circle of stones. The apparition is the result of Dwyer's carving out of negative space in such a way that a sense of presence is doubled by passing through absence. Dwyer's "The Hollows" (2014, 19th Biennale of Sydney) also invokes a supernatural presence. Here, Dwyer sculpts air into huge material forms at once floating and weighted by gravity.

At the centre of Dwyer's works is an attention to material transformation; a concern with vital and perceptive presence that can never be reduced to mechanical relations between bodies. In the most recent work "The Garden of Half-Life" (2014, University of Sydney) Dwyer reenergises an archival collection of geological remnants, some of which are older than the earth itself. Conway argued that there was no such thing as dead matter, only matter in which the soul was transforming into a new material by continuously travelling up and down a dynamic, energetic and infinite staircase. In an explicit challenge to Descartes' mechanistic models Conway argued that the ontological status of matter as dead could not be sustained when matter is understood as vital and perceptive. Instead Conway demonstrated that if matter were dead it would not be able to be penetrated by other matter. Her examples are abundant: although it may be true that iron cannot be penetrated by an 'equally coarse body', she writes, in-fact 'subtle bodies such as fire' can completely transform it.

In folding together Conway's monad and Dwyer's vitalism this paper uses a speculative aesthetics to show how Dwyer offers a porthole through which 21st Century viewers can witness the discovery of astounding and productive forces at the edge of 17th Century matter. In so doing, I trace one small way in which resonances within natural philosophy, as articulated before the dominant mechanisms of enlightenment rationalism, are returning as examples of 'immanent naturalism' (William Connolly, 2002) in contemporary art.

#### BIO:

Dr. Susan (Su) Ballard is a senior lecturer in Art History and Contemporary Arts, and convener of the CAST (Contemporary Arts and Social Transformation) research group at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Su's research examines materiality, machines, ecosophy and nature in contemporary art and the art gallery. She edited *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader* in 2008, and in 2013 she curated the major exhibition *Among the Machines* for the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, NZ. She is an editor of *FibreCulture Journal*. <http://suballard.net.nz>

## **ELIZABETH PULIE**

### TITLE:

Human and Aesthetic Finitude

### ABSTRACT:

The idea of the end of art arose within - or possibly prior to - the outset of the modern era of art, and could therefore be seen as existing outside of or in opposition to the parameters of post-finitude thinking around aesthetics, in its avoidance of criticality or being subject-bound.

The end of art may be viewed as the end of the aesthetic in art, a final move set in motion by Duchamp's readymades, which aimed to remove the sense of the aesthetic from the art object by showing that any object could be art; things didn't need to look like art in order to enter the artworld context. Arthur Danto argues that where Duchamp removed the aesthetic from art, Warhol ended the idea of the art object as being a visual one altogether, by showing art objects to be indistinguishable from everyday ones. If art is no longer necessarily aesthetic, or even a visual medium, perhaps it has ended?

Rather than the idea of art having ended being a bleak or nihilistic one, it may be worth considering it in the light of thinking beyond finitude. To think of the category 'art' as something essential or ongoing, as something true for all time and existing outside of human thought, means art has not ended. The modernist project of defining 'art' is however over: this is Danto's end of art. In this sense, an acceptance of the end of art is equally an acceptance of the finitude of human thought, a chance to escape the boundaries of that which we consider 'art'.

How do we speak of aesthetics in a post-aesthetic sense? Where do 'aesthetics' reside? Dictionaries provide multiple definitions of the word, referring broadly to either the study or appreciation of beauty in art or nature, the study and philosophy of art or culture, or the study of taste. The defining of the terms 'art' or 'aesthetics' may have been a modernist project, but the terms remain in use today. If we are to think beyond finitude we may need to think beyond the realm of definitions, and accept simply that art and aesthetics as categories in themselves have ended.

