

# Agenda

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29 November 2023

**9:00 am - 9:30 am**

## **Conference Open & Welcome to Country**

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Opening/Closing - [In-Person Only](#) - Arts West, Atrium

9:00 am

[Conference Open](#)

Conference Open

9:15 am

[Welcome to Country](#)

Welcome to Country

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29 November 2023

**9:30 am - 11:00 am**

## **Conversation 1 - Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

9:30 am

[Reinventing the Past and Future of Santal : Indigenous tribal community of India](#)

[Miss Sushree Smita Raj](#)

The history and existence of Santal in India predate that of the Aryans, Dravidians, and Mongolians. The Santal is the largest homogeneous tribe of India and are proto-Australoid by origin with an Austro-Asiatic language. The Santal are nomadic people with extensive migration history to different parts of the country. They have inhabited in Central India's dense forests and hills for generations away from mainstream society. The rigid caste system of Indian society and the oppressive colonialism restrained them from any cultural exchange and interaction with civil society. The socio-political-cultural structure became a major barrier for the community and their culture remained unrecognized, their language remained unknown and the Santali discourse remained unexplored. Due to their close associations with flora and fauna of respective geographical locations, their cultural and linguistic stake remained out from the research domains of the historians and scholars. The history of civilization has not traced the growth and existence of the tribe in comparison to the Aryans and Dravidians. The Santals created a distinctive script called 'Ol Chiki' in 1925 for their language in order to preserve the region's identity and build the foundations of the community and preserve their language. With the assistance of the organizations, institutions, and individuals behind it in Bihar, West Bengal, and Orissa, Ol-Chiki gradually acquired the form of a movement. Santali literature has been enriched by several authors from a variety of genres, which will continue to establish its significance over time. In order to materialize these efforts, Santal presses have been created in several locations. This paper attempts to analyze the Past and Future of their Culture, Literature, and their place in India as an indigenous tribe.

9:50 am

[Everything the Light Touches: Juxtaposing Indigenous wisdom and Enlightenment thought](#)

[Dr Priyanka Shivadas](#)

In recent years, theoretical and intellectual movements such as actor-network theory, new materialism, and philosophical animism have come to question some foundational aspects of the liberal humanist tradition, including human exceptionalism and the separation from the nonhuman world. It has been recognised that while these approaches have proved revealing and productive in thinking about the post-anthropocentric phase of posthumanism, Indigenous knowledges predate these theoretical formations in their challenge to

anthropocentrism. Indigenous stories and practices have been pivotal points of power counteracting the epistemological privilege granted to European cultures and thought. In light of this recognition, the focus of this paper is a contemporary text by Khasi writer Janice Pariat, *Everything the Light Touches* (2023), which explores the question of human/nonhuman dualism, as inherited from the Enlightenment. It does this by not only revisiting the wisdom that resides within Indigenous communities, in particular the Khasi community to which the writer belongs, but also by reimagining the lives of two highly influential historical figures from the Enlightenment, German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus. The novel, which deftly interweaves stories from different and disparate places and times, can be considered a daring experiment in narrative structure. It can also be regarded a meditation on the possibilities offered by literary imagination in the age of climate crisis. In response to the conference theme, this paper will examine how and why this recent novel by Pariat brings into focus Indigenous wisdom in juxtaposition with Enlightenment thought to examine some key concerns of posthumanism.

**9:30 am - 11:00 am**

## **Conversation 2 - Entanglements (01): Humans, moths, bees, gorillas, plants**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

9:30 am

[Telling Stories with Moths in the Anthropocene: Metamorphosis and symbiosis in interdisciplinary art practice](#)

[Hannah van Seventer](#)

Insect populations worldwide are experiencing a meaningful decline caused by habitation loss, extreme weather changes, pollution and other environmental factors. Insects in the Anthropocene exist in complex systems, entangled with humans, plants, other-species and organic-matter. They are vulnerable to ecological changes and are involved in almost every part of the terrestrial environment and have been for millions of years.

Throughout Western history, at times of change, flux and transformation, artists examine the natural world and address these unstable and complicated relations. From 17th century naturalist illustrations to contemporary bio-mechanical installations, these are moments when disciplines collide, understandings of the natural world expand and artists offer new tools to make sense of ecological crisis and planetary change. By extension, this effort also questions what it means to be human.

This paper focuses specifically on moths and explores the ways artists engage with the biological process of metamorphosis in pupal stage, and the related concepts of transformation and symbiosis. A number of artists working at the intersection of science and art approach moths in imaginative and intimate ways. This paper addresses how artists imagine transformation and plant-moth symbiosis through interdisciplinary art practice. Primary case studies for this paper include, Maria Sybilla Merian's *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* and *The Wonderful Transformation of Caterpillars* 1705, Tomás Saraceno, *How to Entangle the Universe in a Spider Web*, 2017, Anicka Y, *Biologising the Machine (tentacular trouble)*, 2019, Mire Lee, *Carriers* 2020 and Robert Hooke *Flea*, 1664.

The diverse stories told about moths in popular culture, art history, biology and literature are evidence of moths being both real and imagined – figurations. The small and often un-regarded world of moths is a valuable point of research and an existing line of artistic inquiry.

This research paper is framed by wider debates on the Anthropocene and the role of art in the Anthropocene. Including by theorists such as Anna Tsing who proposes methods of understanding human-nature relations in terms of interspecies complexities and dependencies, Donna Haraway who emphasises story-telling and 'staying with' non-human actors and The Extinction Studies Group's call for a 'witnessing' of the dramatically changing world and its inhabitants.

Artistic imaginings of moths, *with* moths provide valuable contributions to inter-species thinking and offer ways of living on a damaged planet, understanding human-ness and finding hope in loss.

9:50 am

[Men, Women, and Beasts in the Scientific Imagination](#)

[Dr Erich Nunn](#)

In 1847 (two years before Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species* and a quarter century before *The Descent of Man*), gorillas enter the western scientific record, in a paper by Thomas Savage and Jeffries Wyman entitled, "Notice of the External Characters and Habits of *Troglodytes Gorilla*, a New Species of

Orang from the Gaboon River," published in the *Boston Journal of Natural History*. The bulk of the paper, as suggested by its title, comprises physical descriptions, and the authors go into tedious detail about the various shapes and measurements of their subject animals' bones and skull. Peppered throughout, though, are acknowledgments of and disavowals of African people's claims and understandings regarding the kinship of "orangs" and humans. Savage and Wyman go out of their way to disclaim what they call "[t]he silly stories about their carrying off women from the native towns," as well as the "natives'" belief that the "orangs" are in fact "human beings, members of their own race, degenerated. . . The majority," they aver, "fully believe them to be men, and seem to be unaffected by our arguments in proof of the contrary." Such stories enter the western popular imagination through such works as Paul du Chaillu's *Adventures and Explorations in Equatorial Africa* (1861), and reemerge in twentieth-century popular culture touchstones including *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914) and *King Kong* (1933). How might considering how these claims to kinship and Western scientists' resistance to them help us rethink our own understanding of the relationships of human and non-human primates? How in turn might engaging with the history of these idea's persistence in popular media lead us to rethink the role of narratives human/non-human intimacies and violence in the Western popular imagination?

10:10 am

[Bees and being, from before pollination to Blade Runner 2049](#)

[Dr Alexis Harley](#)

One of the grimmest figures for ecological hope and collapse in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) appears as Officer K stumbles upon an unlikely apiary in the ruins of Las Vegas. Honeybees cluster on feeders suspended from an intravenous drip stand or buzz in apparent disorientation through thick red air. When K's hand becomes covered by bees, he regards it with no emotion beyond mild curiosity. This scene plays out for less than two of the minutes of an almost three-hour film, and the bees are not explicitly referred to again. What, then, do they mean?

Earlier iterations of *Blade Runner* (1982; 1992) explore a set of fundamentally Enlightenment-era questions about materiality, mentality and the human. In *Blade Runner 2049*, the earlier films' revelation that machines are capable of putatively human, supposedly mental modes – empathy, anger, moral reasoning – is old news; that Nexus-9 replicants like Officer K can feel is taken for granted. Instead, K worries about a personhood that he believes to be contingent not on the possession of mental properties or feeling but of biological relationship. His search for evidence of his own biological origins plays out alongside the film's representations of technologized, denatured organic material. *2049* updates the original *Blade Runner's* questions about the materiality of personhood by asking instead if a person, or indeed any organism, can have a meaningful existence outside of its ecological relations. The honeybees that K encounters illustrate a possible answer to this question: without plants, they mill incoherently in the dusty air.

In the second half of this paper, I turn to two nineteenth-century books about pollinating insects to show how understandings of bees' ecological relationships have travelled alongside or against mechanistic understandings of these insects. The first of these books is John Evans' poetic natural history, *The Bees* (1806); Evans understood the role of flowers in honey production but did not know of the role of honeybees in plant pollination. The second is Charles Darwin's *Fertilisation of orchids* (1862), a landmark study in pollination ecology that argues for the co-adaptation of pollinating insects and insect-pollinated flowers. Reading these two works against *Blade Runner 2049*, I tease out the genealogy of ideas about bees, ecology and a more-than-mechanistic mode of material being, and consider how a small stand of pollinating insects with nothing to pollinate stuck in a post-apocalyptic Las Vegas might symbolise K's tentative reach for personhood.

**9:30 am - 11:00 am**

**Conversation 3 - Remembering the Enlightenment (01)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

9:30 am

[Burke versus Hastings: the Human against a Beast and Inhuman Monster](#)

[Dr Chiara Rolli](#)

On 18 February 1788, Edmund Burke was to pronounce one of the most shocking speeches against the first Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings. Convinced that Hastings had committed despicable crimes in India, Burke stressed how his prosecution was necessary "for the sake of justice, humanity, and the

honour of Government". Before disclosing the appalling tortures allegedly perpetrated on Indian peasants in the region of Rangpur, Burke apologized to his audience – the House of Lords, as well as the *crème de la crème* of British society and foreign representatives in Britain. As he stressed, "it is indeed a most disgraceful scene to human nature that I am going to display to you". Although Burke's commitment to universal values such as justice and humanity has been the object of a vast number of studies, the multiple references to Latin authors, especially Cicero, to impeach Hastings have largely escaped scholars. Cicero, it should be stressed, had thoroughly explored humanism and human nature in some illuminating treatises. In this paper, in particular, I would like to show how, by a careful reuse and adaptation of Cicero, Burke successfully portrayed Hastings as a beast and inhuman monster. In this sense, I will suggest how Burke used the Classics as a powerful tool to reflect on and promote the human and humanity against oppression and cruelty.

9:50 am

[Inventing the \(Soldier\) Citizen, Realising the Human: Natural Law, Military Honour and State Citizenship in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1769-1815.](#)

[Dr Kurt Baird](#)

After the brutality and waste of the Seven Years' War, reformers in the Habsburg Monarchy set about creating a state rigorous, and compassionate enough, to endure and triumph in future wars. Inspired by the French and German Enlightenment, and the convenience of natural law theory in conveying the justness of state-building, the Monarchy's jurisprudence experts and military intellectuals sought to create selfless, virtuous, and content citizens ready to sacrifice for the only polity which secured the peaceful and natural order of man: the state.

As this paper shows, the Monarchy's reformers used natural law to imagine people's heavenly-defined relationship with the state to transform servile subjects of local manors into active, contributing citizens. Through enlightened emancipatory laws, proclamations, military reforms, toleration edicts, and interventions in subject-landlord relations, serving the state was narrated as the way in which people achieved moral goodness and human perfection.

By examining the changes to concepts of soldiering and experiences of martial honour in the Monarchy after the Seven Years' War, this paper argues soldiers understood fighting for the Habsburgs as their way of achieving moral goodness. Honour elicited the morally good actions of a soldier, which frontline combatants believed made them citizens. The sign, in the political culture of the Habsburg Monarchy, of their humanity.

10:10 am

[Queering the Clinamen: Ann Yearsley's Atoms](#)

[Dr James Metcalf, James Metcalf](#)

In their essay 'Queer Poetics: Deviant Swerves, in Three', Ren Ellis Neyra takes Lucretius's principle of the clinamen in *De rerum natura* – the idea that all matter is created through the deviating movements and collisions of atoms – for a meditation on 'the swerve at the heart of the encounter' in queer poetics (*The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*, ed. Siobhan Somerville). Queer desire moves like Lucretius says atoms move: in stochastic relation, proliferating possibility against the chance that it might never happen. Rather than an ontological basis for all passional attachments, this persistent image of the aleatory interactions of bodies is queered in the cultural afterlife of the atom, used both to define queer desire against the order of things and to free its momentum from normative constraints. The labouring-class poet Ann Yearsley (1753–1806) wrote several poems featuring atoms, including 'Night. To Stella', 'A Fragment' (both 1785), 'A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade' (1788), and 'Soliloquy' (1796). In my paper I argue that Yearsley uses the figure of the atom to represent the swerves of queer desire in poems which spotlight the erotics of materialism in specifically gendered and queer-coded terms.

Earlier readings of Yearsley's atom poems have explored the poet's sense of the movement of time and the development of knowledge, the conventional parameters of which are challenged through figural reorientations which take their impetus from atomic motion. Building on these claims, I examine Yearsley's use of the clinamen to inform a poetics in which ideas, images, and bodies oscillate and converge in precarious relation which nonetheless tilts our impression of the world as we know it. Crucially, the collisions of Yearsley's atom poems – always uncertain and on the cusp of possibility – constellate queer relations as the desiring bodies of women come into fleeting, bracing contact. Their encounters, facilitated by the atom's free movement, trespass boundaries of class and education; and, taking up the provocation of the atom's underpinning of all material life, they incorporate nonhuman collateral from the surrounding world of objects. As Amanda Jo Goldstein writes, the atom is both a scandalous philosophical proposition and a source of figural impropriety in literature, contouring the movements of physical and poetic bodies

(*Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life*). Yearsley's atom poems illuminate the queer potential of this deviant interanimation for reinventing the human, finding expressive energies in the swerves of desire.

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29 November 2023

**11:00 am - 11:30 am**  
**Morning Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



29 November 2023

**11:30 am - 1:00 pm**  
**Conversation 4 - Embodied knowledges: Song, ballet, dance**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

11:30 am

[‘Because body, he got song’: connecting kin, country and bodies through Wägilak song](#)  
[Daniel Wilfred, Sam Curkpatrick](#)

Across many cultures, the interdependent functions of the human body have been a rich source of metaphor related to social responsibility and the healthy functioning of communities. Traditional Yolŋu thought from Arnhem Land interprets the human body as a collection of living relations between diverse people and places. These relations are expressed as both metaphoric likeness (an elbow connection *is like* the relationship between brothers) and metonymic equivalence (the chest *is* country, a beating heart that nourishes and sustains). In this way, individual bodies form a living text of social and ecological responsibility, and constitute belonging and purpose.

In this collaborative presentation developed with Wägilak ceremonial leaders Daniel Wilfred, Peter Djudja Wilfred, Benjamin Wilfred and Roy Natilma, we explore specific understandings of the body carried through Yolŋu *manikay* (public ceremonial song), *bungul* (dance) and *yäku* (song words; language). We ask, how can we understand the body through song, and song through the body? Not only do the structures of *manikay* and *bungul* map onto the body, but songs draw different people and stories together to sustain complex relations between kin and country.

From a linguistic perspective, the semantic connections carried within the body are also salient, showing meaning as always encountered, subjectively and materially, *in relation*. This raises significant challenges for the ways we approach collaborative research with Indigenous communities.

11:50 am

[Motion, Affect, and the Human in Coppélia and Petrushka](#)  
[Prof. Ya-feng Wu](#)

The rivalry between the human and the automata continues to find enacted on the ballet stage. The most recent adaptation of *Coppélia* (Scottish Ballet, 2022) sets the nineteenth-century story in Silicon Valley, reflecting a twenty-first-century anxiety over AI technology. The various versions of the ballet are based on E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1816), a gothic tale which adapts the Sandman folklore in featuring Nathaneal torn between his fascination for Olympia, manufactured by Dr. Coppelius / Coppola / Spallanzani, and his love for the girl, Clara. Hoffmann's tale paves the way for Sigmund Freud's theory on *The Uncanny* (1919).

