

Spiral Film and Philosophy Conference

IT'S ALIVE!
Film / Form / Life

DAY 1 – MAY 17, 2019

Panel 1: Common Life
9:30-11:10AM

Chair: Philippe Theophanidis, York University

Graeme **GILLOCH**, Lancaster University

“Home again, home again, jiggy-jig!”:

J. F. Sebastian and his welcoming and unwelcome friends

ABSTRACT – This is a timely moment to revisit Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), not only in the light of Denis Villeneuve’s 2017 sequel (*Blade Runner 2049*) but also because it is set in 2019! Indebted to Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, and set in a dystopian LA wherein robotic simulations substitute for the largely extinct natural world and human needs and pleasures are met through the slave labour of cyborgs – the ‘more human than human’ replicants – these films question and prompt reflections upon what it means to be human and, indeed, what it is to be ‘alive’.

While the ‘retirement’ of rogue Nexus 6 replicants by the eponymous ‘blade runner’ (Rick Deckard – Harrison Ford) forms the central narrative of Scott’s film, my focus is on the presence of other human-like (mannequins) and ‘animated’ figures (automata). The paper considers the chronically ill cybernetics / robotics / AI engineer J. F. Sebastian (William Sanderson), and the various ‘friends’ (Bear, Kaiser and other assorted mechanical models) he has literally made and with whom he shares his ramshackle apartment. “Nice toys!” exclaims Roy Batty, thereby distancing himself and his fellow replicant Pris from these, their own rather ‘less human than human’ early ‘ancestors’.

Drawing on motifs from Walter Benjamin, a cultural theorist renowned for his particular penchant for automata and toy collections, I examine the significance of Sebastian’s unhomey home as an uncanny mechanical menagerie / museum and workshop. Most importantly, as both toy-maker and chess-player, J.F. himself calls to mind the figures of the “puppet in Turkish attire” (representing

historical materialism) and the “hunchback dwarf” (theology) with which Benjamin opens his 1940 ‘Theses on the Concept of History’. But what use are they now, puppet and dwarf, when it is Roy the replicant who proves the ultimate chess master?

BIO – Dr Graeme Gilloch is Reader in Sociology at Lancaster University UK. Specializing in social and cultural theory, and in particular the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, he is the author of three monographs (*Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* 1996; *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* 2002; and *Siegfried Kracauer: Our Companion in Misfortune* 2015, all Polity Press); the co-author of *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: The Global Vision of a Turkish Filmmaker* (2018, IB Tauris); and the co-editor of *Walter Benjamin and City Cultures of the 21st Century* (2018 Saemulgyul Publishing, Seoul). He has published numerous articles and essays on literature, film and visual culture drawing on the writings of theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Marc Augé and Henri Lefebvre. His on-going collaborative works include a rhythm analysis of the Korea port city of Busan, projects on film, fragmentation and the city in Busan and Lisbon, and two art exhibitions with Invisible Print Studio, London: ‘The Arca Project’ and ‘A-Z: Anderswo – Zentralpark’.

Scott **BIRDWISE**, York University

Walking on Thin Air: Agamben and the Creaturely Cartoon

ABSTRACT – Commentators on Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “the coming community” tend to draw from a canon of “serious” examples: Melville’s *Bartleby*, the “assistants” of Walser and Kafka, nymphs of mythical lore, and the cinematic strategies of Debord and Godard. But as I suggest, Agamben also considers ‘toons to be among those “whatever beings” in the community after judgement. To explain how ‘toons can be thought with Agamben, I draw from the Warner Bros. Road Runner series. Following Agamben, I first suggest that such cartoons are ethical and political experiences at the same that they are objects of entertainment; they give us a profane glimpse of the life-time that remains after the law. Thus they belong to a theologico-political field related to questions of sovereignty, law and justice. More specifically, they reveal humanity’s essential “inoperativity,” ultimately revealing how humanity’s condition is comic rather than tragic.

Like Walter Benjamin before him, who saw in Mickey Mouse a “creaturely life” adapted to the contradictions of industrial capitalism, Agamben focuses on the notion of “experience” in cartoons — how we recognize in them our own distorted form of life within consumer capitalism. To consider the question of what Agamben’s philosophy offers to a theory of animation that allows us to reframe it as ontologically and ethically linked to humanity’s conception of itself in its potentialities, this paper draws from the diverse range of Agamben’s corpus, including his recent study of the *commedia dell’arte* figure Pulcinella, and engages with the work of Eric Santner, who brings together biopolitics with psychoanalysis and political theology. Working with Santner’s extrapolations of Benjamin’s “creaturely life,” I extend Agamben’s nascent philosophy

of the 'toon to a consideration of the form of *enjoyment* such creatures, including ourselves, suffer and endure as we all fall into our exemplary comic and cartoonish condition.

BIO – Scott Birdwise is a PhD Candidate in Cinema and Media Studies at York University. His dissertation is on the work of British documentary filmmaker and artist Humphrey Jennings analyzed through the lens of Surrealism and biopolitics. He has published essays and book chapters on various aspects of experimental film, documentary media, animation, and the Canadian horror film. He also performs in the post-hardcore group HUMANITIES.

Patrick **MARSHALL**, University of Toronto

Prediction, Population, Power: Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *World on a Wire*

ABSTRACT – Released on television on in 1973, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's critically neglected two-part mini-series *World on a Wire* appears most immediately as a reflection on philosophical skepticism: it's story concerning an institution committed to developing software which is capable of simulating an entire life-world populated by inhabitants who remain unaware of the governing conditions of their existence and its protagonist who uncovers a vast conspiracy which exposes the supposedly real world as *itself* simulated would suggest as much. But by these very same features and by its inclusion of a subplot in which a corporation seeks to use the simulation project to produce market research, the film also indexes an interest in a way of thinking which grew to prominence in the 1970s: a positivist hermeneutic which reduces the complexity and contingency of a life-world to a set of quantifiable, calculable, and predictable data which can then be readily appropriated for the sake of control and profit comes to be one of the defining features of neoliberal capitalism.

In this paper I begin by inquiring into the concept of "world" as it has been described by Martin Heidegger, before moving on to indicate the centrality of this idea for Hannah Arendt's conception of democratic politics. If a world is a form of life in which contingency, togetherness, and freedom are the conditions of possibility of politics, then *World on a Wire* proposes that the use of surveillance technology as a predictive device (a wholly neoliberal application of technology) can stabilize and thus reduce a world to a population (as described by Foucault in his lecture course *The Birth of Biopolitics*): an arrangement of bodies in which contingency, togetherness, freedom and the political as such are compromised if not eliminated outright. By focusing in particular on stylistic construction in *World on a Wire*, this paper examines the film's prescient anxiety about the transformation of political power into market research data.

BIO – Patrick Marshall is a Third-Year PhD Student in Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto. His dissertation examines the role that North American and European political thrillers in the long 1970s played in examining and popularizing the interrelations between media, democracy, and capitalism.

Joshua Harold **WIEBE**, University of Toronto
Behold now, Behemoth

ABSTRACT – The average airplane seat has diminished in width from 18.5 inches in the 1990s to 17 inches, with an average pitch (the measurement between a given point on one seat and the same point on the seat in front of it) of 31 inches, down from 35. There are reported incidents of fat people being ejected from planes after boarding, while a policy of forcing large passengers to purchase two seats has been adopted widely. This is the case despite a dramatic increase globally in the average BMI (Body Mass Index) in the same timeframe, frequently referred to as ‘the obesity epidemic.’ Drawing from Derrida’s model of deconstructive reading, this paper stages a conflict between airlines and fatness by way of monstrosity, providing a rough genealogy of cinematic encounters between airplanes and giant monsters, seeking in these encounters a radicality and political efficacy absent from representational arguments about fatness. Looking to films such as *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995, Okawara), *Mega Shark vs. Giant Octopus* (2009, Perez), *King Kong* (1933, Schoedsack and Cooper), this paper thinks through the antagonism between monsters and airplanes without resorting to ascription of intentionality, instead using the network of images considered as a generative base for radical critique. Given that one’s position in modernity is at stake in the potential to enjoy the benefits of globalization via air travel, a detour through Heidegger’s arguments regarding the “airliner that stands on the runway” and technology “standing on reserve” will be necessary to establish the weight of this argument.

BIO – Joshua Harold Wiebe is an MA student at the University of Toronto’s Cinema Studies Institute.