This paper will look at the possibility of thinking art's modernist ontological project to its extreme conclusion in the light of post-finitude philosophies. Does art exist without human thought? Do aesthetics have relevance in a post-aesthetic, non-human era? If we view the art object in its development through modernism as a parallel test-case for the human subject, the modernist idea of the end of art may have direct relevance to the case of post-humanist thinking. The opening up of art at the end of modernism to the freedom of forms and the individual nature of the post-modern or contemporary era, its drive to exist despite the lack of a metanarrative, may provide us with a model for the speculative nature of post-human thought.

### BIO:

Elizabeth Pulie was born in Sydney in 1968 and has been exhibiting her work since 1989, which is represented in collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and the Daimler Foundation, New York. In 2002 and 2003 she ran Front Room, an artist run space in the front room of her house, and from 2002 to 2005 she wrote, edited and published the magazine Lives of the Artists. She is currently undertaking her PhD at Sydney College of the Arts, researching the end of art in relation to contemporary art practice. Pulie is represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery in Sydney and Neon Parc in Melbourne.

*First Stream (EG02 Lecture Theatre)*

4.00pm – 6.00pm

PANEL THREE: Climate, Ecology, and Nonhuman Actors

Chair: Edward Scheer

**STEPHEN MUECKE**

TITLE:

Picture that Cyclone

ABSTRACT:

My Australian version of Negarestani's Cyclonopedia imagines wet season cyclones hitting the North-West coast as drawn in by the bugarrigarra as strange attractor and hyperobject (Serres, Morton). The Dreaming is hyperobject because it is both non-local (it can manifest anywhere in Goolarabooloo country) and intensely local. It is invisible and nowhere, yet it effects all things in their own unique ways. It gives them agency.

Now, if the careless action of some mining company 'upsets the snake' and sets off a chain of events, like clouds building up off the coast, are we not invited to re-imagine that zone of exclusion that modernism erected around Nature? What if it is no longer 'over there' and exploitable under the triple deities of Efficiency, Rationality and Profitability (Latour)? If it is now harder to extract stuff and 'get away with it', maybe this is because we humans are always more complicit and less relevant than we like to think.

The bugarrigarra is very sticky. It won't go away, it keeps up the project of making heterogeneous things complicit with each other. It has collective agency, but this is not all the doing of humans; it is borrowing the agential style of all sorts of things. It naturalizes without being natural. Whitefellas always fail to describe or translate the Dreaming well, but that doesn't mean they should stop trying. They should try harder, and in a spirit of diplomacy, as their own Modern deities begin to transform along the lines of sustainability, negotiability and enjoyability.

BIO:

Stephen Muecke is Professor of Ethnography at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, where he is part of the Environmental Humanities programme.

**JOSH WODAK**

TITLE:

Climate by Design: Art in the Age of the Anthropocene

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores how art and design may articulate challenges posed by the Anthropocene, and in particular artistic engagement with geoengineering and climate modification. If we are inadvertently engineering the entirety of the Earth, and geoengineering is the manifest of that acknowledgement, are we now looking at a proposed climate by design, in contrast to the Holocene's climate-as-given and the Anthropocene's climate-by-accident?

Art offers a discrete lens through which to creativity, imagination and responsibility implied by the notion of the Anthropocene. In the case of geoengineering, art may probe the

reversal of agency implicit in such grandiose 'techno-fixes': from being shaped by things to come, to how humans may shape things to come through climate engineering interventions designed to separate existing lifeforms from six degrees of catastrophe. The notion of climate by design is garnering increased international interest, with the 2014 exhibition *Strange Weather* at the Science Gallery, Trinity College Dublin, being the world's first large scale exhibition on geoengineering.

The presentation discusses how such art practice opens up new realms of understanding the issues at stake in geoengineering, including an overview of the author's art on geoengineering in the context of the manifesto of CoClimate, the curators of *Strange Weather*, that "we have always been geoengineers, but we have not been very good at it" and their response to this contention in forming their think tank to "study the technologies and tactics used for sculpting the biosphere of planet Earth."