The ballet *Coppélia* (premiered in 1870) adapts Hoffman's tale while enabling Swanhilda to master the tricks of Coppelia and rescue Franz from an impending doom. The story of the machine-doll gets a second life in another ballet, *Petrushka* (premiered in 1911), featuring a love triangle between three puppets, Petrushka, the Moor and the Ballerina at a Shrovetide Fair. The ballet derives from an ancient Russian tale. Petrushka falls in love with the Ballerina but she likes the Moor instead. Petrushka attacks the Moor in a rage only to be dismembered. The two ballets end similarly in an apparent restoration of human supremacy.

Dance as an art form runs on human performance, and therefore, the ballet featuring automata capitalizes on a paradox, that is, human performing automata which imitate humans. The two ballets thus shed light on at once the limits and uniqueness of humanity. This paper focuses on the moments when the essence of the human undergoes challenge: when Swanhilda masters the movement of the automata in *Coppélia* and when Petrushka suffers from his unrequited love in *Petrushka*. These moments present a cauldron of humanity, which can be likened to the encounter between Frankenstein and his creature. This paper will examine motion in *Coppélia* and affect in *Petrushka* with a view to investigating how these two factors perform and underscore humanity. An embodied methodology related to dance will be adopted which shall combine Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the body as an open system with Silvan Tomkins's affect theory in order to reconfigure the core of what is human as it is staged in ballet.

12:10 pm

[We-atherlands for Sky & Bones](#)

[Tia Reihana-Morunga \(Ngāti Hine\), Professor Carol Brown](#)

Moving in the 'aftermaths' of colonial violence, we are weathered and awake to bring awero (challenge) to social discourses where histories ripple through us as embodied knowledges (Wanhalla et al 2023). 19th century liberal humanism created the conditions for British Captain Robert FitzRoy (1805-1865) to claim authority over the weather in inventing the 'forecast'. But knowledge of the weather persists beyond the quantifications of science and meteorology in the stories we tell and the performances we make. In 'We-atherlands Sky & Bones' we embody weatherscapes as cultural memory work (Robinson, 2008) by peeling into the fragilities of environmental health through a dance of relation. For the dancer their body is a *Whare tupuna* (genealogical house), a carved vessel of gestural traces and muscle memories (Williams, 2015). In this experimental performance we explore dance as a 'practice of freedom' (bell hooks), resisting the (in)corporeality of a humanity that persists in colonial-settler infrastructures. Through breath, voice, body and atmosphere, the cyclic rhythms of the *taio* (environment) locate us in movement, inviting thinking-with the 'breath of life', *hau, hauOra*. Activating the air between us as a medium of exchange and contemplation we resist the mastery of the 'man of reason' (Brown & Reihana, 2019; Raymond, 2016). Relational forms re-appear that reject identity politics in favour of affinities and alonsidness responsive to Vā-kā (the ignited and actioned space in between) (Smith & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2022). As such History gives way to geostories, ancestral story work and activā-tions of whakapapa.

References:

Brown, Carol, and Reihana-Morunga, Tia. 'Hau: Living Archive of Breath'. *Performance Research*, vol.25,no.2, 2020, pp. 69-78.

Paraha, Tru. 'Astrochoreography', *Choreographic Practices*, 2022

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Wanhalla, Angela, Ryan Lyndall, Nurka, Camille (Des) *Colonialism, Violence and Memory in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*. Dunedin: University of Otago, 2023.

**11:30 am - 1:00 pm**

**Conversation 5 - Entanglements (02): Humans, plants, and animals**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553



11:30 am

[Plant Life and Human Existence in the Age of the Anthropocene](#)

[Professor Vanessa Lemm](#)

This paper explores images of plant life in the history of western philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Nietzsche and Dostoevsky in pursuit of the question of what we can learn about the nature of the human being and its place in the world from plants and the way they are rooted in earth. Over the last half-century many voices identify our disconnection from the earth with the centrality of technological progress, capitalist production, industrialization and globalization that are essential to our modern self-understanding and way of life. What was supposed to be the root of human distinction has ended up uprooting us. Is this because we have a distorted view of what it means to be rooted in the first place, and our dependency on the rootedness of plant life? This paper draws on contemporary plant studies to interrogate western plant imaginaries in view of developing an idea of human life as deeply embedded in both earthly and planetary life.

11:50 am

[Morphologics of the Human: Herder and the Heavenly Plant Hypothesis](#)

[Elliot Patsoura](#)

Plato's depiction of the human as the 'heavenly plant' has had a profound impact on Western thought. Portraying humans as 'creatures rooted in heaven,' determined by their upright bodies and suspended heads and ideally comported towards anamnesis, Plato not only initiated a longstanding tradition of interpreting vertical posture as the defining human characteristic but highlighted the prescriptive powers of morphological description, revealing how morphology can decisively shape understandings of what the human was, is, and should be.

Despite the success of historicism and Darwinism in bringing the human 'back to earth,' the foundational elements of the heavenly plant hypothesis have persisted into Western modernity. Vertical posture continues to play a pivotal role in influential accounts of anthropogenesis, serving as a canvas upon which numerous aesthetic, intellectual, political, and ethical ideals can be inscribed and interpreted.

This paper examines Johann Gottfried von Herder's adaptation of the 'heavenly plant' hypothesis against this background. It seeks to unravel the underlying 'morphologics' at play in Herder's line of analogical reasoning, where the Platonic hypothesis is adapted within a historicist framework to position the human as at once a summation of existing natural forms, and as a 'middle' link on the path to future natural formations. Herder, it argues, demonstrates a keen understanding of the full explanatory and prescriptive power of morphological reasoning, and affords us an expansive view of how claims at once abstract and intuitive, transcendental and historical, can be read into and out of human form.

12:10 pm

[Human Forgetfulness and Animal Memories in Frankenstein and The Last Man](#)

[Libby King](#)

Suzanne Nalbantian has noted how a "remembering human subject" is recognisable throughout Western literary history. The connection between human memory and human identity was cemented in the long eighteenth century, with John Locke suggesting that "personal identity" depends on how far "any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first." The emphasis on "personal" memory highlights an increasing attention to the experience of the individual human subject. This "remembering human subject" is also frequently characterised by a *forgetfulness* of animal experience. In the case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the 're-remembering' human subject is notably distinguished by his anthropocentric forgetfulness. While it is Victor Frankenstein who literally re-members the bodies of both human and non-human animals into not quite human form, it is the creature himself who *remembers* these animals through his own consciousness. A conflict between Victor's forgetfulness and the creature's remembering thus forms a central tension of the novel. Indeed, close scrutiny of Shelley's corpus reveals an almost ever-present dialectic between forgotten and remembered animals. Throughout her writing, human society often appears to be premised on an apparently necessary and inevitable forgetting of animal experience. Unbidden memories of animals serve as crucial interruptive moments, briefly disrupting social frameworks and narrative trajectories.

This dialectic between memory and forgetfulness reaches a critical juncture in Shelley's future-oriented novel, *The Last Man*. Highlighting how recent cognitive research has noted a deep connection between thinking about the future and thinking about the past, Alan Richardson points out that a recognition of the "close alliance between memory and imagination" was a "key element" of eighteenth-century thought. *The Last Man* is a prophesy about the future narrated in the past tense. As the human population is destroyed by an unnamed plague, animal memories continuously interrupt the narrative, briefly surfacing only to be

forgotten again shortly afterwards. This ensures a constant reassessment of different pathways, with the novel's prophetic quality allowing for the possibility of alternative futures. By describing a future prophecy as if it has already happened, Shelley literalises the connection between memory and imagination, making the line between them difficult to decipher. Sarah Eron has noted how eighteenth-century novelists examine how memory can be used to both "change our stories of the past" and "change present circumstances." In *The Last Man*, Shelley also uses memory to change the future. Using *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* as case studies, this paper considers anxieties about the role of memory in the construction of human identity, exploring how animal memories can disrupt narratives in order to indicate alternative ways forward.

**11:30 am - 1:00 pm**

## **Conversation 6 - Remembering the Enlightenment (02)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

11:30 am

[De-Humanising China for De-Humanising Women](#)

[Em Prof Will Christie](#)

"It may, perhaps, be laid down as an invariable maxim, that the condition of the female part of society in any nation will furnish a tolerably just criterion of the degree of civilization to which that nation has arrived" (John Barrow, *Travels in China* [1804]). Toleration and pluralism were central tenets of the liberal culture that evolved over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But so, too, was an obsessive ranking of different cultures according to "the degree of civilization" they had attained, which would become, in turn, justification for an expansionist British trade and imperial policy. In this paper, I'll be looking at the way nineteenth-century British liberal culture negotiated the challenges of an alien and what it took to be *illiberal* cultural practice in China – footbinding – and at the way this and other alien practices, and the attitude towards women they implied, allowed the British to de-humanise the Chinese, becoming part of the self-vindication and self-absolution of an imperial nation.

11:50 am

[Inverting Race: Enlightenment and Romanticism in George Forster's Construction of the Human in A Voyage Round the World \(1776/7\)](#)

[Dr Alex Watson](#)

In this paper, I examine the important contribution of the German naturalist Georg Forster's *A Voyage Round the World* (1776/7) to eighteenth-century debates about race and the nature of humanity. Forster describes accompanying Captain James Cook on his second voyage to the Pacific, drawing on the journals of his father naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster and his experiences of working as his father's assistant during the expedition. Nigel Leask describes *A Voyage* as "in many ways a milestone for romantic period travel writing, establishing the principles which would increasingly be demanded from scientific travel writers over the next half-century" [1].

I investigate the relationship between Forster's status as a pioneer of Romantic "scientific" travel writing and the racial taxonomy he proposes. Forster depicts the multiplicity of Polynesian culture as a linear hierarchy, with whiteness associated with status and civility, and blackness with lowliness and labor. For instance, when describing Tahitian society, he predicts that the sun "will blacken" the skin of the laboring class "and they will dwindle away", while the "pampered race... will preserve all the advantages of a superior elegance of form...and of a purer color by indulging their voracious appetite, and living in absolute idleness". Forster supports this racial hierarchy with accounts of the indigenous peoples of Easter Island, the Friendly and Society Islands and New Zealand. Forster argues that these racial differences demonstrate that South Seas societies had degenerated from their original condition of primitive virtue, and begun to emulate the inequality and corruption of European societies, forecasting that "[a]t last the common people will perceive these grievances, and...will bring on a revolution". Forster contributes to Enlightenment thinking of the time by presenting his travel experiences as empirical data with which to address broader philosophical questions about the nature of humanity. But Forster is also proto-Romantic in his revolutionary anti-colonialism and his celebration of indigenous societies as "rough, passionate, revengeful, but likewise brave, sincere and true" [2]. I argue that Forster's inverted model of racial hierarchies constitutes a fissure between existing Enlightenment and emerging Romantic models of race.

[1] Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetic of Travel Writing 1770-1840: "From an Antique Land"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 41.



[2] Georg Forster, *A Voyage Round the World* (London: B. White, 1777) p. 367, p. 536.

12:10 pm

[The Asian Enlightenment](#)

[Mr. Babu Gogineni](#)

The intellectual and cultural archeology of Asia offers a fascinating glimpse of a scintillating yet intermittent stream of Reason-based thinking in the region. Despite its great social and ethical promise, despite its universal embrace and relevance, the Naturalist, Materialist approach of yore failed to become the dominant thought in Asia. What were the forces that pushed that tradition back into a civilizational memory lapse?

It is possible to reconstruct the glorious Rationalist thought traditions of Asia by examining the works of Scholars and Intellectuals past and present and by looking at their continued relevance in modern times. This would help establish that Freethinking and a secular understanding of society and of nature are indigenous to Asia too, consequently defeating the notion that Reason, Humanism, Human Rights and indeed Science are imports from the Western world. That argument and ruse would then no longer be available to tyrants and dictators, emerging and established, to claim that Universal values are alien to the region and hence inappropriate and unsuitable. The implication of a Postmodern approach to universal values and the idea of common humanity has had disastrous consequences, and not just in Academia where the fad appears to be now receding. Such an exercise to locate Reason in civilizations before and after the European will also help Reason clear the taint of having being associated with Colonialism and Imperial ambitions which went beyond the conquest of territories and a European project.

In this paper I would like to present the related key ideas and notions with the appropriate factual references to make my case.

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29 November 2023

**1:00 pm - 2:30 pm**  
**Lunch**

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Break - [Break](#)



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29 November 2023

**2:30 pm - 3:30 pm**  
**Keynote 1: Chris Danta, 'Dear AI Reader ...'**

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Keynote - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

2:30 pm

[Dear AI Reader: Nonhuman Perspective and Evolutionary Thinking in the Human-Machine Relation](#)

[Professor Chris Danta](#)

One of the ways in which humans understand their relation to machines is by analogy to biological processes. We think of machines as resembling us in somehow being alive and somehow evolving over time. The American science fiction writer Philip K. Dick observed in his 1972 speech, "The Android and the Human," that in the last decade, "our environment, and I mean our man-made world of machines, artificial constructs, computers, electronic systems, interlinking homeostatic components—all this is in fact beginning more and more to possess ... animation." Already in the late nineteenth century, the English authors Samuel Butler and George Eliot were thinking of machines as living and evolving organisms. This paper examines how writers like Dick, Butler and Eliot rethink what it means to be human by attributing life to their technological environment. It discusses various speculative rhetorical techniques that writers use to look at the human from the perspective not just of another living organism but also of the surroundings of the human themselves. It shows how writers biologize machines by figuring them as cryptic nonhuman organisms that can merge with and act on behalf of their physical environments. It argues that underlying the techno-anthropologies of writers like Dick, Butler and Eliot is an environmental understanding of life as the dyadic relation between the organism and its surroundings.

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29 November 2023

**3:30 pm - 4:00 pm**  
**Afternoon Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



29 November 2023

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**  
**Conversation 7 - Writing/rewriting the human**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

4:00 pm

[A Black Feminist Poethics of Wording in XR](#)

[Dr. Clareese Hill](#)

The academic, philosopher, and artist Denise Ferreira da Silva's essay Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World, where she maps out speculative strategies for refusing categories of racial otherness by rethinking space, time, bodily materiality and relations by activating Black Feminist Critique thus creating the end of the world as constructed by Western philosophical and sociological terms. Ferreira da Silva's argument concludes with the revision of time, space, linearity, and being by unpacking the complexities of **virtuality by** activating the terms Transsubstantiality, Transversability, and Traversability. She turns to the Black female protagonist in African-American sci-fi writer novelist, Octavia Estelle Butler's book Parable of the Sower, Kindred, and Wildseed to illustrate her line of thought. I am interested in the term Traversability as she relates it to Butler's character

Dana from *Kindred*, who non-consensually is snatched back to antebellum Maryland to save her slave-owning ancestor from various scenarios of death to ensure her existence. Dana is a time traveler for the sake of her survival while being embedded in the total violence of plantation life. Ferreira da Silva establishes Traversability as a methodology for world-building and the critical aspect of survival in a non-linear framework. In my paper, I will think through Traversability, Transversability, and Transubstantiality, as methodologies for worlding in Virtual Reality, Mixed reality, and immersive environments.

4:20 pm

[Prismatic refractions of the human in the poetry of Chris Zithulele Mann](#)  
[She/her \(Prof.\) Molly Brown](#)

Despite quibbles about Neanderthal genes, the concept of *homo sapiens* is a fairly stable and widely accepted one. The concept of the human is far more fluid and uneasy. Defining and recognizing the human appears to be a contextually determined process, consistently reshaped by parameters determined by both time and space. While this is regularly acknowledged, it is less commonly recognized that inventing the human is both a social process and individual one. In the contemporary moment, human identity may be moulded by both essentialist conceptions of identity and patterns of migration that challenge and complicate such simplifications.