Panel 2: Other Life

11:20-12:40PM

Chair: James Leo Cahill, University of Toronto

Sarah **COOPER**, King’s College London

Vegetal Life Forms: Filming Flowers and the Secrets of Nature

In this paper, I consider a selection of pioneering British natural history films made in the early twentieth century, paying attention to the filming of plant life, particularly that of flowers. From *The Birth of a Flower* (F. Percy Smith, 1910) through to the *Secrets of Nature* series made by Harry Bruce Woolfe’s company British Instructional Films between 1922 and 1933, the hitherto invisible development of the life of plants (in addition to that of birds and insects) was made visible, from the meandering extensions of their roots through to the unfurling of their petals. The subject matter of F. Percy Smith’s intricately filmed time-lapsed footage of plants, presented silently with inter-titles or accompanied in some cases by voice-over commentary

and edited painstakingly by Mary Field, ensured the success of these works with the general public, which, as acknowledged by BFI Screenonline, pre-empts the kind of fascination exerted today by David Attenborough's documentaries on the natural world.¹ My interest in these early films from the vantage point of the twenty-first century is twofold: I examine how they shed light on innovative filmic processes and questions of film form, but also on forms of life – those of the vegetal world – that have received less extensive consideration to date in film studies in comparison with areas such as animal studies. In attending to plant life, I join with philosophers Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder who have reflected recently on the significance of the vegetal for our lives, taking up their concerns in a filmic context in order to ask what it means to put the vegetal, especially flowers, centre screen.

BIO – Sarah Cooper is Professor of Film Studies at King's College London. Her books include *The Soul of Film Theory* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013), *Chris Marker* (Manchester University Press, 2008), and *Selfless Cinema? Ethics and French Documentary* (Legenda, 2006). Her next book, *Film and the Imagined Image*, is forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press in 2019. Her current research focuses on flowers in film.

Charlie **HEWISON**, Université Paris VII Diderot

The Organic and Inorganic Life-Image.

Emmanuel Lefrant's *Parties visible et invisible d'un ensemble sous tension* and the *Umwelt* of analog film

In 2001, the French experimental filmmaker Emmanuel Lefrant travelled to Togo. While he was there, he made an analogue film composed of two types of cinematic images, mingled together later in the post-production by complex bi-pack techniques. The first was a time-lapse view of the landscape he could see from the window of his house. The second, less conventional type of image, was created by Lefrant burying rolls of black developed film stock underground in the same landscape for various amounts of time. Titled *Parties visible et invisible d'un ensemble sous tension*, the result is a hallucinatory short experimental film, in which a recognizable image of a landscape emerges from, melts into and coexists with a more abstract image, created by the direct reactions of the film stock's emulsion with the chemical and biological processes of the same environment.

Can we not see *Parties* as an attempt to create a new image, what we could call a life- or bioimage? For the cinematic image that is produced here is one that is, to paraphrase Canguilhem's description of life, fundamentally not indifferent to the conditions in which it is possible. The film has physically engaged, unmediated, with the living environment that it is then represents to us. In doing so, can we not begin to conceptualize a certain *Umwelt* of the film stock itself, that, through the various *agencements* with heterogeneous chemical,

¹ Mark Duguid, Entry on David Attenborough, *The Private Life of Plants* (1995), <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1206560/index.html>> (accessed 14 January 2019).

biological and human elements, finishes by becoming the image of life that is at once not solely anthropomorphized, but also perpetually oscillating between the organic and the inorganic?

We propose Lefrant's film as a case study into the way that contemporary experimental analogue film practices present new ways in which film can engage with non-human life, and create new types of images that correspond with, respond to, and can influence contemporary ecological thought.

BIO – I am a French-Australian doctoral student at Ecole Doctorale 131, Université Paris VII Diderot, and am part of the CERILAC research laboratory. My thesis, under the direction of Emmanuelle André, is titled “L'état pathologique de l'image filmique : la pellicule et son milieu” [The pathological state of the filmic image: film stock and its *milieu*], and focusses especially on contemporary experimental analog film practices. I also teach two classes at Université Paris VII, one on experimental cinema and another on the relations between cinema and politics. Outside of the university setting, I am also the co-founder of *Détail*, a Paris-based association that programmes and produces events that bring together experimental film, music and art practices.

Recently, I participated in the seminar “Rencontres: arts, écologies, transitions” [Encounters: arts, ecologies, transitions] at Université Paris VIII Saint Denis, with a communication entitled “Un eco-cinema météomatérialiste ?” [A climato-materialist eco-cinema?].

Erin **OBODIAC**, The Media Ecology Lab
Animation, Automata, Biomimesis

ABSTRACT – In a cartoonish fashion, W. Grey Walter's *Machina Speculatrix* and Nam June Paik's *TV Buddha* parody, all at once, Cartesian self-reflexivity, the Lacanian mirror stage, and what Paul de Man calls the “material vision” of Kant's aesthetic reflective judgment (*Aesthetic Ideology* 82). Although these operations are typically reserved for the form of life—the human person—that holds a place of exception in the realm of living beings, they also inadvertently point to the reflex mechanisms and automaticity at work in all life forms, and inadvertently uncover our kinship with the machinic animation characteristic of *inanimate* entities.

For the cinema, animation refers directly to its ontogenetic principle: to movement, or the movement-image. In “Of Mice and Ducks: Benjamin and Adorno on Disney,” Miriam Hansen writes that, “animation traditionally served the role of exemplifying the ‘mechanical magic’ of the cinematic apparatus” (43). The technics of animation engenders the kind of movement-image that is taken as a sign of life, and does so by way of the mechanics of an automaton-like apparatus. If animation engenders a sign of life, this is the life of a technical apparatus, neither human nor even animal (unless we take the animal as Cartesian *bête-machine*).

Motion is often considered the outward sign of life's autonomy, yet spontaneous self-movement defines life as well as its opposite, the inanimate mechanism. In *The Beast and the Sovereign: Vol. I*, Derrida observes that: "the living being concentrates in a single ambiguous value this automotive spontaneity that gives itself its law, its autonomy and which, by the same token, is right up close to automotive autonomy but also signifies its opposite, namely automaticity, or in other words the automat's mechanics of action and reaction" (221). In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida considers the Cartesian tradition's opposition between animal reaction and human response as a disavowal of the machine at the heart of human ipseity and language. Instead of this disavowal, he calls for "another thinking of life, of the living, within another relation of the living to their ipseity, to their *autos*, to their own autokinesis and reactional automaticity" (126).

Cyberneticist W. Grey Walter's *Machina Speculatrix*—a biomimetic robot—is an early example of an autonomous system with emergent behavior, which does not rely on programming, but on ecologies of perception with which it interacts. Like a basic reflex animal, *Machina Speculatrix* instantiates "a circular information-based relation between sensor devices and motor devices," a feedback loop, in effect. In his article "Imitation of Life," Grey Walter notes that, though simplistic, *Machina Speculatrix* gives "an eerie impression of purposefulness, independence and spontaneity," in other words, an impression of autonomous agency. And further, Walter claims that a feedback loop between the electric animal and its image in the mirror unexpectedly generates a kind of zig-zag "dance," exhibiting a kind of machinic "self-recognition behavior." Does *Machina Speculatrix*'s self-recognition dance signal not only a kind of machinic mirror-stage, but also a machinic cinema, animated by and for the machine, animated by and for the automaton, in short, "a cinematography of consciousness"?

Taking up Gaby Wood's enigmatic statement that "automata gave birth to the movies," this paper will explore cinematic animation and automata as forms of biomimesis and ontogenesis. Mobilizing Jacques Lacan's essay "Cybernetics and Psychoanalysis," Etienne-Jules Marey's motion studies, Jakob von Uexküll's chronophotographic experiments at Marey's institute, and what Marey calls "The Graphic Method," this paper will begin with Bernard Stiegler's provocation "if language is already writing, life is already cinema," and discover how "a sheer, machinal trace exponentially accelerated" points to the manner in which "cinema 'is' life—which is to say, animation" (Tom Cohen, "*Polemos: 'I am at war with myself'—or, Deconstruction in the Anthropocene?*" 12).

BIO – Erin Obodiac received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Irvine and has held teaching and research appointments at UC Irvine, the University of Leeds, SUNY Albany, and Cornell University. Her writings assemble residual questions from the deconstructive "legacy" with emergent discourses on technics and animality, media ecology, and machinic subjectivity. She is currently completing a book called *The Transhuman Interface*, which repositions critical theory and deconstruction within the history of cybernetics and machinic life. *The Transhuman Interface* is a result of the research project "Robots at Risk: Transgenic Art and Corporate Personhood," which Obodiac began as a Fellow at Cornell's Society for the Humanities. The project and accompanying book manuscript examine the

conceptual antecedents of machinic subjectivity and automation as well as the nascent technosphere that ushered in our geologic era, the anthropocene. *The Transhuman Interface* proposes that we use a lenticular lens to view cinema and the anthropocene as one emergence. The cin-anthropocene is an episode in planetary history that maps the “cinematography of consciousness”—the arche-cinema at work in human temporality and subjectivity—onto environmental destruction.