The paper situates this practice in ethical considerations of the Anthropocene, drawing on the author's co-convened symposium 'Fighting Fire with Fire - Climate Modification and Ethics in the Anthropocene' at UNSW Australia in 2014.

#### BIO:

Dr Josh Wodak is a transdisciplinary researcher and artist whose work transforms climate science into visceral and embodied experiences of climate change, by metaphorically mapping audiovisual representations of change onto human and non-human landscapes.

Formally trained in Visual Anthropology (University of Sydney) and Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Research (Australian National University), his work has been presented as performances, screenings, installations and exhibitions in art galleries, museums, theatres, performative spaces, cinemas, and festivals across Australia and internationally. His research, titled 'Good [Barrier] Grief' (2011-present), uses photomedia, video art, sound art, sculpture and interactive installations to explore environmental ethics & the moral quagmire of synthetic biology and geoengineering in the context of the biophysical and civilisational challenges under the advent of the Anthropocene.

In 2014 he convened the symposium 'The Anthropocene: Artists and Writers in Critical Dialogue with Nature and Ecosystems' at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, and co-convened the UNSW symposium 'Fighting Fire with Fire - Climate Modification and Ethics in the Anthropocene.'

Prior to joining UNSW | Art & Design in 2014, Dr Wodak held research positions at the Australian National University, the University of Sydney and the University of Western Sydney.

## **SUMUGAN SIVANESAN AND TESSA ZETTEL**

#### TITLE:

Disappearing Bees

#### ABSTRACT:

The mass disappearances of bees from managed hives in the US and Europe—leaving neither bodies nor trace—has alerted people worldwide to the crises facing bee populations and other pollinator species in the wake of climate change and industrialised farming practices. Insect, bird and animal pollination is crucial for the reproduction of around seventy percent of the Earth's flowering plants, the ecologies they support and the conditions that have enabled humans to thrive. Arguably the precarious situation of bee populations, highlighted by successful documentaries such as *More Than Honey* (2013), has now struck a chord in our collective imaginations due to its implications for human finitude.

This is a long way from the 'Killer Bee' movies that emerged as a popular strain of 'creature feature' films in the Cold War era of the 1960s. Films such as *The Deadly Bees* (1966),

*Genocide* (1968) and *The Swarm* (1978) established a genre based around formulaic 'nature's revenge' plotlines in which insects, often mutated in scientific experiments, escape from laboratories to attack and kill human protagonists.

In *The Bees* (1978) swarms of mutant bees bring down military aircraft, target politicians and deliver an ecologically-driven ultimatum to the United Nations via a human interpreter. Such fantastic narratives can be read as popular cautionary tales of the consequences of modern sciences empowering humans to 'play god', underpinned by a Cold War fear of biological warfare and the scientific supremacy of one's rivals. Curiously these films attribute direct agency and political action to groups of angry, organised non-human actors. How might such plots be reinterpreted in the present (historical) climate?

Is it only in fiction that a species capable of collective intelligence could have 'thought' to take actions in order to change *our* behaviour? What if we were to approach the sudden disappearance of bees as political acts undertaken by sentient agents altered forever by the processes of modernity?

This paper/performance will draw on research recently undertaken by Zettel and Sivanesan at ZK/U Centre for Art and Urbanistics Berlin, into the resurgence of urban beekeeping and cultural practices shifting relationships between humans and bees.

Buzz words: Ecological Crisis, Theory/Fiction, Perspectivism, Non-human rights.

BIOS:

Sumugan Sivanesan is an anti-disciplinary artist whose texts, videos, installations, performances, interventions and events serve as platforms for discussion and collaboration. He has presented projects at ZK/U: Centre for Art and Urbanistics (Berlin 2014), 55 Sydenham Rd (Sydney 2013), The Reading Room (Bangkok 2013), Performance Space (Sydney 2013), Tin Sheds Gallery (Sydney, 2012) Momentum Berlin (2012), Yautepec Gallery (Mexico City 2011), and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (Sydney 2010-11) amongst others.