This tension is profoundly significant in the poetry of Chris Mann, a white South African of British descent, who yet openly acknowledged the importance for his writing of both Romanticism and the Zulu concept of the shades or guiding spirits. My paper will examine his use of this key aspect of Zulu spirituality and argue that its presence in his poetry allowed him to challenge the racial binaries prevalent in late twentieth-century South African culture. By affirming a prismatic identity for himself, it will be suggested that Mann both subverted the rigidly physical categorizations of traditional racial politics and created a third space in which he placed himself at once between and beside 'the assumed "polarities" of conflict' (Bhabha 1999).

By doing so, Mann attempted both to escape the restrictions placed on identity by rigid apartheid categorizations and also to reclaim a more complex and less divisive concept of the human by openly acknowledging that modernity has ensured that 'many and probably a growing number of people are saturated by shades that originate in other cultures' (1992, 9). By questioning the limitations inherent in traditional determiners of humanity, including culture and ethnicity, Mann thus echoes De Toro who has also observed that with the blurring of boundaries that once surrounded totalizing discourses, in the future we can only hope to position ourselves with regard to a 'nomadic subjectivity in a nonhierarchical space, where discourses are being constantly territorialized, deterritorialized and reterritorialized' (1995, 39).

4:40 pm

[Violence, Necessity and the Limits of Relation](#)  
[MR Mackenzie Smith](#)

When confronting violence in the ethical scene—the precise moment at which the shooting of an unarmed person is justified or condemned—it is the realm of interiority that guides our image of existence. That is, bearing on the question of justice in any deployment of violence is the presumption of the subject as a self-knowing thing that is separable from the conditions that anticipate that violence. Yet what if, as Denise Ferreira da Silva asks us to do in her 2022 book, *Unpayable Debt*, we attended to necessity 'as [the] exteriorization of a formal determinant'? By naming necessity as an authorising force, Ferreira da Silva exposes how otherwise unconscionable acts of violence are resolved through economic and juridical conditions, rather than in the ethical scene.

In this paper, I consider a moment of ethical circumscription in the 1934 execution of the Aboriginal Anangu man Yukun by the white police officer William (Bill) McKinnon. Yukun, unarmed and unconnected to the crime McKinnon was seeking justice for, was shot while hiding in a cave at the base of Uluru. In that incident, and with the emergence of new evidence nearly 90 years on, I find that necessity remains fully operative. That is, I locate necessity as a formal determinant that cannot be captured within the interior stage, and that works to justify and maintain ongoing settler-colonial violence in Australia. Further, I suggest that when Yukun's relative, Abraham Poulson, names a tree overlooking the cave as 'a witness,' he provides an image of existence through which we might apprehend and halt necessity's operations in the global present.

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

## **Conversation 8 - Disability, Ability, and the Human**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

4:00 pm

[‘A Form Was completed, a Human Illusion’: Encounter and Erasure in William Blake’s \*The Book of Los\* \(1795\)](#)  
[Dr Sharon Choe](#)

William Blake’s *The Book of Los* ends with this vision of a human form appearing through darkness, reinforcing a similar image presented in an earlier poem *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1795). While this form is determined ‘a Human Illusion,’ the poem preceding this statement explores the different facets of embodiment and bodily functions. The poem is framed as a prophetic cry, and it addresses the ways in which the physical embodiment of a form conflicts with the conceptualising of the form itself. The disjunction between perception and presentation creates an epistemological break in what constitutes the human body. Grounding itself in Disability theory, this paper will examine how encountering the human form in Blake necessitates the erasure of what we understand as ‘normative’ and able-bodied. Standardisation is an illusion, one that when pressed, can open the form to post-human possibilities.

4:20 pm

[Disabled Humans and Able-Bodied Gods in Johannes Brahms’s \*Gesang der Parzen\* \(1882\)](#)  
[Dr. Tekla Babyak](#)

The boundary between the human and the divine has been questioned, contested, and reimagined in many ways throughout history. I propose to examine how this perceived boundary has been shaped by notions of ability and disability. My case study is Johannes Brahms’s choral composition *Gesang der Parzen* (*Song of the Fates*), Op. 89 (1882). Based on a bleak poem from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 1786 version of *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, Brahms’s *Gesang der Parzen* aligns the Greek gods with power and strength, while describing human beings as helpless and despondent, as Margaret Notley (2012) and Nicole Grimes (2019) have argued. Building on their work, I suggest that Brahms portrays the human condition as inherently disabled throughout *Gesang der Parzen*.

The stanzas that describe the athletic power of the gods employ tonal keys such as F Major (bars 72-80) and C-sharp Minor/Major (bars 81-99). When the text returns to the sorrowful lot of humankind, however, the music takes on a Phrygian color (bar 100ff). Thus, Brahms uses certain musical scales, especially the Phrygian mode, to reflect Goethe’s textual dichotomy between the powerful gods and the helpless humans. The association of modal scales with human incapacity was a common trope in 19th-century Austro-German musical culture. Adolph Bernhard Marx (1795-1866), for example, referred to the helpless dependency of the Phrygian mode (*The School of Musical Composition*, 1841) and the “weak, breathless affect” of the Lydian mode (*Ludwig van Beethoven: Life and Works*, 1859). Similarly, Brahms’s close friend, the musicologist and Bach scholar Philipp Spitta (1841-1894), wrote about the “solemn and twilight effects of the Phrygian.” By using these modes in *Gesang der Parzen*, Brahms gestures toward a notion of humankind as disabled, potentially opening a space for disability to be normalized as an intrinsic part of life rather than a pathological condition.

4:40 pm

[The competent human speaker: Ableism and disabled speech](#)  
[Lesley Champion](#)

Beasley describes the good human as being governed by the requirement to speak, and to speak well (Beasley, 2021). The requirement for competent and competently speaking humans has been incorporated into the ableist norms to which we are all expected to conform. It is an imperative which is closely linked to other familiar humanist tropes of agency, bodily mastery, and boundedness (Davis, 1995; Moser, 2005), working to inform who can be considered fully human and who, in Campbell’s words, exists in ‘a diminished state of being human’ (Campbell, 2009, p. 5). Despite this, the presence of these ableist norms in relation to impaired speech is relatively under-researched.

Those living with a disability which affects their speech often experience a sense of social disconnection (Miller et al., 2006) and a sense that their humanity often goes unrecognised (Beasley, 2021). We invited Australian adults with life-long experience of impaired speech to talk to us about their experience of their speech and their ability to make themselves heard. These interviews work to place the focus back on the disabled voice, exploring not only how disability and competence are invented through large scale cultural discourses, but also how disabled speakers work within these possibilities, and sometimes at their edges, to invent themselves.

This paper will approach these semi-structured interviews with a view to exploring how impaired speakers navigate and move between various conceptualisations of disability and understandings of competence to position themselves as competent, or incompetent, speakers.

Paying attention to the ways in which impaired speakers play with, draw on, resist and subvert these ableist norms to validate their voices and their humanity allows us to not only expose the networks of beliefs which have invented the (competently speaking, able-bodied) human, but also to begin thinking about how the diversity of human voices might be invented differently.

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

## **Conversation 9 - First and Last things, from quotidian life to death and catastrophe**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

4:00 pm

[Inventorying invention: Annie Ernaux's \*The Years\*](#)

[Dr Elizabeth McLean](#)

*It was considered more chic to serve pears in syrup than ripe from the tree. Food's 'digestibility', vitamins, and 'calorie count' had started to matter. We marvelled at inventions that erased centuries of gestures and effort. Soon there would come a time, so it was said, when there'd be nothing left for us to do.*

– Annie Ernaux, *The Years* (2008)

Organised by a sequence of ekphrases that describe photographs of the author herself from childhood through to the present, *The Years* is Annie Ernaux's compilation of histories personal, political, and cultural. By referring to herself in the third person, to the reader in the indefinite second person, and employing the collective pronouns 'we' and 'us', Ernaux all but dissolves narrative centrality, a convention her fellow life-writer, Rachel Cusk, has described as stressful and aggressive. Through this formal erosion, Ernaux resists more broadly the Romantic tradition of the *bildungsroman*, wherein we see historical events collapse into the history of the individual. Instead, as Alice Blackburn astutely writes, *The Years*, "seems to want to grant access to [the] mute thickness of historical, collective time."

In my paper I wish to read *The Years* in terms of invention, and invention's interaction with preservation, monumentalising, or maintenance. This seemingly dialectical relationship is straddled, I believe, through Ernaux's method of inventorying human life. As she engages a multitude of forms (books, films, music, philosophy, advertisements, shopping lists, headlines, diary entries), Ernaux evokes and archives minute moments in the production of communal, quotidian experience.

4:20 pm

[Done to Death: Aesthetics of Disappearance](#)

[Dr Sheridan Palmer](#)

How do we encode death if not by measurements of before and after, of finitude and disappearance. Death is inscribed into history by words, art, burial, and the erection of memorials, after all, the threat of oblivion induces commemoration. The shape of death is ontologically both fixed and metaphysically abstract. It is one half of life's binary, being and nothingness, one determined by realism and rationalism, and the other represented as abstraction and the unknown. William Blake's artistic vision of humankind in the age of materialist progress against a backdrop of the dark, secularised industrial world, escorted us to the underworld with Virgil and Dante. The translation of death by western cultures and socialised religions, or Eastern spirituality contain complexities that hound or round on each other through theological and philosophical circuits. This paper investigates ways of understanding and seeing the transition of human life, death and the enigma of the afterlife through the visual image, and how art helps us come to terms with the inevitability of mortality, as well as understanding the transcendental passages we use to tap into the aura of death.

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29 November 2023

**6:00 pm - 7:00 pm**



## Keynote 2: James Davies, 'On Being Kind; or Music Lessons in Disanthropy' [FREE IN-PERSON EVENT]

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Keynote - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

6:00 pm

[On Being Kind; or Music Lessons in Disanthropy](#)

[James Davies](#)

**FREE IN-PERSON EVENT: Non-delegates, book via [Eventbrite](#)**

This paper accounts for “music” as a site for soundings of the human, and for setting out terms for “kindness” in a period of rampant European colonial expansion. It has been said of musical knowledge “after 1800” that it was vital to stylizations of man-animal relations, spirit possession states, geopolitical orders, legal property regimes, ideas about reason and aesthetics, autonomy and freedom, racial and sexual typologies, and that it set the store for organism-plus-climate thinking, and environmentality writ large. In counterpoint, acoustic knowledge also became mixed up in liberal histories of sympathetic resonance, good listening, humanitarian intervention, and kindness.

If the paper has a provocation, it is to pull out a disanthropic strand in the last 223 years of European musical thought devoted, not to the milquetoast liberalism underscoring what Walter Mignolo calls *pluriversal humanity*, but to what Foucault, in the conference abstract, calls *the erasure of man*. The will to human erasure is in fact a topos common to accounts of much European romantic-modern music, emancipation from the *massa damnata* being the aspiration of our best avant-garde creatives, disruptors, and deregulators. I want to historicize the idea, formed in the ethical claim that to be kind to the planet, life, animals or environments, that a line should be drawn under humanity. My topic, in other words, is *human sacrifice* – the conviction that, for the greater good, humans must go.

Are kind beings really being kind when they are being kind “beyond the human”?

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30 November 2023

**9:30 am - 11:00 am**

**Conversation 10 - Between the human and the artificial**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

9:30 am

[Virtual Reality as Empathy Machine: Rethinking the Human in Distant Suffering](#)

[Professor Sandra Ponzanesi](#)

Virtual Reality (VR) is a technology that allows immersion and embodiment. It makes it possible for someone to transcend the confines of their own body and adopt another character’s point of view. *Clouds over Sidra* (2015), a 360-degree documentary video produced by the United Nations, provides such a virtual experience. It allows viewers to peek into the life of 12-year-old Sidra, a Syrian refugee housed in the Za’atari refugee camp in Jordan, home to 130,000 Syrians fleeing violence and war. In his popular Ted Talk, Chris Milk (2015), one of the makers, states:

*“VR connects humans to other humans in a profound way that I have never seen before in any other form or media. So, it is a machine, but through this machine we become more compassionate, we become more empathetic, and we become more connected. And ultimately, we become more human[.]”*

As Rosi Braidotti writes bodies are not only a socially constructed entity, but an embodied, embedded, relational and affective portal to the world. The embodied self, far from being the unitary point of epistemological verification of lived experiences, turns into a crowd of human and non-human housemates. For this reason, VR has been postulated as a ‘technology of feelings’, one that promotes compassion, connection and intimacy by allowing the viewer to experience the lives of other humans, for example distant sufferers such as migrants or refugees.

Humanitarian VR productions, such as *Clouds over Sidra*, celebrate the value of the embodied presence of other humans simulated by this advanced technology. Yet, critics point out to the inherent bias of the technology itself as “humanitarian VR is an ambivalent sensory experience of bodily absence triggered by its technological limits” (Zimanyi and Ben Ayoun, 2019). Humanitarian VR should seek to move beyond provoking *feelings* on the part of the spectator to raising the possibility of tangible action *outside* of the representative space, in order to avoid ceremonial cosmopolitanism.

This intervention intends to explore how ‘human’ is the human in humanitarian communication and whether the unprecedented success and efforts of UN VR campaigns for example, do not risk fabricating new ideas of the human that inherently disempower, dehumanize and infantilize the distant others, rethought as proximate and alike humans. The drive for innovation and technosolutionism should be understood within a socio-critical context in which humans from different backgrounds are considered, avoiding easy universalism and stereotypes.

9:50 am

[From Nonperson to More-Than-Human: Understanding ageing in Gerontology's Posthuman Turn through Changanti Tulsi's "Sunstroke"](#)  
[Ms. Jithya Paul](#)

This article has a double aim: it contributes to the emerging paradigm of literary gerontology by borrowing theories from posthumanism and revisits the relation between posthumanism and affect with regard to the lives of older adults. Changanti Tulasi's short story “Sunstroke” (1977) conceptualizes this relation and illuminates on the one hand, how in the twenty-first century, a gradual deviation towards posthuman social condition challenges the stereotypical portrayals of older adults as ‘nonperson’ and ‘immaterial’ and on the other, problematizes the materiality and beyond-the-human aspect of ageing, calling for an all-inclusive and age-friendly environment. “Sunstroke” foregrounds the entangled life of an aged individual with a non-human material entity or artefact that turns into an external manifestation of the users' subjectivity. The novelty of the paper lies in its ability to bring out how the short story concedes on these artefacts' agency to create an affective reality for the aged individual thereby clearly bringing the human/nonhuman distinction on the same level of existence. The paper argues that these material entities are not only responsible for ageing realities and experiences, but they are all capable of agency and can co-evolve together, emphasising a more-than-human approach in ageing studies. The novel may be conceived to be a commentary on the emerging discourse in the domain of literary gerontology that aims to cognize the complex interplay between the human and nonhuman world that is transformed into a non-animate subject by the experientialities of the individuals possessing those artefacts. The subjective experientialities relate to the concept of sensitive objects as explored in knowledge domains such as life-course study, material gerontology, and material culture. The paper draws on critical perspectives from posthuman affect and immaterial bodies to contend on the affective experientialities of older adults that emerge as a result of the interaction between humans and non-animate beings.

10:10 am

[Getting to Know You: How Artificial is Engineered Friendship?](#)  
[Professor Purnima Mankekar](#)

### ***Getting to Know You: How Artificial is Engineered Friendship?***

Sparked by the use of robots to provide care for the elderly in Japan, several questions have (re)surfaced regarding relationships between the human and more-than-human and about the engineering of friendship and empathy. AI and robots are also increasingly deployed in mental health settings, for instance, to provide psychotherapy or to detect and treat autism. In many of these contexts, robots are expected to engage in *relationships* with humans, thus foregrounding the centrality of the more-than-human in the generation and circulation of affect. Several cultural and spiritual traditions across the world acknowledge and, indeed, center the agentic capacity of objects, animals, spirits, and landscapes as well as the affective relationships that form between the more-than-human and humans: they problematize assumptions that agency and affect are unique to human beings.