Panel 3: After Life

1:40-3:00PM

Chair: Gabriel Levine, York University

Grant **LEUNING**, University of California

The Corpse-Image

ABSTRACT – When Aleksandr Rodchenko writes his early speculations about the moving image as the possibility of a new form of life, he describes a world of animate objects, with which we “laugh and enjoy and converse” and take as “friends and comrades.” These friends and comrades, however, are no more stable or immortal than those who persist in flesh, and forms of life imply their complement, the spectre of death. When the image undergoes this form of death, it often appears as a memory (Barthes), ritual fetish or icon (Latour), or inert object (Mitchell). Each of these takes the corpse to be the negation or dialectical Other to the living image and body, rather than a form of existence with its own peculiar features and activities. This paper will articulate a form of the image as a dead body starting from Margaret Schwartz’s claim that “materialist analysis of media begins with the Corpse,” and moving through several figures. These include Jean-Pierre Vernant’s immobile double of the Greek *Kolossos*, mummification’s exemplary role as the image of material non-identity in Jeremy Bentham’s theory of the Auto-Icon, Achille Mbembé shadow-image and its dynamic production of race and new forms of death, and Deleuze’s account of decomposition as a power, of which the moving photographic image is a profound expression.

BIO – Grant Leuning is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of California, San Diego. He is the founding member of the art collective *Comité Magonista: Tierra Y Libertad*, the experimental film cooperative Gosung Cinema and the long-running San Diego performance series *Now Poetry*. His research is on contemporary ontologies of the image, material practices of historical reverberation and the production of images of labor in South Korea.

Erin **NUNODA**, University of Toronto

A Zed and Two Noughts: On Snails and the Terror of Symmetry

ABSTRACT – *A Zed and Two Noughts* (Peter Greenaway, 1985) centres upon three characters who have recently undergone experiences of relational grief: twin zoologist brothers Oswald and Oliver (Brian and Eric Deacon) who have lost their wives and Alba (Andrea Ferréol), who has lost her leg and her unborn child (all in the same accident). Their shared experience of loneliness also eventually becomes a shared experience of sexual and bodily non-normativity: in the ceding of marriage, traditional reproduction, and corporeal wholeness arises not just polysexual (implicitly incestuous) consummation between the brothers and Alba, but also a fascination with recording and watching decay. Spectatorship itself thus becomes an expression of heteronormativity's simultaneous collapse and omnipresence: a persistent attachment to coupling (embodied in the brothers' desire to "explain" their wives' deaths through their obsessive focus on plant and animal decomposition) paradoxically producing something quite dissonant and strange, a kind of cinematic consumption of ontological consumption. Moreover, the film's two crucial formal conceits – time lapse photography of decay and incredibly precise, mirrored compositions – are aligned through a portrayal of photography's declining ability to master life (or death), a demise that is illustrated through irruptions in the fields of familial, erotic, and even human/animal relationality. At the same time, the film – like many of Greenaway's films – relies upon an atmosphere of over-abundance, not just in the excess of the mise-en-scene but also in its choreography of viewing, in the way that it produces a florid, ornamental visuality that is simultaneously a product of Thatcherite prosperity and an exploration of consumption's ecological strangeness. The film's opulent flower arrangements and luxurious home furnishings are thus also adorned with the persistent, spectatorial processing of death: neither form of domestic decoration is ever far away from the snail, which the film frames as an intersex, autoerotic creature, one who enlivens and animates death through its very being, one who stands for its conceptualization of the potentialities and limitations of cinema. Making use of queer interventions into ecocriticism and disability studies, cultural theory investigating 1980s consumer privatization, and scholarship on the relationship between specularity and animality, this paper will argue that *Zed* is primarily a film about the terror of symmetry, one wherein the compulsive need for complementarity leads not towards an idyll of mutual fulfilment, but instead fosters a mode of joyful (and paradoxically alive) extinction.

BIO – Erin Nunoda is a PhD student at the University of Toronto. She is interested in sexual ethics, public space and political aesthetics, with a particular focus on queer sociality and its interactions with cinematic form.

Hilary **BERGEN**, Concordia University

Animating the Kinetic Trace: Kate Bush, Hatsune Miku and Digital Dance

My paper emerges out of a recent research creation project in which I used the Japanese animation program Miku Miku Dance (MMD) to translate choreography across organic, virtual and filmic bodies. Using my own dancing body, a PC and a Microsoft Kinect to feed the choreography for 70s British singer Kate Bush's cult classic song "Wuthering Heights" into MMD, I applied the resulting motion data to an avatar of Japanese Vocaloid popstar Hatsune Miku. Critiques of motion capture, a technological process that converts dance movement into numerical patterns, have often juxtaposed data with embodiment, arguing that the dance loses something *living* in the translation. My project considers not only how the organic dance body persists in data and animated renderings, but how the digital body might possess its own lively dance potential.

My project seeks out resistances to notions of translation rooted in convertibility, and as such I am especially interested in moments of difference and disruption. I see dance as an index of embodiment that relies on movement, or *doing*, rather than being, thus giving it the potential to intervene with static notions of ontology. In using the Kinect, a cheap motion capture application which produces an awkward, machinic aesthetics of the avatar body, my project calls into question the value of mimetic realism across multiple media, platforms and spaces, as well as across various bodies, both analog and digital. Because the result of this "translation" is determined by the logic of the interface, it resists the polished, glossy aesthetic that MMD users usually achieve when editing videos of their dancing avatars and which I read as an ideology of verisimilitude that reinforces problematic fantasies about the female body. Given its presentation of a thoroughly manipulatable avatar body which is *nothing but* digital data, Miku Miku Dance presents not only a new choreographic tool but a fantasy of control that goes unproblematized by its many users. Except for my own dance input, I relinquish that control in my project, refusing to intervene with or edit the actions of the machine and therefore allowing the distributed agency of the interface to produce a dance of its own.

BIO – Hilary Bergen is a PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Humanities at Concordia University in Montréal where she studies screendance, posthumanism and feminist media history. She has published work on the feminization of digital assistants (*Word and Text*), rotoscoping as dance notation (*Screening the Past*), the use of military technologies to capture dance (*Culture Machine*, forthcoming) and the spectacle of female disembodiment in the work of Loie Fuller and Freya Olafson (*Archée*, forthcoming). Currently, she is exploring dance as a critical intervention to posthuman discourses of moving "beyond" the body.

Panel 4: Figuring Life

3:10-4:30PM

Chair: Steven Bailey, York University

Colin **WILLIAMSON**, Pace University

On the Origins of Animation: *Proteus*, Metamorphosis, and the Moving Image

ABSTRACT – In 2004, David Lebrun completed *Proteus: A Nineteenth-Century Vision*, an experimental documentary about the biologist and artist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919). The film explores the intersection of art, science, and philosophy in Haeckel’s study of the radiolarian, a single-celled sea-dwelling organism. Haeckel produced thousands of artful renderings of the intricate microscopic skeletal remains of radiolaria, the beauty of which was central to the development and popularization of his theories of the origins of life. Lebrun spent 22 years organizing these images into mesmerizing animated sequences of dancing, metamorphic patterns and forms that bring the fossilized remains of the radiolaria to life.

In this paper, I offer a close analysis of how the pairing of Lebrun’s animations with Haeckel’s work invites us to see *Proteus* not only as an experimental documentary, but also as a meditation on the moving image. Drawing on Hannah Landecker’s argument that microscopic films of cells in the early 20th century played a crucial role in theorizing movement and life in the cinema, I consider how the spectacles of metamorphosis in *Proteus* are doing similar work to theorize animation, the nature of which, to borrow Sergei Eisenstein’s important term, is as “plasmatic” as its forms. In animation studies, metamorphosis tends to be linked to the wondrous (im)possibilities of animated forms that are, by nature, not bound to the natural world but rather exploit longstanding affinities with *fantasy*, *dream*, and *magic*. Without questioning the importance of these affinities, I suggest that Lebrun’s artful engagement with Haeckel points to the importance of *nature* and *science* to understanding the origins of animation in what Tom Gunning calls “a fantasy of metamorphosis or the potential for transformation.” In the process, I show how Lebrun’s animations are (in)directly in conversation with everything from Art Nouveau and Loïe Fuller’s fin-de-siècle Serpentine Dance to early natural history films and the cartoon animations of Winsor McCay and Walt Disney.

BIO – Colin Williamson is an Assistant Professor of Film and Screen Studies at Pace University (NYC). He also serves on the Executive Committee of Domitor, The International Society for the Study of Early Cinema, and as a Reviews Editor for *animation: an interdisciplinary journal* (ANM). His research focuses on early animation, science and the cinema, and film theory. He is the author of *Hidden in Plain Sight: An Archaeology of Magic and the Cinema* (Rutgers UP, 2015), and has published articles and essays in such edited collections and journals as *Thinking in the Dark: Cinema, Theory, Practice* (Rutgers UP, 2016), *ANM*, *Leonardo*, *Imaginations*, and *The Moving Image*. His research has been supported by fellowships and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and the University of Pennsylvania. He received his PhD in film studies from the University of Chicago.