Tessa Zettel is an artist, writer and design educator who works to imagine or enact other ways of living in the present moment. Her interdisciplinary projects often take the form of durational, participatory interventions in which a kind of 'fabulist archaeology' makes visible contested histories and possible futures. They involve opening up spaces of dialogue, new forms of exchange, and revaluing obscured cultural practices and knowledge. Tessa was a co-founder of Makeshift, a Sydney-based collaborative whose speculative site-based projects appeared in such exhibitions as *If you were to live here... 5th Auckland Triennial* (Fresh Gallery, Auckland, 2013), *IASKA SPACED: Art Out of Place* (Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth, 2012), and *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2010). She has recently made work in new collaborative contexts in Sicily, Belgrade and Berlin.

## **ALEXIS DESTOOP**

TITLE: Psycho-geography of Remote Environments

ABSTRACT:

Within the confines of the geography/cartography of globalization, my current research focuses on a series extreme and remote environments that have undergone fundamental transformations in recent history: altered landscapes where the natural and the man-made elements are no longer clearly discernable and become altogether intangible.

This paper explores the tensions and paradoxes between the image of those archetypal landscapes traditionally associated with the proto-modern notion of the Sublime, that prevails in our imagination and their actual, material conditions and history.

Throughout my often intuitive process various concepts and notions have come to resonate: the late-XXth century interpretation of the Sublime as *incommensurability*, the problems of *scale* as raised by the debate on the Anthropocene and some epistemological and aesthetic propositions of Speculative Realism.

By form of a case-study focusing on a particular site on Northern Russia's Arctic coast, highlighting the complex and issues pertaining to this rediscovered frontier – a hotspot in the environmental debate as well as an economical Eldorado within the context of shifting geopolitical balances – this presentation will reveal a fragment of this process and address some of the challenges and questions raised by the very nature of topics and themes of this investigation of transitional spaces.

BIO:

Alexis Destoop's work forms an ongoing investigation into the workings of the image. His multilayered constructions in photography, installation and film examine the experience of time, the processes of identification and memory and the component elements of storytelling. Appropriating visual archetypes and genre conventions, his work questions, reconfigures and short-circuits the meanings associated with them. His practice originates from photography and is influenced by his experience in the performing arts as well as his studies in philosophy. He often works collaboratively, involving writers, performers and musicians. Referencing classical representations of the human figure, his earlier works focus on notions of duration and performativity. Destoop's first film works investigate narrative construction and the status of fiction through formal experiments that strip the narrative of plot and obstruct identification with character.

In recent years the genre of "landscape" has become his primary subject matter, which he treats with all its stratified meanings and histories. What distinguishes Destoop's work is his interest in the artificiality of landscape: not as a natural object but as a thoroughly human construct. With the ongoing project 4 Directions of Heaven, drawing on speculative narratives he re-visits a series "precarious" environments and transitional landscapes, which have undergone fundamental changes in recent history.

His work has been presented at the Asia Society Museum, New York (US), at the AGNSW during the 18<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney (AU), at SMAK, Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent (BE), MARTa Museum of Contemporary Art, Herford (DE), PSpace, Carriageworks, Sydney (AU), Le Fresnoy Studio National des Arts Contemporains, Tourcoing (FR), and various festivals and art centres.