My presentation draws on my previous research on the affective labor of call center workers in India and my new project on algorithms and emotions. Recent debates regarding robots and humanoids query their ability to engage in affective relationships, in particular, those based on empathy and friendship; they also

construct narratives of futurity that interrogate the place of the human vis-à-vis the machine, robots, and AI. Some of these debates have shaped popular fiction, for instance, novels such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (which builds on his earlier book, *Never Let Me Go*, a poignant indictment of Enlightenment conceptions of knowledge) and Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. Both these novels focus on friendships forged between humans, humanoids, and robots, and, in the process, they develop narratives of futurity predicated on dominant discourses regarding relationships between the human, the more-than-human, and machines.

In my paper, I reflect on how these narratives of futurity compel us to rethink the centrality of empathy to what we consider "the human." I stage a dialogue between anthropological scholarship on cross-cultural understandings of empathy on the one hand and, on the other, novels like *Machines Like Me* and *Klara and the Sun* to ask: how artificial is engineered friendship? How does the ability of robots and humanoids to engage in empathetic relationships with humans compel us to rethink the boundaries between us and the more-than-human?

**9:30 am - 11:00 am**

## **Conversation 11 - Telling stories about the human**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

9:30 am

[Enchanted Objects: Material Fictions in the Eighteenth Century](#)

[Dr. Lenka Filipova](#)

In the eighteenth century, many writers and thinkers believed firmly, although not without contestation, in the utopian potential of trade as a means of transcultural exchange and dialogue between vastly different communities across the globe. This consideration of global cooperation most often assumed, at the centre of its operations, a distinctly *human* agent (an individual or a company) in charge of directing the global flows of trade that would, hopefully, lead towards a better world. Yet the eighteenth century was also an era that displayed, at least in European societies of the Global North, a distinct fascination with objects, particularly those from distant lands. Traded as commodities, exchanged as exotic gifts or studied as scientific items and museum pieces, these objects became *dis*-placed and *re*-placed things, facilitating the narrativisation of both European and non-European cultures, accruing shifting meanings and recordings of their value as they moved across geographical and temporal zones.

In this paper, I will look at two instances of the mobility of objects in literature, specifically the peculiar eighteenth-century vogue for the genre of literature known as 'it-narratives'. Scholars have shown that the it-narrative needs to be seen in the context of commodity fetishism and the objectification of the human subject. However, my examination of these narratives foregrounds the various geographical and cross-cultural journeys undertaken by the object-narrator-protagonists as a mapping of global and worldly space-time. I read the it-narratives as forms of 'material fictions' in which the temporal mobilities of objects mediate between differences. My analysis utilizes Brian Massumi's concept of 'enactive cartography' (2002, 2014), as well as Catherine Malabou's notion of 'plasticity' (2008, 2010), which are remodelling relations within spacetime and the relations between things (human/nonhuman) that make up the world. Both Massumi and Malabou articulate notions of space and time that are contingent, local, embedded and provisional, and provide a theoretical framework to enable the movements of objects as creating culturally-specific locations of meaning in spacetime. I ask to what extent the affects created by the 'material fictions' can be seen as mobilising the possible by experimenting with conventional literary forms. The affective cartography created by the material excess of the objects contests binaries such as human/nonhuman and material/imaginary, pointing to a wider world that escapes our mapping and meaning-making efforts. As such, this process reconfigures spacetime as multi-layered, in which temporalities of the human and the nonhuman overlap and become entangled.

9:50 am

[Humans of Romanticism: George Scharf's street people](#)

[Professor Gillian Russell](#)

George Scharf, who was German-born and migrated to London in 1816, was an artist who worked primarily as a lithographer for the Geological Society and other scientific institutions. He was also responsible for over a thousand sketches, drawings and watercolours, now in the British Museum, that documented a

rapidly changing London between the 1820s and 40s. Scharf's interests are idiosyncratic, particular and local -- the backyard of his home in Francis Street off the Tottenham Court Road, for example, the laying of pipes for gas lighting and mains water, or pavements in the rain. He also depicts the metropolis's street hawkers, performers, signboard carriers, and delivery workers as well people on the move, engaged in their own unknowable business. In this paper I discuss one drawing, from 1841, entitled 'Dinner Time, Sunday, One O'Clock' which shows men, women, and children getting take-away food as many lower class dwellings did not have kitchens. The drawing features a well-known type in late Georgian-early Victorian society, the pot-boy, who delivered beer in tankards, carried in numbers in a rack. Scharf's drawing shows the 'boy', who is clearly a child, carrying his rack in one hand with his delivery list in the other. The pot-boy was a ubiquitous figure in early nineteenth century, comparable with others who were part of a communications infrastructure -- the newsman who delivered newspapers and the bill-sticker who posted notices on walls (both of whom are also depicted by Scharf). I compare Scharf's drawing with John Keats's view from his sick-room in Hampstead on a Sunday on February 8 1820 where he 'descried' a 'Pot Boy' and 'conjectured' that it was the 'one o'clock beer' and ask what does it mean to 'conjecture' time and sociality from such busy passers-by.

10:10 am

[Inventing the Colonial Child: Romantic Pedagogical Legacies in Louisa Anne Meredith's Children's Literature](#)

[Dr Sara Fernandes Crouch, Dr Lauren Weber](#)

This paper draws from a larger interdisciplinary project that seeks to establish the influence of British Romanticism on the way early colonial authors envisioned and theorised child development, teaching, and education in Australia. We introduce the work of Louisa Anne Meredith (1811-1880) as a case study of the way Romantic preoccupations such as sympathy and reason emerge within a latent colonial logic in writing for and about colonial Australian children. Meredith published a range of books for children exploring the island of Tasmania from her colonial perspective. Her work was printed in Australia and England, in multiple editions and widely circulated. In this paper, we focus on two of her works: *Loved and Lost! The True Story of a Short Life* (1860) and *Waratah Rhymes for Young Australia* (1878) to argue that Meredith's contribution to the history of Australian children's literature rests in her desire to author a contextualised account of 'island life' for the white Australian colonial child. Meredith's project is to encode a new genre that reconfigures familiar English modes such as the 'moral tale' which was developed by authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Lamb, amongst others, while also advancing a distinctive aesthetic of the miniature that finds expression in the island of Tasmania and the child as inquisitor. There is limited work on the migration and subsequent development of Romantic-era British pedagogy and children's literature across colonial lines. This paper reads the status of the colonial child in Meredith's works as the idealised mini-colonialist whose discovery of the landscape through fictional encounter positions them to craft the nation in their image.

**9:30 am - 11:00 am**

**Conversation 12 - Science Fiction: writing/rewriting the future**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

9:30 am

["Are you alive?": The Invention of the Human/e in Mary Shelley, Banna Ren, and Fujita Kazuhiro](#)

[Dr. Nahoko Alvey](#)

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the word "invent" is used twice. The word, however, does not appear in the process or concept of Victor Frankenstein's scientific creation, "the accomplishment of my toils" into which he infuses "a spark of being" (*Frankenstein 1818 Text* p.36). Shelley uses the word to describe two opposite poles of artistic creation. One is an art of literary creation represented by Henry Clerval's tales. The other is an art of depriving life, whether by execution or by a slow torturing manner: Elizabeth Lavenza compares the execution of Justine Moritz with the punishments "the gloomiest tyrant has ever invented to satiate his utmost revenge" (vol.1. ch.7).

Shelley's *Frankenstein* is, unlike Clerval's wonderful literary creation, a "hideous progeny" ("Introduction" to the 1831 text), in which she explores the art of tortures and death in medicine, science, and law. She delineates human sufferings experienced by all the main characters, including the nameless being created by Victor, who assembled parts from dead bodies of humans and animals. In doing so, she fails the characters whose intellectual or physical abilities make them more than or less than human. Her attempt in *Frankenstein* to seek what humanizes a being, whether it is a human being or not, has attracted and

influenced numerous later artists and writers, producing many hideous offsprings all over the world. This paper considers Mary Shelley's attempt to construct the human as inventing the human/e through literary imagination. It examines *Frankenstein* and two of its numerous sequels written beyond Europe in our century. The paper focuses on Banna Ren's short fiction, "Three Laws of Frankenstein, or Usurpation of Corpses" (2015), in which the created being sets up the Zeroth Law of preservation of life, and Fujita Kazuhiro's *manga* (a graphic novel), "Crescent Moon, Dance with the Monster" (2022-) in which Mary Shelley names the female monster. The paper hopes to show how those two Japanese works share important concerns with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and seek a way of inventing the human/e in the Anthropocene era.

9:50 am

[George Turner and the Future of Humanity](#)

[Prof Anne Maxwell](#)

Australian novelist George Turner (1916–1997) has never had a large readership in Australia, but he remains a big name in SF circles in the USA. My paper examines the posthumous novel for which he won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Novel. *Down There in Darkness* (1999) is a haunting tale about two men who are cryogenically frozen and who awaken two centuries later to find themselves in a completely unfamiliar Australia, one that because it has undergone climatic catastrophe, has been reborn with genetic scientists in charge. Reproduction in this new world involves white people mating with Aboriginal Australians because they are seen by these scientists as the only race genetically and culturally suited to long term human survival. The novel is futuristic, but it is also a reflection on current Enlightenment political, biopolitical and epistemological practices and how these will need to change if the human race is to survive into the future. Turner, I argue, regarded fiction as a medium through which to address what he viewed as pressing global problems. I argue that although he made innovative use of SF writers like HG Wells, Olaf Stapledon and Ursula Le Guin, arguably his greatest innovation, as evidenced by this novel, was to portray the compact between ordinary working class citizens and Indigeneity as part of the solution to the looming problems of scientific hubris, social inequality and climate change.

10:10 am

[Diving for Homo Aquaticus](#)

[Dr Killian Quigley](#)

Speaking at a conference in 1962, the underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau foretold the appearance of a novel kind of hominid. "*Homo aquaticus*" was coming, thanks not to "the slow blind natural adaptation of species" but to "a conscious and deliberate evolution." Cousteau's aqueous posthuman was meant to herald the arrival of a new historical era, but his fantasy has an old pedigree. In 1648, the priest and mechanical philosopher John Wilkins published an essay on submergence which ventured the intriguing (and comparatively modest) claim that while "long use and custome" might not entirely enable a person "to live in the open water as the fishes do," a practised diver was sure nonetheless to be relieved of the inconvenience of always requiring "pure" air for breathing. Where Cousteau anticipated "future generations born in underwater villages," Wilkins had pondered numerous "Colonies...having their Children born and bred up without the knowledg [*sic*] of land."

This paper takes Cousteau's and Wilkins's visions as exemplary of a long history of testing the edges of human bodily necessity, and even inventing new forms of humanity, via prospects of extraordinary immersion. As well as experiments in defamiliarizing terrestrial views—Wilkins imagined the submarine children's amazement at discovering the "strange conceits" of "this upper world"—such prospects have frequently testified to the (reputed) achievements of real divers, that international cast of (mostly) breath-hold experts who have populated poems, scientific treatises, novels, and visual art, abundantly and marginally, for the past four centuries and more. Their meanings have been as plentifully diverse as their appearances, but they share a literally profound concern with the affordances of *unbreathing* for alternative protocols of sensing, knowing, and inhabiting. As well as pivotally informing significant trajectories in submersed poetics in and beyond the Romantic era, those protocols' contemporary salience suggests the importance of forms and practices in un-inspired humanism for the future of our "more oceanic" planet.

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30 November 2023

**11:00 am - 11:30 am**  
**Morning Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



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30 November 2023

**11:30 am - 12:30 pm**

**Keynote 3: Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu, 'Grown by Country ...'**

Keynote - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

11:30 am

[Grown by Country: Becoming Companions in Contemporary Australia](#)

[Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu](#)

What does it mean to live together as companions in this land? By learning to read country, a younger generation of Warlpiri is shaped by patterns of ecology, law and culture that have sustained healthy communities for generations. Through songs and stories, Warlpiri also learn that purpose and belonging require us to become companions, friends who nurture one another in our differences. A shared identity that belongs to both Warlpiri and Kardiya (non-Indigenous) can emerge through such mutual respect and nurture, a gift that cannot be sustained by mere nominations of Australian multiculturalism.

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30 November 2023

**12:30 pm - 2:00 pm**

**Lunch**

Break - [In-Person Only](#)



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30 November 2023

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm**

## **Conversation 13 - Writing/rewriting the human (02)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

2:00 pm

[Mutant people: Reading reinventions of the human subject across the 20th century avant-garde.](#)

[George Mouratidis](#), [Sarah Fantini](#), [Mr James Macaronas](#)

This panel comprises three papers that examine 20th century avant-garde and countercultural depictions of the human, exploring how immense sociotechnological shifts compelled artists to revise Enlightenment notions of the human subject.

### **Gertrude Stein's Proliferating Lyric Subject. (Sarah Fantini)**

Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, written from 1910 and published in 1914, comprises syntactic structures that exclude personal pronouns. However, in poetry written during the First World War, the personal pronoun returns, often with the first-person plural, 'we'. *Lifting Belly* is among the most well-known of these works. It contains obscure autobiographical reference, and some of Stein's most explicit eroticism, alongside language play and dialogic exchanges. But while the voices are multiple, and actively discursive, they are often characterless and undifferentiable. In this paper, I will examine what this multiplicity does to the lyric subject, often read as a stable and singular 'I' that identifies with the poet in the moment of utterance. With Stein's 'we', who or what is speaking? Perhaps a pluralised poet-speaker, a pair of intimate partners, a social milieu; or perhaps a 'we' without stable deictic reference speaks an impersonal and undifferentiated multiplicity.

### **Acting out 'free': The San Francisco Diggers and the (R)evolution of Human Society in the Haight-Ashbury. (George Mouratidis)**

On October 6, 1967, the San Francisco Diggers, a group of guerilla actor-provocateurs and community activists, staged a mock funeral procession to mark "the Death of Hippie" and herald "the birth of Free Man." While the latter term did not supersede the former as they had hoped, the event nevertheless continue the Diggers' social experiment of provoking considerations of a more direct, organic relationship between human experience and self-identity, both individual and collective, and the concept of "free" outside institutionalized discourses and modalities of the post-Camelot Vietnam-era America. Taking their name from the proto-socialist English dissidents of the mid-seventeenth century who sought to reform society by agitating public space and repurposing common land, the Diggers combined a community-minded personal politics of liberation and responsibility with avant-garde absurdism, Dada and Situationism to create a living guerilla theatre. Through hit-and-run plays and events such as "The Death of Money" in public spaces and community projects such as the Feed-In and the Free Store, the Diggers saw the Haight-Ashbury neighbourhood as a giant public stage in which to challenge prevailing notions of society and civilization by "acting out" alternative, more "authentic" models of living in the face of a dehumanising capitalism run amok.

### **"I feel! I anger! I fight!": Exclaiming the human in Jack Kirby's *The New Gods*. (James Macaronas)**

From 1970, artist and writer Jack Kirby began working for DC Comics, where he wrote and illustrated four interconnected titles that would come to be known as the Fourth World saga. *The New Gods*, the centrepiece of the saga, describes a secret war waged on Earth between the benevolent gods of New Genesis and their tyrannical counterparts on the planet Apokolips. This paper examines Kirby's mythopoesis as part of a broader post-Sixties response to Western technocracy, which reinvented the human as a split subject, divided between the promise of alternative futures and the reality of the material present. This split is manifest in Kirby's art, but amplified in his prose, which repeatedly asserts the virtues of the human figure, even as the narrative arc of the text threatens to tear it apart.