Sandra **ANNETT**, Wilfrid Laurier University
Being in the Digital World: Embodiment in the Works of Lu Yang

ABSTRACT – When scholars of cinema write about digital animation, they often view it as a visible manifestation of information --that is, *not* the photochemical trace of a real body or even the physical markings of paint on celluloid, but rather the result of a codified configuration of ones and zeros. To paraphrase N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), the history of CGI might be traced by describing "how animation lost its body." In this presentation, however, I will contest these discourses of digital disembodiment using examples that reveal the animated image's potential to evoke a posthuman form of embodied experience that incorporates the virtual while remaining grounded in an inextricable entanglement with the living world. I argue that approaches to digital works which emphasize disembodiment fail to reflect both the practices of digital artists and the experience of watching animation "in the wild." They remain caught in an intellectual pattern that has recurred from Descartes to the poststructuralists, and which persists even among phenomenological film theorists who emphasize the importance of embodiment in cinema but discount electronic or digital modalities, such as Vivian Sobchack (2004). I will use the case study of independent Chinese animator Lu Yang's animation practice, which includes digital modeling, medical imaging, video gaming, and site-specific performance, to explore how animation can reinforce our chiasmatic sense of "being-in-the-world" as embodied subjects (Merleau-Ponty 1962) even in a digital media environment.

BIO – Sandra Annett is an associate professor in the Film Studies program at Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada, where she is the resident specialist in digital and new media studies. She is the author of *Anime Fan Communities: Transcultural Flows and Frictions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), as well as articles on animation, global cultures, and new media arts in journals such as *Transcultural Studies*, *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *The Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* and *Mechademia*. Along with Frenchy Lunning, she is Editor-in-Chief of the *Mechademia: Second Arc* journal of East Asian popular cultures (U. of Minnesota Press.) Her research interests include world animation, digital cinema, film theory, and fan studies. Her hobbies include digital photography, swing dancing, and modular origami.

Shane **DENSON**, Stanford University
Cinematic and Post-Cinematic Animation: Medium, Theme, Phenomenology

ABSTRACT – This presentation takes a comparative approach to animation as both theme and medium, focusing particularly on Frankenstein films and more recent incarnations such as *Her* (2013), *Ex_Machina* (2014) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). Both *Frankenstein* and the more recent tales of artificial creation interrogate what I call the "anthropotechnical interface," revealing the relation between humans and technologies to be one of mutual construction rather than unilateral control or domination. And both *Frankenstein* and the newer movies

weave questions of gender centrally into this apparent deconstruction of the human subject/technical object dichotomy. Clearly, though, any such comparison must account for the historical, cultural, and technological contexts in which the narratives were articulated and to which they responded. *Frankenstein*, written in 1816, was composed against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution with its central technology of the steam engine; *Her*, *Ex_Machina*, and *BR2049* on the other hand, were composited two centuries later against the backdrop of big data, robotics, AI, and computer-generated imagery. To be fruitful, a nuanced comparison will furthermore need to look beyond narrative contents and examine the media in which these stories are materially embodied. As I will demonstrate, both *Frankenstein* films and *Ex_Machina* embody highly self-reflexive engagements with their own medial substrates and with the phenomenological relations that they enable between viewing subjects and the visible objects of moving images. They both therefore also *enact*, rather than merely thematize, interrogations of human-technological relations. But whereas *Frankenstein* films are concerned with properly cinematic processes of animation (by which dead, static photographs are put into motion and brought back to life), *Her*, *Ex_Machina*, and *BR2049* confronts us with a situation in which algorithms *anticipate* the subjectivities that engage post-cinematic images, while these images themselves acquire an affective density and agency that is hard to distinguish from that of the living itself.

BIO – Shane Denson is Assistant Professor of Film & Media Studies in the Department of Art & Art History at Stanford University. He is the author of *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface* (2014) and co-editor of several collections, including *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives* (2013) and *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film* (2016). His current book project, *Discorrelated Images*, is under contract with Duke University Press.

Panel 5: Spectral Life

4:40-6:00PM

Chair: Brian Price, University of Toronto

Carrie REESE, University of Toronto

A Figure of Speech: Atomic Gestures of Mediation

ABSTRACT – Ana Mendieta’s short film *X-ray* (1975) unsettles viewers as the monotone phonetic screams that accompany it emphasize the ripped-apartness of the film’s X-rayed, isolated skull. By showing a skeletal figure that speaks, experimental filmmaker Mendieta promotes the *figure* as both flesh (for the speech is nearly impossible without the tissues of the mouth) and nothing but bone and dark cavities. What does it mean, the film asks, to be both of these things, flesh and skeleton, at once? The uncomfortable question haunts the viewer as their own body is at once removed, yet implicated by this question. How are you putting your flesh to work, and what does that work sound like? In this film, language, science, violence, and

body mix to create a film that emphasizes the way in which art (and intermedia) allow for us to reconsider the ways in which the body is both abstracted and taken for granted.

This paper discusses how the concept of the figure breaks into two parts—inside and outthinking *figure* through both Lucretius’ atomistic theory and Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Francis Bacon’s figures that reverberate with what Bacon calls “the brutality of fact” (or what Deleuze calls the “logic of sensation”). Differing from Bacon’s paintings in medium specificity, Mendieta’s artwork incorporates a linguistic soundtrack that comprises spoken phonemes, which both emphasize the throat cavities in the skeletal figure (those forming the sound) and complicate the concept of the figure (adding an oral/aural element), as “the figure” treads towards language, narrative, or “the figurative”. Intermedia and interdisciplinary practice play a crucial role in the conception of figure as they emphasize the ways in which the conjunction of elements produces new ways of viewing what we think to be figure, and with these visuals, new ways of thinking of what it means to be, or see, a figure. Moreover, the atomic violence introduced to the figure through the ionizing radiation of atoms makes visible the politics of both the artist’s life and the scientific advancements that made this piece—but also disasters of seismic proportion—possible.

BIO – Carrie Reese is a PhD candidate at the Cinema Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Her dissertation is on the experimental intermedia of Ana Mendieta and the theoretical output of the artist’s work. She is currently an assistant editor of *World Picture Journal*.

Alexandra **GRIEVE**, University of Cambridge

Framing the Spectral: Corporeality and Mediation in the early cinema of Laura Bayley and George Albert Smith

ABSTRACT – The pioneering films of George Albert Smith and his wife, Laura Bayley, are rich illustrations of a highly fungible Victorian entertainment culture in which the spheres of scientific empiricism and illusionism routinely mixed. Making innovative use of telescopic, microscopic and radiographic techniques of display, Smith and Bayley’s trick films drew upon the former’s interests in mesmerism and invention to stage lively scenes of interaction between the mechanical and the biological, as well as uncanny encounters between creatures both mortal and ‘spectral’. Highly invested in the pleasures of fantasy, voyeurism and shock, films such as *The X-Rays* (1897) and *Grandma’s Reading Glass* (1900) are easily read as examples of the extraordinary theatricality of the early ‘cinema of attractions’. However, this paper proposes that Tom Gunning’s famous observations on the excess and unpredictability of early cinema ought to be taken further, to highlight epistemological clashes between cinema and the organic world in this period. Focusing particularly on Smith and Bayley’s trick-films from 1897 to 1903, I precede with an exploration of the bodies they depict in relation to the twinned notions of instrumentality and visibility. This relationship is illuminated with help from the concept of *Gestell*, or ‘Enframing’, a technological mode of Being which, in its usage by

Heidegger, is inextricable from a constellation of verbs taking their root in *stellen* (to place), including *darstellen* (to exhibit) and *nachstellen* (to entrap). Although attracted to the possibility of the ‘entrapment’ of life onscreen, I propose that Smith and Bayley’s work is simultaneously enmeshed in a fetishistic corporeal dialectics of visibility and concealment, pleasure and lack. Transcending the pleasures of illusionism, these trick-films actively question whether our bodies can be made productively available to our comprehension, and indeed, whether we can safely place our trust in the ‘inert’ technology that unveils it to us.

BIO – Alexandra Grieve is a Gates Scholar and a PhD candidate in the Centre for Film and Screen Studies at the University of Cambridge. Her doctoral research explores costume and material culture in African diasporan cinemas, with a particular emphasis on works by women filmmakers and visual artists. This follows on from her MPhil thesis, which focused on recent work by North African and Lebanese female filmmakers. She is the winner of the Johan Berg Historia Award from the Journal of the Historical Association of South Africa (2016). Future publication plans include work on early cinema and fashion in film studies.