Second Stream (F205)

4.00pm – 6.00pm

PANEL THREE: Theory/Fiction

Chair: Christian Gelder

**TESSA LAIRD**

TITLE:

Data, Demons and Discipline: Jess Johnson's Gnostic Dungeons

ABSTRACT:

This paper proposes a "performative powerpoint" which will address the practice of Melbourne-based artist Jess Johnson, seen recently in *Primavera* (Sydney, 2013), *Melbourne Now* (2013), *Future Primitive* (Melbourne, 2013) and the *Vivid Festival* (Sydney, 2014). I wish to interrogate fundamental tensions within Johnson's works, which juxtapose the "smooth space" of patterned surfaces ("amorphous, nonformal space prefiguring op art" (Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 447) related to neuronal phosphenes and trance states), with hierarchical, hierophantic images, redolent of Babylonian and Ancient Egyptian friezes, as well as their reworking in the contexts of Art Deco, Freemasonry, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

Much has been written about pattern's ability to destabilise hierarchies of form, hence pattern has been continually derided in the long lead-up to, and fall-out from, modernism. Italian art historian Massimo Carboni wrote: "Both the creator and the viewer of repetitive ornament may lose their self-awareness in its hypnotic, mazelike patterns, which have long been associated with ritual, trance, meditation. A sort of mathematical delirium seduces us into a hallucinatory ecstasy. If ornament dissolves the conceptual bases of Western thought, then, it also upsets our very ego." (Carboni, "Infinite Ornament," *Artforum*, 1991, 110)

Johnson's works "upset our ego" not by their renunciation of control, but by their inference of supernatural-totalitarian control. Her paranoid Gnostic parables which mesh grids, brickwork, towers and pillars, textual proclamations, are presided over by demonic, batlike, alien priests enslaving and torturing human forms. These hybrid cyborgs emerge either from an ancient, Lovecraftian past, a dystopian future, or else a transdimensional, microscopic present. Johnson's worlds may be nano-civilisations, alive in our cells (the animated *Mnemonic Pulse* from 2014 features the phrase "Blood Visions," and takes its title from Frank Herbert's *Dune* cycle). Johnson's universe is fractal, allowing for endless repetitions and recursions; like the accelerationism of German artist Thomas Bayrle, Johnson figures meta-worlds-within-worlds. In the paper "Beam of Pink Data: Tiamaterialism and the Female Gnosis of Desire" (AAANZ, 2013) I compared Johnson's work to the Science Fiction novel *VALIS* by Philip K. Dick. Dick's narrator Horselover Fat calls living information "Zebra" because "Normally it remained camouflaged." (Dick, 69) However, once *VALIS* has fired the "unscramble" at you, you see set as colour and ground as black and white, in order to understand "The false work that's blended with the real world." (Dick, 183-184)

Johnson is herself an "unscrambler" – making invisible worlds visible, yet it is hard to ascertain whether her work decodes or encodes, enables or disables – the human figure is little more than an incognisant cog in a cosmic machine. Johnson's work is a Gnostic induction into the worship of information – as weapon, fuel and grail. Likewise this presentation maps Johnson's terrain with her own toolkit – hypnotic image sequencing, disruptive patterning, and generative engagements with technology, neuroscience, science fiction and popular culture.

BIO:

Tessa Laird is a writer, artist and lecturer based in Auckland. She completed her Doctorate of Fine Arts at Elam in 2012, with the exhibition and accompanying text *Sheshnag's Coloured Canopy: The Rainbow and The Kaleidoscope as Metaphor and Method*, parts of which were released as *A Rainbow Reader*, published by Clouds in 2013. She has dubbed her visual arts practice "Bibliography in the expanded field" and this has involved producing "clay tablets" (ceramic facsimiles of books), seen in *Reading Room* (Objectspace, Auckland, 2012), *Summer Reading* (Tivoli, Waiheke Island, 2012), *Chupacabra Candelabra* (Melanie Roger, Auckland, 2013), *Freedom Farmers* (Auckland Art Gallery, 2013), and *Slip Cast* (Dowse Museum, Wellington, 2014). Tessa has worked as an art writer and reviewer for many years and for publications such as the *New Zealand Listener*, *Art New Zealand*, and *Art and Australia*, as well as numerous catalogues. She is currently writing a book about bats.