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm**

## **Conversation 14 - Digital Futures (education, reading, imagination)**

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2:00 pm

[Conceptualising postdigital humanity in higher education: A novel theorisation of subjectivity using Romantic literature and literary theory.](#)

[Mr Brian Martin](#)

We are accelerating towards a higher education future where AI, dataveillance, and personalisation are de-humanising the educational experience within virtual learning environments (VLEs). These teaching machines risk driving higher education away from its social and subjective aims towards efficient ways to credential human capital (Watters, 2021). The social effects of technology upon education are emerging within critical studies of educational technology (Macgilchrist, 2021) that highlight unforeseen and emerging harms upon individuals (Selwyn, 2010). This postdigital education research agenda, articulated by Fawns et al. (2023),

invites scholars to interrogate issues of sociomaterial entanglement and human experience. Here, a knowledge gap exists in our ability to conceptualise how student subjectivities might be shaped by emergent VLEs (Castañeda & Williamson, 2021). This paper seeks to develop such concepts through post-qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2018) that thinks with Romantic literature and literary theory.

Postdigital critique echoes the central tenets of Romanticism, which questioned the veneration of technology, efficiency, and logic in favour of social justice and the flourishing of individual subjectivity (Ferber, 2010). In this paper I imagine how the Romantics might describe experience in VLEs supported by scholars that analyse literary tropes to generate novel concepts of how subjectivities could be forged. The literary retorts of Shelley, Austen, and Wordsworth to the Enlightenment (Berlin, 2013) have much to teach us about the loss of agency in emergent educational worlds and the unforeseen consequences of rapid technological advancement (Beetham et al., 2022; Douglas, 2017; Thompson, 2022). For example, Trigg (2015) highlights how Jane Austen's depictions of codified behaviours are developed to explain how subjects navigate "socially restricted spaces" (p. 199) by narrowcasting emotion. This has much to offer towards understanding the powerful gaze of affect recognition software within VLEs and the performative resistance that might ensue (McStay, 2020; Sumner, 2021; Sumner & Martin, 2020). Alongside Shelley's (1996) depiction of a non-human ethnographer, we might also speculate upon how AI might calculate our human striving to become.

My inquiry seeks to capture the power of literature to provide "scaffolding for the narrative imagination" (Comer & Taggart, 2021, p. 199) and contribute to knowledge at the intersection of literary theory, surveillance, and education (Brighenti, 2009). Following Greene (1976), I seek to draw literature into the otherwise social-scientific paradigm of educational research to develop theories of subjectivity for a plausibly less human education future (Carlin, 2010; Pasquale & Selwyn, 2022).

2:20 pm

[#Clarissa2020: Reading Apart, Together](#)

[Francesca Kavanagh](#)

In his novel *Clarissa* (1748-49), Samuel Richardson produces a model of friendship and human connection that depends upon the "necessary absence" of letter writing (6). In the increasingly restricted environment of the novel, Clarissa and her friend Anna perform their friendship through their letters, evoking their spaces of writing and reading to create a shared imagined space in which to foster intimacy and maintain their social connection. 270 years later, two separate but related groups of readers picked up Richardson's novel, to share an experience of reading apart, together. From across the world, academics and literary enthusiasts shared their experiences of reading *Clarissa* via Twitter using #Clarissa2020 to chart their course through the novel, reading each letter on the date it is written in the novel. This endeavour began before the global outbreak of Covid-19 but took on new resonances when the pandemic caused those readers, like Clarissa herself, to be locked down. In the wake of the outbreak in May 2020 a reading group of academics in the US selected *Clarissa* as "the long, immersive novel for the moment" (Lynch), meeting over zoom to discuss the novel throughout the northern hemisphere summer of 2020. Twelve members of the reading group contributed to an issue of the online journal *The Rambling*, to reflect upon their shared experience of reading the novel in lockdown. This paper examines the ways in which these groups—#Clarissa2020 and the reading group *Clarissa*, in Lockdown, Together—share their experience of reading in virtual and digital spaces, collaboratively building an online community for human social connection during a time of absence and isolation. It argues that these digital spaces and virtual communities are built through the same methods deployed by Clarissa and Anna to maintain their friendship through their correspondence. Using the exchange of text (whether the letter, a tweet, a poem or an article) #Clarissa2020 and *Clarissa*, in Lockdown, Together evoke the affective experiences, physical places, and imagined spaces

of their reading to remap and rearticulate the novel in the twenty-first century digital landscape. In doing so, they build, Like Clarissa and Anna, a new virtual and imagined space for human social connection.

Lynch, Deidre. "‘Nothing of Body’: Our Clarissa Quarantine." *The Rambling*, no. 11, June 2021, <https://the-rambling.com/2021/06/11/issue11-lynch/>.

Richardson, Samuel. *Correspondence with Sarah Wescomb, Frances Grainger and Laetitia Pilkington*. Edited by John A. Dussinger, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

2:40 pm

[The collective imagination: considering the site of creation via collaborative writings of climate change](#)  
[Dr Rachel Hennessy, Amy Matthews, Alexander Cothren](#)

While artistic production in narrative forms such as film and television are often recognised as a collaborative process, prose writing remains focused on the idea of a transcendent, imaginative, individual author, locked away in their garret, producing a text ripe for dissemination via traditional publishing methods. In the meantime, the postmodern imagination, having lost sight of narrative as a source of ethical representation, traps itself inside pastiche and irony. Where, then, does the posthuman imagination lie? This paper presents ongoing research, by the three authors, into climate fiction and collaborative writing processes for prose fiction writers. New technologies, such as the collaborative whiteboard on Zoom, Google docs, or Etherpad, allow multiple writers to work on a document in real time, at the same time. These technologies have been utilised primarily in the corporate world, with the ability to collectively work on a document seen as time-saving and pro-actively embodying "teamwork". These liberal capitalist aims are not self-evidently desirable, but a posthuman focus on connectivity might offer a way for these tools to be repurposed. Homing in on climate fiction – a sub-genre of literature that depicts climate change – and discovering it to frequently be mired in dystopian landscapes that offer little hope, we posit that writing climate fiction collaboratively might be one way to use these technologies to both challenge fixed notions of where the imagination resides – inside the modernist individual genius – and to imagine different futures. To explore this hypothesis, we run Posthuman Artists' Laboratories that re-position imagination as not centred in the internal, solitary self but engage with the notion of play and public imaginings of alternative ways of being. We propose that there is a strong (posthuman) argument for fiction writers to abandon the desire to be identified as one singular being with a unique voice and reimagine their creative subjectivities as a sticky web of connections.

This research is supported by the Flinders University Assemblage Centre for Creative Arts Research Grant Scheme.

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30 November 2023

**3:30 pm - 4:00 pm**  
**Afternoon Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



30 November 2023

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

## **Roundtable 1: Pushing the Boundaries: Dance, Music, Technology and Disability**

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Roundtable - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

4:00 pm

### [Pushing the Boundaries: Dance, Music, Technology and Disability](#)

As dancers and musicians we live with expectations around bodily perfection every day. Our movements are analysed and scrutinised from every angle as we are surrounded by cultural exceptions of what it means to be graceful, to be beautiful, to be elite artists. This roundtable will explore how these exceptions play out for and are reimagined by performing artists with disability and how we can use technology to embrace both our differences and our similarities with other artists and our audiences.

Convened by [Anthea Skinner](#) (McKenzie Postdoctoral Fellow, Victorian College of the Arts).

Participants:

Dr [Melinda Smith](#) (OAM) (Dancer, Performance Artist, Performer, Speaker)

Dr [Suzanne Cowan](#) (performer, choreographer, teacher and researcher)

Prof. [Carol Brown](#) (Professor in Dance, Victorian College of the Arts)

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

## **Roundtable 2: Varieties of Imagination, Creativity and Wellbeing in Asia**

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Roundtable - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

4:00 pm

### [Varieties of Imagination, Creativity, and Wellbeing in Asia](#)

Creativity is a key word in contemporary culture, which appears in talk of creative economies, cities, communities, classes, institutions, and so on; and in relation to a wide range of disciplines—creative arts, creative writing, arts management, economics (the creative economy), town planning, and so on—where it names a key concept. It is also increasingly understood as an important ingredient in the experience of 'well being,' which is in turn becoming increasingly significant in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and in the context of the now rapidly unfolding disasters produced by climate change and apparently unresolvable conflict. And yet despite their significance, understandings of creativity and wellbeing are still largely Eurocentric and pay sparse attention to what these terms mean in other cultural traditions, where quite different cultural practices and cultural competences support them. These remarks provide the starting point for this discussion of the 'Varieties of Imagination, Creativity, and Wellbeing in Asia,' which asks whether these concepts, as they are understood and operate locally, might be linked to broader issues, e.g., power, politics, history, identity, agency, place, etc.? And also, to what extent this diversity has implications for the functioning of different social and cultural groups and, to that extent, for Australia, perhaps also the region, as a whole.

Convened by Vedi Hadiz (Director and Professor of Asian Studies at the Asia Institute) and Peter Otto (Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor and Executive Director, ERCC).

Participants:

Dr [Anita Archer](#) (Co-convenor, 'Inventing the Human'; Business Development Manager for Faculty of Fine Arts and Music).

Dr [Danny Butt](#) (Senior Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Practice at Victorian College of the Arts).

Dr [Jon Glade](#) (Japanese Studies, Asia Institute).

Prof. [Charles Green](#) (Professor of Contemporary Art, University of Melbourne).

A/Prof. [Edwin Jurriëns](#) (Associate Professor in Indonesian Studies, Asia Institute).

[Chris Parkinson](#) (photographic artist, arts professional and published author).

[Nur Shkempi](#) (art historian, curator, and writer, who was part of the core team that established the Islamic Museum of Australia, serving as the museum's inaugural Art Director and founding Curator).□



## 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm Roundtable 3: Artificial Intelligence

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Roundtable - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

4:00 pm

### [Artificial Intelligence](#)

In this roundtable, Joel Stern and Sean Dockray will be animating a hands-on experience, taken from their current Machine Listening project. Participants will listen with (and through AI) a system to generate a shared experience of where AI (and Machine Learning) sits in relation to human experience – where it fails, where it hallucinates, where it modulates our sense of sounds. Then, we will reflect on the experience collectively.

Convened by Fabio Mattioli, Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology, University of Melbourne, and Associated Researcher at the Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Ethics.

Participants:

[Joel Stern](#) (artist, curator and researcher; Vice Chancellor's Research Fellow at RMIT School of Media and Communication).

[Sean Dockray](#) (artist and writer; Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Monash University; founding director of the Los Angeles non-profit Telic Arts Exchange, and initiator of knowledge-sharing platforms, The Public School and [AAAAARG.ORG](#).)

Respondent:

Prof. [Chris Danta](#) (ARC Future Fellow (2021-24) and professor of English at UNSW).

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30 November 2023

## 5:30 pm - 6:00 pm Break

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



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30 November 2023

## 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm Keynote 4: Sujit Sivasundaram, 'The Human and the Ocean ...' [FREE IN-PERSON EVENT]

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Keynote - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

6:00 pm

[The Human and the Ocean at the Centre of the Earth](#)

[Sujit Sivasundaram](#)

**FREE IN-PERSON EVENT: Non-delegates, book via [Eventbrite](#).**

The Indian Ocean is the youngest of the world's oceans. The character of this great sea, trapped by continents to the north, without an escape route by water, and on all sides by lands teeming with people, speaks to this conference's theme. How shall we understand the definition, the rise, and the future of the human? Three of five people in the global population live facing the Indian Ocean. A third of the world's cargo passes through it. This is also the region which holds the bulk of the world's fossil fuels. It is likely to be a region which experiences the early effects of climate change given on-going changes to the monsoon, sometimes seen as the lung of this great sea, as well as vulnerability to rising sea levels, especially when low-lying cities and settlements are taken into view. In this provocation, I build on a project-in-progress, which tracks the travels of environmental objects across this great sea to illustrate the way humans and nature have interacted over centuries. The provocation points to the uncertain pathways through which humans travelled in this arena of early globalisation; the unexpected natural things which proved durable in forging global economies, migratory webs or forms of communication; how the control of nature required the taming of the human body; and, how human senses and human imagination played a role in the triumph of romantic, enlightened and reasoned imperial science. If these travels, experiments, controls and flights of mind were central to the human's mastery of the Indian ocean, how are we to work towards de-seating these inventive and tragic modes of being?

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01 December 2023

**9:30 am - 10:30 am**

**Keynote 5: Amanda Jo Goldstein, 'Ulterior to Man ...'**

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Keynote - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

9:30 am

[Ulterior to 'Man': Cooperative Evolution, from Kropotkin's Anarchist Ecology to Grigg's Black Utopias](#)

[Amanda Jo Goldstein](#)

From the Romantic period to the present day, evolutionary biology has exerted a powerful hold over what the nature in "human nature" is authorized to be. Returning to the nineteenth-century crucible of Darwinism and its discontents, this talk will focus on an improbable strand in that debate. I turn to Peter Kropotkin's anarchist classic *Mutual Aid* (1902), which turns out to be a work of alt-Darwinian evolutionary biology that centers the social lives of human and non-human others of "Man." Seeking to save Darwin from the Social Darwinists, Kropotkin – an internationally-respected biogeographer exiled to London for his revolutionary activities – reveals how the dogma of biological individualism in the modern Anglophone study of nature renders the reality of uncoerced cooperation a "Utopian" illusion in both natural and social realms. In Kropotkin's alternative view, evolutionary nature evinces the capacity for forms of organized flourishing without domination, and anarchist tactics like "direct action" and "mutual aid" are capacities that derive from and are shared with plant and animal life. To think through the implications of this view, I trace Kropotkin's uptake by African American liberation sociologist Sutton E. Griggs (1872-1933), whose astonishing works of speculative fiction bend Kropotkin's sense of "co-operation" to unforeseen ends.

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01 December 2023

**10:30 am - 11:00 am**

**Morning Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



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01 December 2023

**11:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Conversation 15 - In the Penal Colony: Romanticism/ Colonialism/ Australia (01)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

11:00 am

[In the Penal Colony: Romanticism/Colonialism/Australia - Part 1](#)

[Dr Justin Clemens, Thomas Ford](#)

Almost all the scholarly authorities agree: the radical and reformist writings of British Romanticism had a decisive impact upon the post-1788 British settler colony that was to become Australia. Yet, when imported in this way, many fundamental aspects of Romantic writing self-evidently underwent a strange, often malignant sea-change. This double panel discussion will bring together established and emerging researchers in the field of Australian colonial writing to discuss the details and consequences of this fateful importation. Organised by Justin Clemens and Thomas H. Ford, who will also speak, the two panels will consist of Claire Knowles (senior lecturer, LaTrobe), Brendan Casey (PhD student, Unimelb), Kyle Kohinga (PhD student, Deakin), and Hannah Murray (fixed-term lecturer, Unimelb).

**11:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Conversation 16 - Rethinking categories: Romanticism, Liberal Humanism, Posthumanism**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

11:00 am

["Where Branchèd Thoughts \[...\] Shall Murrur in the Wind". Re-Thinking the Human in Keats's Theories of Expanded Sympathy and Artistic Creation](#)

[Greta Perletti](#)

In order to promote new forms of thinking about posthumanism, my research paper would like to focus on the extent to which John Keats's theories of artistic creation seem to point beyond traditionally (European-centred) Romantic traditions. In particular, my paper aims to combine ecocritical explorations of Keatsian ecosystems (Bate 2000; Scott 2014; Clark 2015; Henning 2018) with new materialist approaches that foreground the interconnectedness of the various (human as well as nonhuman) entities inhabiting ecosystems. In particular, this paper would like to explore the potentiality that Keats's ideas on poetic receptivity and creation may have for an aesthetic theory that goes beyond human exceptionalism. Relying on recent studies on the importance of Keats's medical background (de Almeida 1991; Roe 2017), Keatsian receptivity and his notions of 'negative capability' and 'material sublime' will be placed in the context of medical and materially-oriented discussions of heightened sensibility and expanded sympathy, which emphasise the intersubjective orientation of the nervous system (Bassiri 2013). For Keats, the creative process is inseparable from the enhancement of sympathy: the chameleon-like poet "is continually in for

and filling some other body" (*Letters*, 210) in a yearning that is not just expressive of the might of human mental powers, but rather strives for the dissolution of the boundaries of the self so as to promote the identification with human as well as nonhuman and even inanimate entities (for example a sparrow, or a billiard ball). By so doing, Keats's aesthetic theory rejects the notion of "the Wordsworthian, egotistical sublime" (*Letters*, 210) and embraces instead the conception of environmental relations founded on interdependency and mutual shaping, in ways that seem to anticipate ecocritical notions of 'transcorporeality' and 'intra-activity' (Alaimo 2010) among human and nonhuman beings, and their collective constitution of the world. While in Keats's aesthetic theory and poetry the dissolution of individual boundaries is never far from the risks of pathology, his ideas about receptivity contribute in significant ways to the de-essentialist perspective that is crucial to any discussion of posthumanism. By focusing on extracts from Keats's letters dealing with his theory of poetic receptivity and creation and on the environmental intersubjective relations to be found in his poetry (the Odes but also some of his narrative poems), this paper intends to argue for the relevance of Keats's works for the de-centering of the self that preludes to new possibilities for the human and post-human.