Lia **TURTAS**, Cornell University

Phantasm of Style: The Ubiquitous, Yet Unlocalizable, Cinema’s Form-of-Life

ABSTRACT – In *The World Viewed* (1979), Stanley Cavell asserts “the task of the modern artist as one of creating not a new instance of his art but a new medium in it.” Creating a new medium, says Cavell, can also be thought of as “establishing a new automatism.” One of the meanings of such “automatism,” according to him, is “the experience of the work of art ‘as happening of itself’.”

“Happening of itself” as a medium and as an automatism also inevitably reminds us of Giorgio Agamben’s definition of form-of-life as “gesture” and “pure mediality” in *Means Without Ends* (2000), where cinema is an attempt to reappropriate the lost gestures of modern bourgeoisie while exposing them as such. Later on, in *The Use of Bodies* (2015), Agamben states that form-of-life is, in Western thought, both an “ethical” and an “aesthetic problem,” that is, both a “mode of life” and a “style by which the author leaves his mark on the work.” Analogously, in Averroism’s philosophical reflection, each singular individual connects to the one intellect through the phantasms of imagination and vice versa, so that fantasy produces an immaterial image that is at the same time a subject and an object of love. Phantasm as form-of-life and style is, in fact, at once the mark that the singular body leaves on the one intellect, and what the one intellect “marks in the singular”: “an absolute *imago*” that works as a point of coincidence of the singular body and the one intellect, and as such is “ubiquitous,” yet “unlocalizable,” just as style is (Metz 2016).

Since *Stanzas* (1993), such phantasm is placed under the sign of love, as we also know from psychoanalysis, for which fantasy is the script and *mise-en-scène* of a subject’s desire, a scene in which the subject is both an observer and a participant (Laplanche and Pontalis 1974). Precisely

such dimension of daydreaming fantasy with its phantasms—a sort of hypnotic state between dream and wakefulness, according to Christian Metz (1982) and Raymond Bellour (2009)—is the closest experience that we can get to cinema. I therefore propose to discuss cinema as the medium whose automatism is animated by the phantasm of style; that is, by the tension between the singular body of a subject (author, character, fantasy), and the one intellect of an intelligent machine: a medium in which there is no subject nor object, but “permutations of roles and attributions are possible.” Pier Paolo Pasolini’s “hypnotic monstrum” of cinema of poetry (1988), Gilles Deleuze’s discussion of phantasms in *Cinema 1* (1986) and Jean-Luc Godard’s cinematic dematerialization of the image in *The Image Book* (2018) will accompany my discussion.

BIO – Lia Turtas is a Ph.D. candidate in Italian and Film Studies in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University, and she works across cinema, literature and philosophy. She received her M.A. degree in Visual Arts and Aesthetics from the Istituto Universitario di Architettura (IUAV) in Venice, and also holds degrees in Classics, and Arts Criticism and Management. At Cornell, she is completing a dissertation that aims to reinterpret a few key moments of the history of Italian cinema from a post-humanist and non-human perspective, stemming from an innovative encounter between film theory, Italian thought, and archival research.

DAY 2 – MAY 18, 2019

Panel 6: Mediated Life

10:00-11:40AM

Chair: Sarah Swain, York University

Natalja **CHESTOPALOVA**, York University & Ryerson University
**Reality-Testing as Choose-Your-Own Adventure Storytelling, or the
Phenomenology of the *Living-Archive* in Charlie Booker's *Black Mirror* and
*Bandersnatch***

ABSTRACT – The *Black Mirror* television series (2011-present) has gained notoriety for creating psychological thrillers about the risks of technological ubiquity, deepening emotional disconnect, and human bonds driven by visceral complexity. This paper turns to *Black Mirror*'s fourth season and Choose-Your-Own-Adventure interactive film *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018) as interconnected narratives that use examples of pervasive technologies to explore the psychological mechanics of surveillance, memory, and reality-testing.

I suggest that there is an inherent dichotomy within the series where, on the one hand, surveillance and recording technologies are portrayed as extensions of the subject and as such have the capacity to represent human subjective reality as a linear narrative. For instance, the implanted parental surveillance unit in “Arkangel” explores human conception of subjectivity as a traceable as well as rewind-able narrative thread through the psychology of parenting and a dysfunctional mother-daughter bond. On the other hand, *Black Mirror*, and more recently *Bandersnatch*, offer a set of immersive storytelling experiences grounded in an *archive*-like cinematic universe that intentionally plays with the definitions of temporality, space, memory, and ways of being. The interactive and self-referential dimension of *Bandersnatch*, and episodes such as “Black Museum,” rely on complex affective frameworks as spaces for testing the *plasticity* of reality, in Malabou’s sense. I argue that this storytelling mode reinterprets human subjectivity as a much more rhizomatic affect-based phenomenon resembling a *living-archive*.

Turning to Husserl’s notion of phenomenological bracketing to further unpack this shift from a linear perspective to a *living-archive*, I want to suggest that *Black Mirror* and *Bandersnatch* actively bracket the viewer and force them to focus on how one can perceive the cinematic representations of subjective reality and consciousness through technologically framed *affective* experiences.

BIO – Natalja Chestopalova is part of the Communication and Culture Program at York and Ryerson Universities in Toronto. Her work is informed by the study of phenomenology, popular culture aesthetics, and psychoanalysis, and focuses on the transformative sensory experience and multimodality in film, graphic novel medium, and theatrical site-specific performances. Her publications appear in the *White Wall Review*, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *Dialogue*, *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, and various essay volumes including a publication on the Freudian theory of *afterwardness* and archives-of-feeling in comics of Alison Bechdel, and *Sound Effects: The Object Voice in Fiction*, a volume that provides a more systematic approach to recent theoretical developments in the study of the Lacanian concept of the voice and voicelessness in literature.

May **CHEW**, Concordia University
‘Soft TV,’ Affective Velocity and Smooth Violence

ABSTRACT – This paper examines the growing trend of “soft TV,” a recent vernacular term referring to shows that are feel-good, calming, congenially escapist, and ultimately friction-less. Soft TV includes shows like *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*, *Queer Eye*, and the Japanese reality series *Terrace House*. Many of these shows stream on Netflix and YouTube, platforms that encourage continuous play, distracted viewing, and allow for algorithmic manipulations. These shows also ostensibly capture the quotidian activities and rhythms of the everyday (cleaning, cooking, etc.), without the histrionics usually found in reality TV. The ambient engagement that these shows enable demonstrates how liquid neoliberal culture is; it

is flexible enough to seep into every crevice, fill up every silence. Interestingly, unlike slow cinema's deliberate rejection of late capitalist time, slow TV reflects the values of an accelerationist culture, but does so through the seemingly de-accelerationist aesthetics of languid temporality, tempered affect, and the extended cadence of everyday life. In this way, it mollifies the relentless shocks of late capitalism by offering entertainment as curative for our weary souls and embattled nerves. However, soft TV does more than merely narcotize. It is operationally similar to other trademarks of neoliberal culture including flow², self-governance, and therapeutic management, which lubricate us for optimal productivity through "good life" fantasies³ and narratives of self-fulfillment. I argue that such techniques provide the affective velocity to move us through the pain, precarity, dread, anxiety, and burn out of neoliberal culture. Likewise, while proffering a supposed reprieve from late-capitalist time, the smooth violence of soft TV instead relentlessly loops us back into its emotional and temporal cadences.

BIO – May Chew is an Assistant Professor at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema and Department of Art History at Concordia University. Her current research focuses on interactive and immersive technologies in diverse museological sites across Canada, and how these facilitate the material and emotional processes of cultural citizenship. Her recent work includes a chapter in the anthology *Material Cultures in Canada* (WLU Press, 2015); articles in *Imaginations*, the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, the *Journal of Canadian Art History*; and *Public 57: Archives/Counter-Archives*, which she co-edited with Susan Lord and Janine Marchessault.

Marek JANCOVIC, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz
Beastly Work: The Moving Image as a Precondition of Life?

ABSTRACT – In a viral YouTube video from 2009 – one among many of this kind – we see Stryker, a Belgian Malinois dog, beside himself with excitement whenever his favorite character from the animated film *Bolt* appears on the TV. Another famous recording shows a German Shepherd howling along with the wolves from *Zootopia*, animated to an affective response by its animated phylogenetic relatives. Yet another records an audience of frogs attacking a smartphone screen – like the rubes of early cinema – where some kind of drama is unfolding between two earthworms. What do we make of these images? What do we make of film critic Bilge Ebiri's recent Twitter thread in which he discovers that his cat Vixen is entirely uninterested in the television screen with the sole exception of Abbas Kiarostami's posthumous film *24 Frames* which, for whatever reason, transfixes her?