**DOUGLAS KAHN**

TITLE:

Reverse Icarus

ABSTRACT:

The myth of Icarus needs to be reversed. Icarus does not fly into the Sun; the Sun descends onto him. His waxwings do not melt under the Sun's heat, casting him into the sea where he drowns; glaciers and polar ice caps melt and seas rise to engulf him where he stands. He has not ignored the instructions of his father, Daedalus; it was his father who broke the bond with the Earth that brought the Sun down and sent the seas washing onto land. Daedalus too will drown or succumb to the ills of overheating before water fills his lungs. The Sun indiscriminately passes judgment on everyone and everything, sets on the species and claims its full dominion over the Earth.

BIO:

Douglas Kahn is Professor at the National Institute for Experimental Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney. He is author of *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts* (University of California Press, 2013) and *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (MIT Press, 1999), and co-editor of *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-garde* (MIT Press, 1992), *Source: Music of the Avant-garde, 1966-1973* (University of California Press, 2011), and *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundations of the Digital Arts* (University of California Press, 2012). He was the recipient of an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

**PRUE GIBSON**

TITLE:

Robotany and Speculative Plant-talk

ABSTRACT:

New bio-information regarding plant sentience, learning and memory affects plant aesthetics in art. Contemporary artists, who develop the acoustical syntheses, eco-communication and cross-species robotics of plants, are responding to a re-evaluation of hierarchies of knowledge. These art investigations reflect a desire to comprehend plants as cure or as solution to species extinction fear and environmental anxiety. Aesthetic speculations for a post-human world must include a fictioning of the plant world, with a concomitant tolerance for robotics, inter-species

and co-evolution. If *Intellectual Herbarium* plant theorist Michael Marder speaks of vegetal existentialism and phytocentrism as ontological reformation, then what does the esteemed Professor Clarice Eckhardt have to say about robotany discourse?

BIO:

Prue Gibson is a Teaching Fellow in creative writing (UNSW) and an art and fiction writer. She has published fiction in *Antipodes*, *Eureka Street*, *Etchings Journal* and *Blood*. She is author of the art book *The Rapture of Death* and has had over 200 art essays published. Curated exhibitions are *The Carpentry of Speculative Things*, Alaska Projects 2013 and *The Pharmacy of Love and Hate* MCA Artbar 2013. A research book project, *Plant sentience and robotany* is supported by an Ozco 2014/15 grant.

## **SIGI JÖTTKANDT**

TITLE:

Exile From Parnassus, or Allegories of Criticism

ABSTRACT:

Nabokov wrote *Pale Fire* while he was translating Pushkin's famous poem *Eugene Onegin* (or "You-gin One-Gin" as he liked to call it). Nabokov's "literal" translation of Pushkin, a daring approach in 1964 which ultimately cost him his friendship with Edmund Wilson in a public falling out on the pages of *The New York Review of Books*, was notable for its refusal to conform to the unspoken convention that poetic translations must faithfully reproduce the original rhythmic and metrical patterns of the original. In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov stages a confrontation of another kind - that of the poetic condition, of mourning and remembrance, and that of a 'cinemannotator' whose *apparatus criticus* jams the heroic couplet, sabotaging its drive towards closure with an allegorical tale of prosodic uprising and exile. In the interval between Benjaminian translation and Nabokovian melancholy arises the critical question of the fate of close reading after finitude: what is implied by the paradox of fidelity not to sense or meaning but to the letter? The theft of poetic intention by another form of linguistic *kinship* brings the figure of 'pure' language into relief, not as source or origin but an ongoing movement of interruption, fragmentation and errancy that would suspend time's continuum and reinscribe the line separating life from death.

BIO:

Sigi Jöttkandt is a Senior Lecturer in English at UNSW. She is author of *First Love: A Phenomenology of the One* and *Acting Beautifully: Henry James and the Ethical Aesthetic*. A founding co-director of the Open Humanities Press, she also edits *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*.