11:20 am

[X Marks the Spot: Lyrical Ballads at the Bookends](#)

[Dr. Omar Miranda](#)

This presentation will bring together Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere" (1798) and *The White Doe of Rylstone; Or, The Fate of the Nortons* (1807/1815) into a long-overdue conversation. After all, these "bookend" poems – the former being the very first poem appearing in the sequence of the original 1798 collection of *Lyrical Ballads* and the latter being, according to Wordsworth, the final lyrical ballad that he authored – have surprisingly much in common. Both are adapted literary ballads from Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) – "The Wandering Jew" and the "Rising of the North," respectively, that center a non-human character, the albatross and the white doe, to foreground didactic messages about the sanctity of all living beings in the natural world. Each is also structured formally as a seven-part frame narrative whose plots about pilgrimages advance cyclically even beyond their final lines: the mariner will continue to tell his tale and the doe will journey from Rylstone to Bolton Priory to make its weekly sabbath appearance. As both begin and end with a narrator ruminating on past tragic events, parts two through six track that previous experience (the mariner's travails at sea and the downfall of the Norton family), employing gothic tropes through the appearance of haunted ships, sailors rising from the dead, or spectral visions of phantasms. In this paper, however, I wish to investigate specifically how both poems of tragedy and hope curiously operate as generic experiments. Each poem methodically distances itself from the particularity of literary traditions, including romance, elegy, legend, lyric, and balladry, while also exploring a deep interest in establishing alternative collective bodies outside of the conventional structures of organized religion. More specifically, in pushing their lyrical and balladic boundaries, both poems present what I call a hymnic mode, a process by which each poem's culminating point of lyric and exilic transformation is linked with the communal presentation of a hymn. In other words, when each lyrical ballad becomes specifically *hymnic*, I suggest that the form transmutes by expanding the personal or individual voice of the poet into an interpersonal and communal/plural mode of expression. Ultimately, I propose that both "The Rime" and *The White Doe* continually reaffirm their shifting power paradigms and revisionary modes of historiography and testimony through their recursive structures: both repeatedly underscore their radical ambitions, which include, I will suggest, their representations of minoritarian communities as well as the post-humanist propositions on which each work is fundamentally grounded.

11:40 am

["Color – Caste – Denomination –": War, Humanity, and Racial Intimacies in Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic/Transpacific Romanticism](#)

[Prof Li-hsin Hsu](#)

The presentation proposes to examine the invention (or reconfiguration) of Enlightenment humanism in the nineteenth century through the triangulation among Europe, Asia and America. The paper will look at the works of a number of nineteenth-century transatlantic Romantic writers, such as William Wordsworth's sonnet "The Banished Negroes" (1802) and "The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at Its Commencement" (1809), Emily Dickinson's "Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!" (1862) and "Color – Caste – Denomination –" (1864), and Helen Hunt Jackson's "The Story of Boon" (1875) and *Ramona* (1884), rethinking the Romantic conceptualization of the human as a liberal subject and its translation, transmission, and transformation embedded in the racialized comparative paradigm across the transatlantic and transpacific literary world. Building on what Lisa Lowe calls "the intimacies of four continents" (2015), the paper explores the interconnectedness among a number of momentous geo-political conflicts, such as the French Revolution, the Sino-Anglo Opium War, the Mexico-American War, the American Civil War, and the Russo-Circassian War, and see how those poems encapsulate the enmeshed relationships among trades, peoples,

and ideas, between racialized politics and the Romantic ideas about liberty, democracy and civilization. By looking at the representation of humanity in relation to the geo-political emergencies of the time, the essay intends to show how the notion of liberal humanism in Romantic writing continues to be challenged, subverted or expanded, and reconstructed.

**11:00 am - 12:30 pm**

## **Conversation 17 - Intelligent machines (01) (from the 19th to the 21st century)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

11:00 am

[Raiding the Lost and Found in Kazuo Ishiguro's \*Never Let Me Go\*](#)

[Dr. Katherine Nolan](#)

Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go* examines the boundaries of the human and tests the limits of empathy by introducing narrator Kathy H and her friends Ruth and Tommy, students at the boarding school Hailsham. What starts as a typical campus novel quickly takes on an uncanny quality as the reader slowly realizes that Kathy and her friends are clones, created to grow up and "donate" their essential organs for "real" humans. The novel and the narration turns on the question of the clones' humanity. Can the reader believe that the clones are really human? Does their humanity matter to them or anyone else if they are slated for death? I read the novel as existing at a fruitful point of intersection between many concerns of the conference, particularly the legacies of the Enlightenment and the role of the humanities in inventing the human.

While a contemporary novel of speculative fiction, the text has much kinship with the concerns and the investments of the Enlightenment and Romantic period. Karl Shaddox, for instance, argues that this novel is more comfortably classified alongside sentimental and abolitionist literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. While Kathy and her friends quietly assert their humanity, they also constantly feel the pull of the things around them, forming deep connections with non-human stuff. For instance, the clones' concept of Norfolk as a "lost corner" functions as both a cosmic lost and found and their version of an afterlife. As such, Kathy herself begins to take on the qualities of an it-narrator, from the popular eighteenth-century genre featuring talking objects like coins or shoes. I examine the text's roots in older literary forms to argue that the clones' status as human or non-human objects is constantly adjudicated by their relationships with stuff.

Indeed, Kathy and her friends have little contact with actual humans, who view the clones as distasteful and repulsive. Instead, they surround themselves with the material culture of the outside world, and particularly art. The novel seems as preoccupied in the fate of humanistic study as it is in the clones' own humanity. Ultimately, I argue that Ishiguro is conflicted and ultimately pessimistic about the ability of the humanities to teach us about being human.

11:20 am

[Frankenstein in the 21st century - a Promethean dilemma](#)

[Mr Henry Dobson](#)

Considered to be one of the first science-fiction novels of the modern era, Mary Shelley's famous novel *Frankenstein* is, among other literary genres, a modern myth of Biblical proportion; when the central character, Victor Frankenstein, pieces together a dead corpse and, by virtue of his scientific method, successfully creates a living creature, he effectively performs an act of God. But what the mad scientist never expected was that rather than inventing a new breed of human being, he had in fact created a demon so monstrous that he immediately wishes to "extinguish" the life which he had "thoughtlessly bestowed" in the creature. Born without a mother, immediately rejected by its father, hideous in appearance and desperate for a partner, Frankenstein's creature is a rational, sentient, and intelligent creature who becomes possessed by an "unparalleled malignity and selfishness [and] evil" and whose power for destruction, murder, and vengeance brings Frankenstein to the conclusion that his creature "ought to die." Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is thus a precautionary tale that warns us against the quixotism of certain scientific pursuits and technological developments, perhaps none more so than what we are now witnessing with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies. It's no secret that some technologists are working hard to create what they call Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) - an artificially intelligent computer system that possesses a mind (or psyche) of its own in much the same way



that human beings possess minds of their own. In this paper I examine the imminent creation of a new kind of life-form which I will call Frankendroid. Computational in nature, this Frankendroid is very similar to but also strikingly different from Victor Frankenstein's biological creation, thus raising important philosophical questions: Similar to Frankenstein's creature, Frankendroid will be born without a mother, but will it recognise its "father"? Can Frankendroid possess maternalist/ paternalistic bonds? If not, then how might Frankendroids relate to human beings? Will they possess the capacity for love? Will they fear death? And how might they develop their own sense of self and self-identity? These questions are critically important to consider in light of the tragedy witnessed in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Exploring these questions *prior* to the creation of AGI will thereby give us the ability to ask whether or not Frankendroids "ought to live" – lest we find ourselves living in horror and with deep regret like Victor Frankenstein.

11:40 am

[Bringing up Alan Turing's Baby : Queering the Contours of the Turing Test](#)  
[Stephanie Polsky](#)

This presentation concerns a re-reading of Alan Turing's queer self-presentation alongside a re-reading of his contributions to the scientific field of artificial intelligence. Turing was highly engaged with the intersubjectivity and embodiment of his thinking machine. Thus, from the very beginnings of its artificial inception he was aware of the risks involved should it be fundamentally denied its claim to proper intelligence and appropriate response. As such, his modelling of the human mind was always conducted with a view to making room for its artificial counterpart to be intellectually and emotionally companions to it in ways that mimicked the homosocial norms of his privileged youth as a product of both England's public schooling and imperial administration. Essentially, this means that Turing was all over the place with his loyalties and affections and as a consequence, he believed it wholly possible to share out his liminal desires amongst genders, humans, and machines.

At the same time, Turing understood that the sentimental capacity for love, rather than the biological act of sexual intercourse, was the feature previously held up to deny full claims to humanity to those differentially raced, abled, and gendered within society. Affinity amongst these categories comes through an assumption at one level that they share a type of social disability. In contrast, at another that they share a kind of potential that accedes towards the possibility of emergent instantiations of being. The computer analytics that Turing introduces into the world fundamentally disrupts and alters the location of gender so that it assumes the position of the posthuman. In many senses, this becomes the source of what could effectively become a postgender reality due to the conjoining of artificial intelligence and mathematical biology.

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01 December 2023

**12:30 pm - 2:00 pm**  
**Lunch**

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Break - [Arts West, Room 556](#)



01 December 2023

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm**

## **Conversation 18 - In the Penal Colony: Romanticism/ Colonialism/ Australia (02)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

2:00 pm

[In the Penal Colony: Romanticism/Colonialism/Australia - Part 2](#)

[Dr Justin Clemens, Thomas Ford](#)

Almost all the scholarly authorities agree: the radical and reformist writings of British Romanticism had a decisive impact upon the post-1788 British settler colony that was to become Australia. Yet, when imported in this way, many fundamental aspects of Romantic writing self-evidently underwent a strange, often malignant sea-change. This double panel discussion will bring together established and emerging researchers in the field of Australian colonial writing to discuss the details and consequences of this fateful importation. Organised by Justin Clemens and Thomas H. Ford, who will also speak, the two panels will consist of Claire Knowles (senior lecturer, LaTrobe), Brendan Casey (PhD student, Unimelb), Kyle Kohinga (PhD student, Deakin), and Hannah Murray (fixed-term lecturer, Unimelb).

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm**

## **Conversation 19 - Inventing and Reinventing the Human in Asia (01)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

2:00 pm

[Malleable Body and Mind: The Genealogy of "New Human" in Modern China, 1900 - 1950](#)

[Yaqi Wang](#)

In the early 20th century, China was deeply influenced by Western colonialism and faced a dual crisis of national and individual anxiety. How to imagine and shape "new human", or "new Chinese" in the context of modernization, was one of the important topics for Chinese intellectuals. This issue was also related to political, economic, cultural and other practices, and affected China's modern social transformation.

I want to turn to the important discourses on "new human" in the early 20th China's historical context, to explore the evolution and reasons of "new human" discourses, and the complex entanglement between the "new human" issue and the China/West, tradition/modernity issues under the theoretical lens of post colonialism. Therefore, I intend to describe this phenomenon in three stages, from Liang Qichao in the late Qing Dynasty, who urged to put forward the theory of "new people" because of people's lack of consciousness of publicity, to Lu Xun who fiercely criticized the traditional oppression of human nature and put forward the national criticism during the New Culture Movement, and to the ideological transformation proposed by the CPC after the 1940s, each with a particular emphasis on the physical and mental intervention of Chinese people. All of them tried to invent more modern and rational individuals and groups, so as to achieve respective national imagination and construction.

With this historical study, I aim to propose that the "new human" discourse is a power discourse that in the name of evolution constructs an unseen language wall, and forces people to "spontaneously" self-reform through evolutionary thinking if they didn't want to be excluded from the national community, for the purpose of a kind of political and historical utopia in specific periods.

2:20 pm

[Being Human in the Anthropocene: A Case for Indigenization](#)

[Dr Sangeetha Puthiyedath, SREEDHARAN THOYAKKAT](#)

Human conception of what it is to be human is predicated on a homocentric logic that has its genesis in the Western philosophical tradition, specifically Greco-Roman thought. Awareness of the Anthropocene, the unmistakable realization that we as a species has been instrumental in altering, even to an extent, destroying the earth that we inhabit forces us to interrogate these received notions. While the world is fast hurtling towards a point of climatic no return, we might be able to put a break on or deflect the trajectory by redefining the human. Discarding the concept of man as occupying the apex of creation in favour of indigenous conceptions could be critical. However, given today's reality, indigenizing the idea of what it is to be human can be a fraught exercise. Indigenous communities have existed in self-contained and self-sustaining groups and their thought and life style reflect that reality. This might not prove to be viable for

large societies or a globalized world. This paper proposes to examine the concept of being human reflected in narratives and knowledges drawn from the Vedic heritage in India. The Vedas encapsulate a philosophy and a thought process that has withstood the test of time. The philosophy that it embodies has impacted even major religions like Buddhism. This paper will examine the challenges that confront man in the Anthropocene and suggest ways of redefining the human based on the world views and wisdom perspectives evident in ancient Vedic texts (The Vedas is estimated to have been written between 1500 and 1200 BCE).

2:40 pm

[“the shipwreck of modern civilization”: Paul Valéry’s “contemporary man”](#)

[Dr Ryan Johnson](#)

In his 1935 lecture on “La formation de l’homme moderne,” Paul Valéry says that the distinction between modern and primitive mindsets is vaguer than often thought. “Civilized nations,” he claims, contain numerous people whose modes of thought are barely different from the “primitive” ways of thinking described in anthropological texts on remote peoples. As a corrective to the idea of the modern, Valéry advances another concept: the contemporary. Valéry meant “the contemporary” as a critique of anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s separation of humankind into “civilized” and “primitive” ways of thinking, as well as of the rise of fascism in Central and Western Europe, part of what Valéry deemed “le naufrage de la civilisation moderne.” But the very year Valéry gave his address, literature written in French, including many of Valéry’s works, overtook Russian to become the most translated body of literature into Japanese. French literature’s triumph occurred even as the militarist Japanese government, the unfortunate outcome of Japan’s modernization that began with the 1868 Meiji Restoration, encouraged Japanese intellectuals to assert the incomparability of Japan and Japanese culture. In recent years, scholars of modernism have, like Valéry, promoted “the contemporary” to include more non-Western artists, critics, and writers in discussions of modern literature. By looking at texts written in French and Japanese from 1935 to 1950, this paper tries to deploy the contemporary differently: to see whether the contemporary can be put into a fruitful opposition with the concept of modernity, and whether that opposition can produce new ways of thinking of art and literature produced during the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, Asia, and beyond.