Taking up Vinciane Despret's suggestion that YouTube could be the site of a new mediaethological practice, this paper will consider how cinema and other technical media have

² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

³ Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

become part of animal life. I will ask what animals watching other animals on screen might tell us about moving images, and how animal spectatorship might call into question humans' traditional role as the implicit subject of all media.

Though this “media ethology” is somewhat different from the one proposed by Deborah Levitt or Jussi Parikka, I will then examine the kinds of media labor performed by animals in our service. Without animals carrying cameras and telemetric sensors, we are increasingly incapable of understanding the chaotically drifting climatic borders, the changing chemical composition of the environment or global patterns of self-preserving migration. In performing these strange kinds of labor – “life knowing life through itself,” as Bogna Konior recently put it – animals compel us to acknowledge them not only as a new class of workers who produce images and data, but as a vital epistemic precondition of human life.

BIO – Marek Jancovic is a lecturer and PhD candidate at the Institute of Film, Theater, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Mainz, guest researcher at Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, and associate member of the German Research Foundation research collective ‘Configurations of Film’. His research interests include the archaeologies of image compression, preservation practices of archival institutions, the historical interrelationships between mathematics, medicine and media, and animals as users of technology. He holds a research MA in Media Studies from the University of Amsterdam. Together with Alexandra Schneider and Axel Volmar, he is co-editor of the forthcoming volume on media formats, *Format Matters* (meson press, 2019).

Fan **WU** and Zohar **FREEMAN**, Independent Scholars
Mukbang - Eating About Eating (Live!)

ABSTRACT – The *mukbang* is a form popularized on YouTube in which one or several people eat an elaborate meal while speaking to the (virtual) audience. The mukbang animates eating as a practice of necessity: we need to eat in order to live; but it also animates eating with communitarian affects (disgust and ecstasy both) that draw millions of viewers: we live in order to eat (together). The mukbang transforms the banal into a new affect: the bored-starving.

This performance will be a "live cinema/interactive TV" mukbang. There is a dearth of critical commentary about such a highly popular form as the mukbang, but we (Zohar and Fan) perform in our conviction that critique of a form must be immanent to that form itself. We want to take the mukbang seriously as a contemporary update to the practice of mealtime as a form of ritual togetherness, while also establishing a meta-mukbang discourse by commenting on a history of eating as ordinary life in literature (Bernadette Mayer), film (Chantal Akerman), and psychoanalysis (Torok & Abraham). The audience will be invited to ask questions, to participate in the conversation, and--at the end, when all is said and sated--to eat with us.

Our performance takes up your CFP's provocation: "life itself seems currently suspended between Bataillean formlessness and the desire to give sensible and intelligible form to our lives." Eating from a selection of Bataille-inspired foods--creams, eggs, puddings--we utilize and interrogate the mukbang as a *form without form*, which activates within form of the meal (the form of forming turd) a formless potential for affective, communal, and intellectual discovery.

BIOS – Zohar Freeman is a researcher with the LGBTQ Oral History Collaboratory, a programmer with NUIT ROSE Festival of Queer Art and Performance, and an avid consumer of mukbangs. Seafood boils are his favourite.

Fan Wu is an amateur of the mukbang who works as a poet, editor, arts writer, and workshop host in Toronto. He is currently working on changing the culture of the academic conference toward performances and experiments in collectivity.

Panel 7: Political Life

11:50AM-1:10PM

Chair: Resat Fuat Cam, York University

Kanika **LAWTON**, University of Toronto

Pick My Face Up Off the Ground:

“Placeless, Raceless, Bodiless” Potentiality in

Janelle Monáe’s *Dirty Computer* (an “Emotion Picture”)

ABSTRACT – What does the future hold for racialized, queered, and disabled bodies if utopic potentiality disavows their existence within these imagined spaces? How can we reconcile the promise of utopia with a refusal to “clean the slate” of our very modes of difference, especially if such difference troubles the privileging of whiteness, heterosexuality, and abledness as “normative” and “good”? By positioning Janelle Monáe’s 2018 concept album and “emotion picture” *Dirty Computer* within a greater discourse on the displacement of black bodies from new technologies, as well as a mediation on race as technology, this paper argues that *Dirty Computer* troubles the optimistic promise of a “placeless, raceless, bodiless” space by explicitly re-framing the erasure of black and queer bodies through an Afrofuturistic production of disruptive counter-memories. By deconstructing the linearity of memory-making through the materiality of the surveillance video as *memory-viewer* (that is, of “watching” memories), Monáe’s Jane 57821’s memories become the site of a *new* potentiality, one that is built on the unanchoring of memories and dreams from specific temporalities. Considering the figure of the dirty computer as that which cannot be “clean,” *Dirty Computer* imagines the possibility of a different future, one that is constructed from a becoming (and shifting) present. By throwing the technologies meant to “clean” difference back onto those who wish to displace them from future narratives, as well as those that refuse to seriously consider the interconnectedness of

history and self-embedded, interlinked memories, the otherized body as dirty computer is rendered anew, capable of writing itself back into the present and future. In the end, this paper argues for a re-configuring of a “placeless, raceless, bodiless” utopic future away from the continuous displacement of otherized bodies (especially the black body) towards one of re-emplacement and the opening up of new future potentialities.

BIO – Kanika Lawton is a MA student at the University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Institute. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a Minor in Film Studies from the University of British Columbia, where she served as an editor with the UBC Undergraduate Film Student Association. Her areas of interests include genre, queer theory, apparatus theory, and feminist film theory, with a particular research focus on personas and the double in psychological horror films. Outside of film, she is the Editor-In-Chief of *L'Éphémère Review*, a multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, and a 2018 Pink Door fellow.

Eric **HERHUTH**, Tulane University

The Animated Figure in Judith Butler's Theory of Subject Formation

ABSTRACT – From *Pinocchio* (1940) to *Inside Out* (2015), there is a long history of animated films depicting and personifying aspects of mental life, including representations of conscience, emotion, and desire. The voice of conscience, the abusive super-ego, conflicting desires and drives are presented as characters and build on the animation tradition of literalizing metaphor. But how exactly does this combination of fiction, figuration, and artifice express and constitute our experience of being a subject with an inner psychical, emotional life? What do these animated figures have to offer to our understanding of subject formation? In this paper, I argue that Judith Butler's extensive inquiry into subject formation provides an explanation for the appropriateness of animated depictions of mental life. Butler's work illuminates how such depictions acknowledge the need for fictional figures and narratives to maintain a sense of autonomous self, and, simultaneously, announce the artifice and absurdity of these representations. Across multiple texts, Butler has analyzed the paradoxical figures to which philosophers repeatedly return when theorizing the formation of an autonomous subject. Butler's analyses explore the opacity of subject formation or the inability to recall and know one's initial, formative experience of the world and embeddedness in a social environment. This opacity creates a need for fictional narratives and figures to give an account of the unaccountable forces that animate the individual. In addition to mapping the philosophical context for this need for figuration, personification, and narrative, Butler's work also highlights a feeling of embarrassment that accompanies locating paradoxical, fictional figures at the core of the modern, liberal subject. My contention is that this feeling of embarrassment is partially relieved through animated personifications of interiority and mental life that acknowledge the artifice and limitations of the metaphors and figures we use to construct and know ourselves.

BIO – Eric Herhuth is Assistant Professor of Communication at Tulane University. His research areas include animation and film studies, aesthetics and politics, media and film theory, and modernity and globalization. He has published in the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Cinema Journal*, *animation: an interdisciplinary journal*, and *Theory & Event* and he is the author of *Pixar and the Aesthetic Imagination: Animation, Storytelling, and Digital Culture* (University of California Press, 2017).

Janet **HARBORD**, Queen Mary, University of London
Film as a Training for Neurotypical Life

ABSTRACT – In his essay, ‘Notes on Gesture’, Giorgio Agamben draws a trajectory through protocinematic practices that insists on reading together the medical imaging techniques of Giles de la Tourette and the locomotion studies of Eadweard Muybridge. A cinematic fascination with bodies in movement, he argues, served on the one hand, to create taxonomies of normal / aberrant gesture, and on the other, to reveal the body as a medium of support and communication. If Agamben constructs a media history through gesture, it is also the case that gesture is the figure through which a cinematic language of neurotypicality develops, a shorthand vocabulary instrumentalised in entertainment films.

In contrast this paper attends to a filmic fascination with gesture in the field of psychiatry during the postwar period where film was used to diagnose and classify. The outcome however, is not straightforward. The films begin with a decontextualized figure absorbed in activity. In a shift from observational mode to a practice of following, the films open onto an alternative, atypical mode of apprehending the world where the hierarchy of mind-matter, self-other, human-nonhuman is absent.