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm**

**Roundtable 4: Futures of Education**

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Roundtable - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

2:00 pm

[Futures of Education](#)

Convened by Professor [Larissa McLean Davies](#), Deputy Dean, Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

Participants:

A/Prof. [Melitta Hogarth](#) (A/Prof. in Indigenous Education, MGSE)

A/Prof. [Carlo Perrotta](#) (A/Prof. of Digital Education, MGSE)

Prof. [Lesley Farrell](#) (Prof. of Education, MGSE)

Dr [WAN Chang Da](#), Chief Executive Officer, The HEAD Foundation, Singapore

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01 December 2023

**3:30 pm - 4:00 pm**

**Afternoon Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



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01 December 2023

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

**Roundtable 5: What is Human? The Way of the Ancestors [FREE IN-PERSON EVENT]**

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Roundtable - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

4:00 pm

[What is Human? The Way of the Ancestors](#)

**FREE IN-PERSON EVENT**

**Non-delegates welcome**

With Marcia Langton (Associate Provost and Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies), Aaron Corn (Inaugural Director, Indigenous Knowledge Institute, University of Melbourne), and Joe Williams (PhD - Indigenous Knowledge Candidate, University of Melbourne).

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

**Roundtable 6: Futures of the Humanities [FREE IN-PERSON EVENT]**

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Roundtable - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

4:00 pm

[Futures of the Humanities](#)

**FREE IN-PERSON EVENT**

**Non-delegates welcome**

This international panel of key Humanities leaders will both reflect on recent challenges and innovations in Arts faculties around the world and envisage possible futures for such faculties in a world where understandings of what it means to be human are being radically transformed. The panel will suggest some of the untapped potential the Humanities have to enable invention, creation and discovery and so to meet existing and emerging needs in society that even the most sophisticated AI cannot – and there will be plenty of opportunity for audience participation.

Convened by Reverend Professor Russell Goulbourne, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne.

Participants:

Professor [Nick Bisley](#)

Professor [Vanessa Lemm](#) (by Zoom)

Professor Katie Stevenson

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

**Roundtable 7: Music and Breath [FREE IN-PERSON EVENT - BOOKINGS REQUIRED]**

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4:00 pm

[Music and Breath: Aspiring to the Human](#)

**FREE IN-PERSON EVENT**

**Non-delegates, book via [Eventbrite](#).**

If, according to Genesis, the human form was invented from dust, then it was the inspiration of breath which made Adam a living being. Breath has long been taken to define the span of human life. Yet far from defining the uniquely human, breath connects humans with the non-human worlds of the elements, divinities, and with other aerobic life. Perhaps breath even undermines the human's boundaries and essence, threatening to suffuse the body with its environment and diffuse its powers into thin air. And while music might seem an innocent fashioning of the air, the first woodwind instrument was invented – according to a myth rehearsed in many enlightenment texts – when the nymph Syrinx, transformed into a reed to escape Pan, was cut into pieces by the god and bound into a set of pipes.

Enlightenment and Romantic Europeans endlessly rehearsed earlier myths of breath, yet equally transformed them. From Robert Boyle's experiments on air in the early years of the Royal Society, to Joseph Wright Derby's *Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump*, from the revolutionary 'breath of Autumn's being' that roars through Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, to long nineteenth-century projects to measure lung capacity across the globe, Enlightenment and Romantic cultures profoundly reshaped understandings and practices of breath. Aiming to breathe new life into this longer history, this recital-roundtable offers music and conversation to reflect on breath across just some of its many current domains: musical, historical, philosophical, medical, literary, political, environmental.

Convenors:

Dr [Miranda Stanyon](#) (Senior Research Fellow in English and Theatre Studies at the University of Melbourne)

Dr [Fred Kiernan](#) (Melbourne Postdoctoral Fellow at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and National Secretary of the Musicological Society of Australia)

Participants:

**James Q. Davies** is Professor of Musicology at the University of California, Berkeley; his most recent book is *Creatures of the Air: Music, Atlantic Spirits, Breath, 1817–1913* (University of Chicago Press, 2023).

**Maxine Beneba Clarke** is Peter Steele Poet in Residence at the University of Melbourne, and an award-winning author of poetry, short fiction, memoir and children's books, including *How Decent Folk Behave* (2021), *When We Say Black Lives Matter* (2020), and *The Hate Race* (2016).

**Tom Ford** is Senior Lecturer in English at LaTrobe University; his books include *Wordsworth and the Poetics of Air: Atmospheric Romanticism in a Time of Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and, with Justin Clemens, *Barron Field in New South Wales: The Poetics of Terra Nullius* (MUP, 2023).

**Genevieve Lacey** is an Australian recorder virtuoso, composer and arts advocate; her recent projects include *Breathing Space* (2021), commissioned for the National Museum of Australia's Garden of Dreams.

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01 December 2023

**5:30 pm - 6:00 pm**

**Break**

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Break - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#)



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01 December 2023

**6:00 pm - 7:00 pm**

**Keynote 6: Delia Lin, 'Reinventing Human Qualities in China'**

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Keynote - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

6:00 pm

[Reinventing Human Qualities in China](#)

[Delia Lin](#)

The discourse of human quality or human qualities, couched in the Chinese terms *suzhi*, has gradually dominated the rationalisation of issues ranging from education, democracy, poverty relief, rural migrant workers, population planning, ethnic policy, organisational management, modernity, progressing to everyday behaviour and social relations, since the 1980s. How has this fabricated idea become a 'reality' to shape and frame how one understands the world, each other and self? Built on a decade of research, this paper traces the genealogy of the idea, thereby revealing convergences between Confucian and modern and contemporary Chinese political and social theories that fundamentally see humanity as a shared mission of perfection for a common vision. This view of humanity sees no moral or ethical objection to control, moulding and manipulation of thought, beliefs, behaviour and affects of individuals for a grand course, which in turn leads to oppressive political structure and social relations. An awareness of vulnerability is therefore central to undoing the 'taken-for-granted' language of *suzhi*.

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01 December 2023

**7:30 pm - 10:30 pm**

**Conference Dinner**

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Social Event - [In-Person Only](#)

**Date:** Friday 1st December

**Venue:** The Woodward, Level 10, Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne

**Time:** 7:30pm

**Inclusions:** 3-course dinner and beverages

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02 December 2023

**9:30 am - 10:30 am**

**Keynote 7: Susan Stryker, 'The Romantic Roots of Gender in the Anthropocene'**

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9:30 am

[The Romantic Roots of Gender in the Anthropocene](#)

[Susan Stryker](#)

The “gender” concept has experienced such a meteoric rise in popularity over the past thirty years that graphing its usage rates produces one of those hockey stick-shaped trend lines similar to those that graph rates of atmospheric carbon increase and other similar markers of anthropogenic climate change—suggesting that the recent history of this concept is in fact one element of the so-called “Great Acceleration” of the Anthropocene. The orthodox history of the gender concept traces the long tail of its emergence to the work of New Zealand/US sexologist John Money in the 1950s, who is credited with first applying a term borrowed from grammar to the development of psychosocial identity. But the use of “gender” in the sense attributed to Money can in fact be traced to 1840s. It is deeply imbricated with the onto-epistemological fallout of Enlightenment humanism in ways that suggest, then as now, that “gender” does the work of aggregating disparate and incommensurable onto-epistemic power/knowledge formulations to produce a quotidian sense of lived reality—and that as such, it functions as a site for the transformation, as well as reproduction, of Anthropolos itself.

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02 December 2023

**10:30 am - 11:00 am**  
**Morning Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



02 December 2023

**11:00 am - 1:00 pm**  
**Conversation 20 - The human beyond binary divisions (trans, gender diverse, non-binary)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

11:00 am

[Dehumanization of trans and gender diverse people](#)

[Dr Suzy Killmister](#)

In this paper I develop a novel account of dehumanization, and use it to help think through the various ways in which trans and gender diverse people are dehumanized in the current political context. The standard way of conceptualizing dehumanization is as a certain kind of attitude: it is a matter of *seeing* others as less than human. On my alternative, dehumanization is instead a matter of what is *done* to people. And what is done, I argue, is excommunication from the category of the human. This approach, crucially, requires us to

reconceive the human as a social, rather than a natural, category; that is, as a social status that is conferred upon us, rather than a quality inherent to us. Dehumanization involves denying someone that status, thereby removing them from the category of the human. I identify three modes through which dehumanization can manifest: as an attempt to change the rules about who counts as human; as a refusal to treat certain others according to the rules for how humans ought to be treated; and as a failure to accommodate certain ways of being human within the social imaginary. All three modes of dehumanization, I suggest, are evident – and increasing – in the contemporary public discourse about trans and gender diverse people.

11:20 am

[Memory, Materiality and Ecologies of Remembering in Transgender Narratives](#)  
[Ms Niranjana Ganesan](#)

This study is part of a doctoral thesis that analyses autobiographical narratives of trans people. It seeks to demonstrate the mutually constitutive quality of material things in human life by bridging the gap between human and object, between nature and culture and between the tangible and intangible divides. This study of quotidian memories reveals how social, cultural, political and material contexts influence remembering and dis-remembering. It also seeks to investigate how bodies mediate collectively constructed dominant memory models of gender while serving as a site of contestation for personal and collective dimensions of autobiographical remembering in trans people's lives. The trans narratives chosen for this study are *Sissy* by Jacob Tobia and *A Truth About Me* by A. Revathi.

11:40 am

[Out of Body / Out of Time: Transgender people and transcendental practices](#)  
[Mx Archie Barry](#)

Contemporary discourse on transgender subjectivity is often about our embodiment: what it means (culturally, politically) to have a body that dissents, and the social effects of living in a gender dissenting body. All this conversation about embodiment forms a phenomenological vacuum, giving rise to an emergent field of trans affect studies that asks; what is it to know and feel disembodied? Being out-of-body or out-of-time in my visual arts PhD thesis is primarily and foundationally investigated as both quotidian and structured. My artistic research reaches towards two minor and complex histories that utilise/d and advocate/d for mentation practices to achieve spiritual transcendence. The first site is my childhood upbringing within the Australian branch of a fringe spiritual community, The School of Practical Philosophy; the second is the archival ephemera of the early trans justice organisation the Erickson Education Foundation (EEF), held in the Transgender Archives collection at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. Whilst at first seeming to be sharply unrelated histories, with the first operating through a dogmatic system and the second through grassroots epistemologies, they formed in the same historical period (the late 1960's) and are both attempts to organise in contradistinction to the force of capitalism and the singular, coherent, linear Enlightenment individual. Complementing a description of my research in progress, I will show a reel of rushes from the previous week of filming on site at 'Mahratta', a property owned by The School of Practical Philosophy.

**11:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Conversation 21 - Intelligent Machines (02)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

11:00 am

[Manufacturing the Human: Charles Babbage, Andrew Ure, and the Birth of Intelligent Machines](#)  
[Dr Russell Smith](#)

This paper examines two influential texts from the 'factory debate' of 1830s Britain, Charles Babbage's *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures* (1832) and Andrew Ure's *The Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835). In both treatises, the 'intelligence' of machinery plays a dual role, on the one hand replacing skilled workers with automated processes that are not subject to the human failings of indolence, fatigue, inattention, error, dishonesty, drunkenness or 'horseplay'; and on the other, the surveillance and discipline of that same workforce, in Ure's words, 'training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton'. This paper seeks to examine two key terms in these analyses of the mechanization of physical and mental labour—skill and intelligence—and the way definitions of these terms shift between human and machine models. It also seeks to show how, in the factory system, as Simon Schaffer notes, 'to make machines look intelligent it was

necessary that the sources of their power, the labour force which surrounded and ran them, be rendered invisible'. The last section of the paper will then briefly draw out continuities between these early treatises on automation and the contemporary AI industry, which relies on a largely invisible workforce of low-paid micro-workers manually tagging datasets for training machine learning algorithms, filtering for offensive content, reviewing the accuracy and quality of algorithmic outputs, and even impersonating AI assistants, an instance, as Tubaro, Casilli and Coville wryly note, of humans taking away computers' jobs. The comparison seeks to illuminate the 200-year history of the so-called 'paradox of automation's last mile', the incessant creation of low-level residual human tasks as a by-product of technological progress.

11:20 am

[Kubrick, Spielberg and A.I. Artificial Intelligence: Romanticism, Robots and Post-Humans](#)  
[Dr Adrian Schober](#)

Directed by Steven Spielberg, from a concept by Stanley Kubrick, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) forces us to reconsider how artificial intelligence fits into Romantic notions of the human. This can be found in its extremely problematic representation of a robot or 'mecha' child, named David, whose express function is to receive and transmit 'love'. Some Romantic oppositions in the film stand out at once: orga/organic versus mecha/machine; free will versus determinism; emotion versus reason; nostalgia and the past versus the future, and fantasy/dreams versus reality. In originating the project, Kubrick was asking the enormously provocative question: at what point does machine intelligence deserve the same consideration as biological intelligence? 'You could,' he said, 'be tempted to ask yourself in what way is machine intelligence any less sacrosanct than biological intelligence, and it might be difficult to arrive at an answer flattering to biological intelligence'. This paper highlights how the Romantics' relationship to technology was much more ambiguous, and how it is perfectly valid to speak of 'Romantic machines' and machines that satisfy Romantic desires. I argue that *A.I.* upends the Romantic, essentialist dualism of machine versus human, by moving toward a post-humanism that rejects anthropocentric notions of human exceptionalism. What's more, it adds a layer of complication to David's Romantic-machine conception. For when that robot is in the image of a human child, programmed to love and remain 'innocent', to be an arrested state of development, what we have is a fractured and frustrated Romanticism. Indeed in *A.I.*, the value of that innocence is in doubt.

**11:00 am - 12:30 pm**

**Conversation 22 - Rethinking the Human**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

11:00 am

[The Evolution of Agency from Autonomous Human to Network of Surveillance](#)  
[Dr. Robert King](#)

Luhmann famously had it that society is not composed of individual humans. Rather, humans are composed, internally, of three separate, valid systems: life, language, and even the nervous system. What makes these systems valid, for Luhmann, is that they are autopoietic- fully able to reproduce themselves by reproducing their parts, from out of their own dynamics. Such systems are operationally closed: neurons aren't activated by words, but by each other, and DNA requires no words to make proteins. In any case, humans don't appear to count as a valid, autopoietic systems in themselves. If humans are not a system in the sociological systems- theoretic proper, what are they? This paper begins from the premise that we are not autopoietic, that we have no basic part which constitutes our internal dynamics. Instead, we appear to be substrates, or assemblages, for the communications of different systems. Yet we are not simply this locus; rather, I argue we are a "triggering board," a "computational device" for networked decision-making. But what does such a theory mean for our identity, and what does it mean for our efficacy in the social sphere? Such a theory redraws the boundaries of what humans are and this redraws our agency. This paper, pace Luhmann, ask how it is that we are lodged in society, but as cybernetic selves. It uses assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari, Jane Bennet), theory of the cyborg, and early cybernetic thinkers like Norbert Wiener to redefine the human-environment relation, and thus the concept of the human itself. Ultimately, what is traced is a move from autonomous human subjectivity, to something mechanistic - even machinic in the subject (the system) - and back again, ironically, toward a heightened sense of agency. My paper briefly highlights the historical trajectory of this posthumanist concept of networked, machinic agency by simultaneously tracing the conceptual movement from German Idealist notions of freedom at the onset of capitalist industrialization, to the WW II-era cybernetic revolution of Norbert Wiener, Heinz Von Foerster,

and later, Maturana and Varela, etc., and on to the post-war, posthumanist, and late capitalist discovery of subjectivity as effected by surveillance. The paper ends by describing and speculating on the stakes of the interplay between liberal humanist concepts of human agency and the new forms it takes through the internet and media, surveillance technologies, and new cybernetic networks out there and in our everyday technologies.

11:20 am

[Inventing the Human-in-the-Loop: Catachresis, Error, and the Place of the Human in Automated Systems](#)  
[Dr Christopher O'Neill](#)

The 'Human-in-the-Loop' has emerged as a controversial figure for thinking the place of human agency and intentionality within automated systems. From its origins in cybernetic schematisations of the 'man-in-the-middle' through its subsequent theorisation in ergonomics and human factors research, the human-in-the-loop has more recently emerged within European jurisprudence as a 'brake' against 'run away' automation, especially in the provision of state welfare services. In this talk I draw from the tradition of Francophone work studies to consider the utility of 'catachresis' as a frame for rethinking the ambiguities of the human-in-the-loop, and its potentials for deliberation about and through automated technologies. 'Catachresis' is a term drawn from linguistics to describe the 'misuse' of language, especially the use of a word beyond or outside the lines of established categorical boundaries. In Francophone work science the term has been used catachrestically to describe the 'misuse' of the technologies of the modern workplace, whether in a way that enables the workforce to overcome unforeseen obstacles, or which reveals the ingenuity of the worker in their capacity to creatively reimagine the work process. The development of 'catachresis' as a frame for work science was coincident with the emergence of post-structuralist accounts of language as itself inherently catachrestic – as a process of working through the displacement of a fixed and determinable signifier. As large language models come to enter and perhaps remake the field of automated governance and production, the question of the catachrestic nature of the human-in-the-loop becomes newly relevant as a way of thinking the potential for interpreting and intervening in the field of automation as a component of social life.

11:40 am

[How Is Poetry Possible? A Propositional Nonpoetics](#)  
[Dr Michael Farrell](#)

I propose to model the beginning of my discussion on Georg Simmel's short essay 'How Is Society Possible?' (itself a riff on Kant's 'How Is Nature Possible?'), before going on to think in terms of François Laruelle's concept of nonphilosophy, adapted to nonpoetics.

Can poetry be thought of in terms of texts that are structured like a society? Words, forms, technologies, tones, styles, conventions of production, are just some of the components of a poetic text, all of which must be taken into account by the writer (in a sense I am aligned with Foucault's notion of the author function: i.e. in seeing the writer as just one of these, however significant).

Thus establishing an initial basis for discussion, I will go on to outline a theory of nonpoetics, and make some gesture to what this implies or means in terms of composition, and reading, in the contemporary.

The position of nonphilosophy is that philosophy – regardless of type – assumes an a priori decision of some kind of splitting (eg between presence and difference, in Derrida), as a basis for further dialectical elucidation. Nonphilosophy is interested in avoiding this paradigm, and in creating philosophically uninterpretable theorems.

My concept of nonpoetics, then, is not a rejection of a particular type, or types, of poetics (as considered by Carla Benedetti), but rather a rejection of the presumed relation between the poet and their poetic materials, and the metaphors associated with making (and crafting).

Etymologically, it is a rejection of the Greek basis of the word poem: i.e. 'poiesis', as one meaning making, for other linguistic options, such as the Latin-derived 'verse', related to 'turn'. It considers the human writer as a vector, or as a component in an assemblage, which produces (or directs) the poem as language speaking through the keyboard, and as reconstitutions of reading. That is, that poems are as much written by the technologies involved – not just keyboards and computer programs, but also books and other language sources. It gestures towards a posthuman theory of writing, but of one that has always been present in some sense: the historicised posthuman as writer of verse.

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02 December 2023

**12:30 pm - 2:00 pm**  
**Lunch**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



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02 December 2023

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm**  
**Conversation 23 - Entanglements (03) (the human, animals, fires, and the sea)**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

2:00 pm

[On Animal Address: The Question of \(Human\) Animality in the Anthropocene](#)

[Dr Emily McAvan](#)

In his *The Animal That Therefore I am*, Jacques Derrida notes, there has historically been a tremendous ambivalence about the possibility of animal language usage in philosophers from Heidegger to Lacan, with language or even lying constituting our difference from non-human animal others, defining the human as such. Yet it is clear from recent research that many animals can and do communicate in ways we understand to be complex and nuanced, and that these increasingly make ethical demands upon us in the context of human-authored climate change and what scientists have called the Sixth Mass Extinction. So how might we think animal address in the Anthropocene, and what might that tell us about our ethical responsibilities to the non-human?

In this paper, I will turn to Nietzsche's work in *The Genealogy of Morals*, where he suggests that the bad conscience of the Christianity he abhors aims at removing "the animal in us" (229). This is an animality associated with the senses, instinct, nature, the biological and truth-telling about the earth. Nietzsche says that bad conscience produces "earth-calumniating ideals," lies about the earth. The Nietzschean subject, therefore, is one in which language assumes a particular relation to animality, that animal language, in effect, tells us something about the phenomenological experience of being alive on the earth. I argue that the pre-eminent source of bad conscience in the Anthropocene is no longer what Nietzsche calls the slave morality of Christianity, but rather the bad conscience of the capitalist consumer subject, which is anti instinct, nature, and biology, obscuring our shared human and non-human relation to the world around us. In particular, this bad conscience allows us to ignore the dire situation of our collapsing ecosystems amid natural disaster, species extinction and the destruction of sustainable food production, and to continue the behaviours that are intensifying this crisis.

Using an archive of animal address drawn from footage of koalas reaching for water in the wake of the 2019-20 bushfires, I will suggest that animal address allows us to see a shared relation to the earth premised not on this bad conscience but something else—an affirmation about what it means to be alive in a warming world, and a recognition of human moral culpability for creating the conditions in which such an address needs to be made. This need not create a politics of yet another bad conscience, a paralysing politics of

environmental guilt, but rather a joyful politics that affirms the animal in us alongside the non-human animals who address us.

2:20 pm

[Animal Drag](#)

[Dr Nicola McCartney](#)

Animal Drag analyses the potential for critical and conscious acts of adornment and embodiment that is entangled with the nonhuman animal to rupture humanist and problematic binary thinking. It proposes that Animal Drag is a political weapon, employing multiple academic disciplines and 'minority' studies. Animal Drag presentations might be used to foreground feminist discourses, issues of race, disability, gender variance and class, let alone issues of species hierarchy.

2:40 pm

[Another Romantic Environmental Aesthetics: Kenji Miyazawa's Cow Song and Cowherd Story](#)

[Prof. Em. Yuko Otagaki](#)

Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933) wrote poems and children's books. Although mostly unappreciated during his lifetime, his works gained significant popularity after his death. He also taught agricultural science and then became a farmer, focusing on social activism to help impoverished farmers by providing free instruction on fertilizer use in his native Iwate, northern Japan. His agricultural activities had hardly succeeded, which motivated him to produce more writings.

Miyazawa was strongly moved by reading the Lotus Sutra. The Scripture became a lifelong cornerstone of his faith, inspiring him to seek a synthesis between agriculture, art, science, and religion. He was very well-educated, a member of the Meiji intelligentsia, who were influenced by Transatlantic Romanticism. His works are characterized by the use of many terms from natural sciences, such as meteorology, mineralogy, botany, geology, and physics.

This study examines how humans and non-humans—an Ayrshire cow, a brass moon, pulp factory fires, the roaring sea, his recently deceased beloved sister, etc.—are interrelated and depicted as equal beings in Miyazawa's works. His characters reveal his nonbinary, materialistic worldview that everything is interchangeable and entangled with each other.

While dairy farming was established by Miyazawa's time, it was mainly carried out further north, where the climate was too cold and dry for growing rice. Since then, bovine-human relationships have become more complicated because of global capitalism and technological advances, including factory farming and animal welfare science. Recognizing Miyazawa's worldview and how it changed over time will contribute to reorienting how to address current environmental issues we are confronted with.

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm**

**Conversation 24 - 'Self, Consciousness, and the More than Human; A Critique of Contemplative Research'**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 553

2:00 pm

[Self, Consciousness, and the More than Human; A Critique of Contemplative Research](#)

[Julieta Galante](#), [Dr Cullan Joyce](#), [Tim Wood](#)

Contemplative research is a multidisciplinary examining contemplative traditions and practices, how different contemplative traditions evolved, how they are applied, and identifying some effects of practising. Contemplative research, as a field, evolved from European and UK interdisciplinary scholarship. Still, the explosion of research into contemplative practices came via US-based collaborations between contemplatives and researchers starting in the 1960s through the influence of approaches such as Transcendental Meditation and transpersonal psychology. An example of contemplative research is when dialogue between various Western psychological disciplines and Buddhist practitioners led to adapting the Buddhist practice of sati (mindfulness) to treat anxiety and depression. The success of this research came, in



part, from its focus on how meditation supports aspects of cognition such as attention and non-reactivity, in other words, by having a narrow focus on cognitive processes. Though researchers have always sought to widen the range of research contexts and questions, in the present day, these challenges are critical. The next research phase requires dialogue, openness to critiques, and the capacity to reorient how research is framed and undertaken. How can contemplative research embrace a range of communities and experiences to meet the challenges of our times? To rephrase: How can we (contemplative researchers) acknowledge the strengths of the pioneering work but broaden the dialogue community? How can contemplative researchers identify prohibitive prejudices and open to reframing enquiry to include pace and the more than human? Today, contemplative research is re-engaging its interdisciplinary origins, identifying the need to decolonise, and seeking to actively collaborate with diverse communities and perspectives for the field to reflect a changing world.

Our panellists are all from the Contemplative Studies Centre at the University of Melbourne. We: A) identify tensions in the orthodox contemplative research, B) show the importance of considering new phenomena, C) provide an account of these phenomena and D) identify how each case can broaden contemplative research. The interdisciplinary panel comprises researchers with backgrounds in public mental health medicine and philosophy of religion and a researcher in psychology. They will propose new ways of framing aspects of contemplative research around ideas of self, how the field understands consciousness, and the role of the more than human in contemplative practice.

In this panel, Julieta Galante discusses how some early approaches to contemplative research identified the aim of contemplative practice as gaining higher consciousness; this model subtly directed aspects of contemplative research and practice. Tim Wood considers meditation-induced changes in the sense of self and how some intense and disruptive experiences may be salutary or harmful based on the positionality of the meditator. Cullan Joyce examines a Christian monastic practice case study to reflect on the complex ways the more than human impacts contemplative practice and experience.

Our panel raises these cases to provide pathways for conference participants to reflect on how the more than human can shape contemplative research in its next phases.

## **2:00 pm - 3:30 pm** **Conversation 25 - The Human and Beyond**

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Conversation - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Room 556

2:00 pm

[What's Left for us in the Human? Judgement and Purposiveness Beyond the Organic](#)  
[Mr Geoffrey Hondroudakis](#)

The human, as a category, has been subjected to a thorough battering. Various post-humanist, anti-humanist, trans-humanist, or anti-colonial analyses have positioned 'the human', conceived as the rational individual of the enlightenment, as at best a state to be exceeded, at worst a mere fictive tool of violent extraction. These critiques have been made with good reason, but they also often hesitate to *fully* disavow the concept of the human. If we accept many of the points of such x-humanist turns, (the exclusionary nature of such categories, their tendency towards the fixity of the individual against its incorporation in multi-agent networks, etc), it leaves little remaining but some strange kernel of loosely organised coherence. Indeed, much of what replaces 'the human' leans on such indeterminate coherence, be it assemblages or actor-networks. But is this empty coherence of the category 'human' simply a dead metaphor, or might something remain for us in the human?

To this question, I return to Immanuel Kant's later work – especially his Critique of Judgement and Opus Postumum – finding that these later works offer useful answers in terms of judgement and purposiveness. Reading the *already* post-human currents latent within this work, I emphasise the theorisation of structured indeterminacy and (trans)individuation that opens Kant's earlier, more rigid thought to ideas still not fully realised. Rational purposiveness and indeterminate judgement offer routes for thinking the kind of structural coherence without determination that seems to have occupied the 'human' following its evacuation. Drawing on the work of Gilbert Simondon, Bernard Stiegler, and Yuk Hui in particular, I suggest how these ideas of judgement and purposiveness offer a path beyond the human, and indeed beyond the 'organic' as a means of organising thought about the human, or rational coherent agents in general.

2:20 pm

[Nature, Significance, and the Human Perspective: Refusing the Choice between Scientism and Posthumanism](#)  
[Dr Mathew Abbott](#)

This paper criticises contemporary post-humanist theories of anthropocentrism by reading an early essay by Bertrand Russell alongside work by Rosi Braidotti and Jane Bennett. It argues that, despite appearances, scientism and post-humanism share key commitments in common, such that clarifying the problems with which Russell struggles regarding nature and significance can illuminate symmetrical problems in post-humanism. Against these alternatives, the paper draws on insights from Bernard Williams, contemporary Hegelian philosophy, and J. J. Gibson's work on animal agency to sketch a picture of what it means to take a human perspective. It is the perspective of one species among others, with a particular evolutionary history; it is also the perspective of a species that, because of certain developments in that history, knows itself as such. That opens us to forms of answerability to the world that do not touch the lives of unselfconscious animals. Some critics of the theoretical discourse on anthropocentrism have argued that taking a human perspective is morally unobjectionable. This paper goes further: it is necessary for grasping our relation to the rest of nature and so our responsibilities for it.

2:40 pm

[Transhuman Liminalities and the Othered Body: Exploring Superheroes and Disability in the Marvel Cinematic Universe](#)  
[Professor Lorna Piatti-Farnell](#)

The physically enhanced bodies of superheroes lie at the centre of their iconic difference, functioning as the source of their exceptionality and often exceeding the limitations of the human flesh. This understanding of physical prowess has inspired the decades-long iconography that has painted superheroes – often problematically – ‘superior’. It is then within this dialogical space that discussions of disability become particularly salient, as the superhero's ostensive physical perfection is also exposed as inevitably entangled with ideas of ableism and bio-ethics, where understandings of what is ‘normal’ and what is perceived as either extra-ordinary or substandard mingle and merge. Taking these interwoven notions as a point of departure, this paper explores the representation of disability in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Superhero representation within the MCU is commonly entangled with the experience of loss and grief, which is often associated with changes to the body, both in terms of enhancement, as well as the outcome of injury and torture. Focusing particularly on the figure of Bucky Barnes, the eponymous Winter Soldier of several narratives, the discussion in this presentation will explore intersecting notions of disability and disfigurement as markers of identity. Here, the idea of disability, and its association with prosthetics, is particularly shown as existing with complicated notions of monstrosity and fear. As a result, the very notion of humanity – especially projected as transhumanity, and even posthumanity – emerges as a slippery and contested epistemological area. The body of the techno-enhanced disabled superhero oscillates between humanity and Otherness, precisely because of its physiological liminality, pushing the boundaries of acceptability, as it also uncovers the fears and anxieties that surround the politicised experience of corporeality in our contemporary moment.

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02 December 2023

**3:30 pm - 4:00 pm**  
**Afternoon Tea**

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Break - [In-Person Only](#)



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02 December 2023

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**  
**Roundtable 8: Wellbeing and Digital Technologies**

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Roundtable - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

4:00 pm

[Wellbeing and Digital Technologies](#)

Chaired by [Dr Joshua Pocius](#) on behalf of Assoc. Professor [Ana Dragojlovic](#), Gender Studies and Insight Fellow at the Contemplative Studies Centre at the University of Melbourne.

In this roundtable we will explore the concept of 'wellbeing' from an interdisciplinary perspective. We will be asking some of the following questions: what does it mean to be well? How is the human invented and re-invented through the lens of wellness. Additionally, we will explore the roles that digital technologies may play in the continual invention and reinvention of the human within the broader concept of wellness.

Speakers:

**Julieta Galante**, Contemplative Studies Centre, University of Melbourne, 'Illness, Wellness, & Self-Transcendence through the lens of modern psychology'

**Rachel Flenley**, School of Education, University of Melbourne, on "Healthy, happy, engaged and successful": The 'well' student in contemporary times'

**Simon D'Alfonso**, Computing and Information Systems, University of Melbourne, on 'Wellbeing considerations and design principles for digital platforms'

**Zara Thompson**, Post-Doctoral Fellow in Music Therapy, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music - "We Still Have Music" - The role of music and technology in maintaining and exploring identities and wellbeing for people living with dementia'

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02 December 2023

**5:30 pm - 5:45 pm**  
**Closing Remarks**

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Opening/Closing - [ERCC 2023 - Inventing the Human](#) - Arts West, Forum Theatre

5:30 pm

[Closing Remarks](#)

Closing Remarks

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