In *Aspects of Childhood Psychosis* (1957), the psychiatrist Elwyn Anthony attempts to categorize psychic conditions through the study of children’s gestures, but their gestural language discloses a form of perception and attention that prioritizes rhythm, light, texture and abstraction reminiscent of early cinema theoreticians. Similarly, Mike Hoolboom’s film *Scrapbook* (2015) re-visits a film made by Jeffrey Paull in 1967 in Broadview Development Centre, Ohio, and includes the voiceover of Donna Washington, an autistic woman who watches the film of her younger self. Each of these films, it is argued, disclose a mode of apprehension that is non-hierarchical, and by implication reveals the limitations of an orthodox gestural language of entertainment cinema.

BIO – Janet Harbord, Professor of Film Studies, Queen Mary University of London, is the author of a number of books including *Ex-centric Cinema: Giorgio Agamben and Film Archaeology* (Bloomsbury, 2016). She is currently researching the history of film and autism funded by the Wellcome Trust, and working on a new book, *Autism through Cinema*.

Panel 8: PLACING LIFE

2:10-3:50PM

Chair: Scott Birdwise, York University

Suzanne BETH, McGill University

Film and the Unknowable of Nuclear Radiation: Philippe Rouy's Fukushima Trilogy

ABSTRACT – The trilogy dedicated by French filmmaker Philippe Rouy to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear powerplant meltdown was deliberately made from a distance, without going to the region hit by the March 2011 triple disaster, the eastern coast of Tōhoku in Japan. At the hinge of experimental and documentary cinema, his films draw on the practice of found footage, from three different sources of images produced and made public by TEPCO, the electricity company running the Fukushima powerplant. *Machine to machine* (2013), the second installment of the trilogy, is made of images recorded inside the damaged facility by nonhuman devices – drones, robots, cranes, endoscopic probes – when and where the level of radiation was so high that it prevented workers to be exposed.

Colorless and odorless, nuclear radiation is imperceptible to the senses, and, as Mari Matsumoto and Sabu Kohso note, a decisive issue for life in an irradiated environment is to find ways to experience it nevertheless. This presentation aims at specifying how the film, as well as the trilogy as a whole, relate to this unknowable, in ways that do not so much strive to overcome it, but work at giving it a sensible inscription. A striking feature of the film is indeed the lack of control put forward by the images painstakingly gathered by the mechanical messengers. Their mischanneled movements make them hard to follow, out of focus, jolted and the ensuing lack of visibility is heightened by their often narrow field of view and the damaging effects of radioactivity on some of the recorded material. Such evidence of imperfection, defectiveness, failure stands in great contrast with the idealization of nuclear facilities as infrastructures, built in the name of security and prosperity. Rather, it seems to call for an engagement, risky and uncertain, with its current metamorphosis.

BIO – Suzanne Beth is a postdoctoral fellow at McGill University specializing in Japanese Cinema. Her research focuses on the powers featured by images harnessing the weak forces of cinema. Her current work is dedicated to films documenting the aftermath of the triple disaster of March 2011 on the eastern coast of Tōhoku, in Japan. Her Ph.D. thesis, a study of Ozu Yasujirō's filmmaking, has shown its strong affinity with Giorgio Agamben's thought of potentiality. She has just published *L'impuissance du cinéma. Une étude des films d'Ozu* (Strasbourg: PUS, 2018).

Terrance **McDONALD**, Brock University
A City is a Form of Light: Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself*

ABSTRACT – How does a city take shape? To see a city involves the perception of many competing narratives from imagined boundaries to physical structures to bodies included and excluded from residency to organics to asphalt and concrete. A city never sleeps because it is always growing, decaying, or becoming otherwise. In *The Practice of Light*, Sean Cubitt states, "the differentiations of mirror and prism point us toward the materiality of light in the world, the relation of light to dark points us toward the materiality of our perception" (266). Therefore, amidst the many competing narratives of what constitutes a city, it becomes apparent that a city takes shape only through the anthropocentric perspective that chisels it from the rest of the world and imagines it as a life of its own. Light forms this practice. Through the materiality of light as well as the materiality of human (and by extension cinematic) perception a city takes shape.

Can a city see itself? Rather than anthropomorphizing any given image of a city, this question interrogates the narratives projected onto cities as locations found in our realities as well as our fictions. Embracing recent work on formalism – including Brinkema's (2014) radical formalism and Levine's (2015) affordances of form – this paper reads a city as a form of light in Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. A city takes shape in a multiplicity of ways, but light remains integral to the materiality of space as well as the materiality humans project onto a location. What this close reading and subsequent theoretical speculation generates relies less on linking cinema, modernity, and cities – as other works on the cinematic city outline (i.e., Mennel 2008) – and more on the forms light carves as a city from images to human perception to boundaries to the glow visible from a distance to capacity of organic growth that can overtake and reclaim human constructions. Therefore, even if a city can never see itself, light opens up the potential for it to play many forms.

BIO – Terrance H. McDonald is a postdoctoral fellow at the Posthumanism Research Network (Brock University). He is the editor of *Interconnections: Journal of Posthumanism / Interconnexions: revue de posthumanisme* and the secretary for the SCMS Film Philosophy SIG. His work has appeared in *Men and Masculinities*, *NORMA*, and *Symposium*, among other venues.

Özge **EJDER**, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University
On the Ambiguous Place of the Human Subject

ABSTRACT – In *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) Werner Herzog shows us that some figures were drawn almost 5000 years apart, which suggests that a similar practice in one location was continued for thousands of years, transforming the cave into a particular place where activities very similar to what we today call art took place. Amidst the blurring of time and anonymity of the artists, one single individual is singled out in the research through traces of his crooked finger, a prehistorical individual who 32,000 years ago was in this very cave. In

this article, I will be considering the meaning of this physical link to this particular individual and the notion of the human subject arguing that it is precisely this kind of oscillation between the subject and the person, space and place that turned the cave into a place with the attributes of a museum and/or an imaginary space in the middle of a valley.

The importance of this particular individual can be thought of as extending Preziosi's questioning of art as evidence of the legibility of the 'unified, substantive, selfsame and unique' human subject, separate from the animal and the spirits. Arguments that draw a lineage from the cave to today's human affirms this subject as that which belongs to this world as opposed to the world of the spirits, negating the permeability and fluidity suggested by Herzog's film. The individual with a crooked little finger communicates with us in a world-forming, memory-inscribing way. The cave as museum—one of limited accessibility—makes it possible for us to communicate with our ancestors and show how this individual came to be conceptualized as the Subject.

On the other hand if the hand—the singular hand—is that which originally points, shows, signs, designates and draws us into a particular direction of thinking, then this hand is not the embodied hand as merely at hand (*vorhanden*). Yet it is also the hand as inscribed. What we get from the palm prints is both the hand that inscribes and is inscribed. Remembering that leaving palm prints on the walls of the cave was a practice that continued for thousands of years makes it possible for us to look at what it shows, as a testimony of being human which cannot simply be detached from its environment.

This article will argue the importance of art in terms of its potentiality to create a certain permeability of the who-ness into the what-ness of existence and conceptualization. Herzog's film enables us to experience the fascination that brings the subject to the limit of its world and seized by the question.

BIO – Özge Ejder is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in Istanbul. She has teaching and research interests in theory of art, architecture, aesthetics and continental philosophy with an emphasis on Husserlian and post-Husserlian phenomenology. She has published on the concepts of death, boredom and representation.

Michael **TROMMER**, York University
Points Further North: An Acoustemological Cartography of Non-Place

ABSTRACT – This paper will discuss the *Solastalgia project*, a VR documentary that was undertaken with a view to foregrounding how sound can be deployed as the primary mechanism for laying out the complex, often subjugated relationships manifested between physical spaces and those who inhabit them. Specifically, It examines how ambisonic and haptic audio's profoundly affective emotional, tactile and topologically enveloping capacities can be

articulated within an acoustemological framework (acoustemology is best defined by ethnographer Steven Feld as “sonic ways of being in and knowing the world”) in order to evoke a heightened sense of awareness, perhaps even an agency, with respect to the largely abstracted ramifications arising from the consumerist lifestyles that are endemic to the developed world. The project exploits the possibilities inherent in the amplification of the vibratory and electromagnetic spectra that permeate our urban environments: infrasonic/tactile elements are disseminated via the Subpac wearable haptic interface in order to constitute a corporeal and emotional presence, and the radiant (yet invisible) transmissions of our information, economic and surveillance networks are captured and sonified via the use of electromagnetic transducers. Both sonically and thematically, *Solastalgia* seeks to capitalize upon the manner in which senses recalibrate themselves within the VR phenomenon, that is, the anxiety and intuitive, primal switch into defensive mode that occur in the face of an ‘unknown’, a response that characterizes the experiences of both personal crisis-response – as evinced in the face of environmental collapse and other socio-economic consequences engendered via the vast, inscrutable, sublime yet sublimated infrastructures that we find ourselves immersed in – as well as that of virtual reality.

BIO – Michael Trommer is a Toronto-based producer, sound designer and sound artist; his experimental work has been focused primarily on psychogeographical and acoustemological explorations via the use of field recordings, infra and ultrasound, as well as multi-channel installation and expanded video techniques.

He has released material on an unusually diverse roster of labels, both under his own name as well as 'sans soleil'. These include Transmat, Wave, Ultra-red, and/OAR, Audiobulb, Audio Gourmet, Gruenrekorder, Impulsive Habitat, Stasisfield, Serein, Flaming Pines, 3leaves, Unfathomless and con-v. His audio-visual installation work has been exhibited at Australia’s ‘Liquid Architecture’ festival, Kunsthalle Schirn in Frankfurt, Cordoba’s art:tech, St. Petersburg’s *Gamma* Festival, and Köln’s soundLAB, among others.

Michael has performed extensively in North America, Europe and Asia, including events with members of Berlin's raster-noton collective, as well as the 2008 and 2013 editions of Mutek's acclaimed a/visions series. He also regularly improvises with Toronto-based AI audio-visual collective 'i/o media'.

His sound design work encompasses composition, audio branding, installation and VR audio for clients such as Moment Factory, Intel and Yahoo, as well as soundtrack and production development for a variety of international cinema, dance and installation artists.

In addition to teaching graduate sound design and sound art at George Brown College, Michael also teaches Think Tank at OCAD University and is currently a PhD candidate in Cinema and Media Arts at York University.

Panel 9: SHELF LIFE

4:00-5:20PM

Chair: Tamás Nagypál, Ryerson University

Sarah **CHOUKAH**, York University

Towards a Theory of Cinematic Discretion, by Way of Slime

ABSTRACT – This proposed contribution intersects the past and present cultural history of scientific micro-cinematography. It moves towards a revived appreciation for time-lapse photography techniques, and their discrete modes of framing in time and space. I aim to show how time-lapse techniques rendered transparency and visibility, and how they compelled wider, socially and culturally entangled explanations of life.

The inquiry starts at a very slow, discrete pace. It's the pace of slime molds, an unconventional group of single-cell, multi-nucleated amoeboid protists that baffled naturalists and scientists since at least the 1880's (Bonner 2010). The slime molds' pace is so slow that early accounts of their movement consisted in comparisons of their positions through hours and days (Cope and Kingsley 1894). Coincidentally, slime molds' appearance in Western scientific literature was shortly followed by some of the first time-lapse photography techniques that imaged their eerie, irregular growth and unusual behavior (Seifriz 1937). Thus slime molds, otherwise known as *myxomycetes*, were among the earliest subjects of cinematographic and scientific tinkering, and at the heart of the scientific gaze's emerging cinematic aesthetics.

The pace picks up, or perhaps further slows down, as time-lapse photography techniques allow for "accelerating or slowing" slime mold movements (Landecker 2006). Timelapse photography then becomes a crucial way to make sense of mutating morphologies, of cellular development, growth, aggregation and migration. The technique also becomes a privileged site of sense-making through film renditions. The ability to evince slime molds' inner circulation, growth and life-cycle lend weight to the hypothesis of pulsing organic networks as a principle of all organic life (Dietrich 2014, 16).

Following the transitions from film to CMOS and CCD sensors, the discretion and discretization afforded by digital apparatuses speak to the ways changing amoeboid forms tune scientific concerns in different directions. Nagakaki's slime mold studies combine mathematics, engineering and physics to make statements about the behavior of slime molds in mazes, and their uncanny ability to solve complex optimization problems such as finding the shortest route between cities in given urban, mapped space (Nakagaki, Yamada, and Tóth 2000; Nakagaki 2001). The life principle thus gives way to interrogations on non-human and artificial intelligence, distributed cognition, collective action. Time-lapse, or "slime-lapse," in these contexts, allows for unusual intersections of non-human narrative and cinematic aesthetics.

BIO – Sarah Choukah holds a PhD from Université de Montréal's department of communication. She is interested in the convergence of technology and biology, new biotechnologies and emergent biomedias (amateur synthetic biology, hobbyist genetic engineering, Do-It-Yourself biohacking). Her doctoral dissertation methodology draws upon the work of Gilbert Simondon on communication, cybernetics, individuation and modes of existence. She complemented her theoretical framework by drawing from pragmatics, STS, /media/ theories, and philosophies of modes and modality in ontology, rhetoric and logic. Her current research addresses contemporary issues of inter-species communication, non-human and post-human aesthetics and rhetorics.

Hanwei **SHI**, Buffalo University

Becoming Mushroom: Time-Lapsing Photography as a Non-Human Perspective

ABSTRACT – This paper is an introduction of the conceptual basis for my videobased art named Shi-Rou. Shi-Rou (Chinese as 视肉, literally means "a flesh that can see without eyes") is a fabulous creature that has reoccurred in pre-modern Chinese myth, medicine classics, and many local folk tales dating back to 4th century BC. It is categorized as plant but touched like flesh, and can self-repair through absorbing decay and vomit. According to contemporary scientists, Shi-Rou is very likely to be mushrooms. If many prominent scholars begin challenging the fundamental dualism exemplified by the Cartesian view on body with looking for new body ideals, like Donna Haraway's cyborg and Elisabeth Grosz's Möbius strip, what new thoughts can be induced if we take mushrooms as an ideal form of being?

In her fascinating study on mushrooms, Anna Tsing views mushrooms as the "mosaic of open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life". For her, mushrooms are better described as a fluid and complicated ecological system that keeps making rhizomatic connections with its surroundings. If media study's recent theoretical interest in the role of body as indeterminate site for affects and percepts opens new possibilities for the value of the body's unruly resistance to the systematicity and normativity, I believe mushrooms' fantastic mode of existence can be a perfect embodiment of the renewed view on body.

Inspired by mushrooms, I am currently working on an installation project that tries to highlight mushrooms' productive vulnerability as the openness for connections and co-existences. I use time-lapsing photography to record how mushrooms rise from decay and decomposition, and apply micro-lens to capture the mushrooms' beautiful folded structure that allows multiple types of microorganisms live together. In addition, I also use the software Processing to digitalize these footages in order to show the mushroom's algorithmic beauty, while adding various interactive elements that help the viewer make new connections with mushrooms, see from the perspective of mushrooms, and become mushrooms.

BIO – Hanwei Shi is a Ph.D. candidate in Media Study at University at Buffalo. Her doctoral research investigates how a renewed view on the ontological status of media as a process of mediation with multiple affective encounters rather than as a technical carrier of

representational contents has the potential to enrich the aesthetic and political possibilities of trauma-related arts. She takes an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses the fields of media theory, Deleuze philosophy, affect study, trauma study, and new media arts. Currently, she is also working with bio-artist Paul Vanouse on a project about mushrooms.

Joel **ONG**, York University
Alien Entanglements and the Microbial Mise-En-Scène

ABSTRACT – As more and more artists seek to produce radical artworks with life as their medium, the scientific laboratory progressively opens outwards and inwards simultaneously towards its historical groundings in natural philosophy, and to begin noticing, questioning and challenging broader inter-active, inter-species and inter-medial entanglements. Moving (far) beyond the Latourian survey of laboratory life, the lab and her technicians today are steeped in a triad of forms – *in vitro*, *in vivo* and *in silico* - that play out as a cinematic assemblage in the scientific construction and affirmation of life.

As a case study, the author will present a work entitled '*In Venti*', a procedural artScience project currently in progress via a residency at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Toronto. This project involves encoding algorithmically derived poetry into the DNA of *P.syringae* at the Guttman Labs in the University of Toronto. This microbe is implicated in planetary scale science (fiction) involving anthropogenic weather modification. The work exploits its cloud-forming potential and generates variegated ice crystals on the lab bench.

This paper looks at the project's challenges, implementations and discusses the roles of scientists and artists as actors within networks of lossy informational transfers. It looks at the hosting of 'alien' or unfamiliar artistic practices by scientific laboratories and discusses this as a collaborative research-creation experiment towards the production of new sentiments, sensations and interconnections. In so doing, this paper hopes to highlight the narratives and aesthetic agencies of non-human entities in the lab and our entanglements with them.

BIO – Joel Ong is Assistant Professor in Computational Arts at York University. His research explores emergent ways of interfacing with the natural elements through the lens of digital and moist-media technologies. He is an alumni of SymbioticA, the Centre of Excellence in BioArts, and is also an artist with the UCLA ArtSci Collective. Ong's individual and collective works in spatial sound, data aesthetics and bio-media have been presented around the world. Website: arkfrequencies.com