

CRUELTY AND BRUTALISM TODAY



INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

Program & Book
of Abstracts
(mobile friendly):



Technology
and Socialization
Project:



4-5 NOV 2024

TECHNO-HUMANITIES LAB,

FACULTY OF „ARTES LIBERALES”,

UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW



Conference Program

Monday, 4 November 2024

All events related to the Conference take place in the Conference Room at the College of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw.

08.45-09.00 Opening Address

Jerzy Axer, Agata Zalewska, Szymon Wróbel

09.00-09.50 Keynote Lecture

Michał Paweł Markowski, *Cruelty, Community, and Culture. A Case Study*

09.50-10.00 Coffee Break

10.00-11.30 Panel 1 – Theorising Cruelty

Nikolai Kostin, *"Techne", Personality and Violence. The Theories of L. Karsawin and Y. Hui*

Ivan Dimitrijević, *Cruelty Through Its Opposites*

Bettina Szabados, *Does Cruelty have Ethic?*

11.30-11.40 Coffee Break

11.40-12.30 Keynote Lecture

Adam Lipszyc, *At the Back of My Head: Cruelty, Submission and Desire in Dolan's Tom at the Farm*

12.30-12.40 Coffee Break



Conference Program

Monday, 4 November 2024

12.40-13.30 Keynote Lecture

Paweł Dybel, *Ontological Cruelty and Art. The Surreal World of Hans Bellmer's Dolls*

13.30-14.20 Lunch

14.20-15.20 Panel 2 – Social infrastructures of cruelty

Felix Birch, *Infrastructure and the Rhythm of Cruelty*

Jakub Babuška, Dorota Orzechowska, *Cruelty Without Intimacy. Cruelty Beyond Subjectivity – The Great Silence of Institutions*

15.20-15.30 Coffee Break

15.30-16.20 Keynote Lecture

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee, *Mickey Mouse and Cruel Technicity: Revisiting Walter Benjamin's Concept of Technical Reproducibility in the Age of AI*

16.20-16.30 Coffee Break

16.30-18.00 Panel 3 – Technological Cruelty

Brett Zehner, Adam Kingsmith, *The Gray Race: How Tech Is Re-racializing White Supremacy in the Age of Brutalism*

Denis Petrina, *The Cruelty of Code*



Conference Program

Monday, 4 November 2024

Tirza Ben-Ezzer, *Civilization and its Digital-contents:
Fascism in the Internet-Age*

18.00-18.10 Coffee Break

18.10-19.00 Keynote Lecture

Monika Rogowska-Stangret, *Slow Brutalism of Exhausted
Bodies-Environments. Case Study for the Cross-Scale Ethics
for the Anthropocene*



Conference Program

Tuesday, 5 November 2024

All events related to the Conference take place in the Conference Room at the College of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw.

09.00-09.50 Keynote Lecture

Jakub Momro, *Terror of the Ear*

09.50-10.00 Coffee Break

10.00-11.30 Panel 4 – Representations

Eero Suorsa, *Brutalized Body: Representations of Aesthetic Surgery and Wretched of the Earth*

Alicja Antosz, *Unbearable Happiness of Writing. The Cruelty of Euphoria according to Franz Kafka's Letters and Diaries*

11.30-11.40 Coffee Break

11.40-12.30 Keynote Lecture

Joanna Bednarek, *"That Misbegotten Accident of Space". Realism, Materialism and the Question of Affect in Philosophy*

12.30-12.40 Coffee Break

12.40-13.30 Keynote Lecture

Ewa Mazierska, *The Violence and Kindness of Modernity*

13.30-14.20 Lunch



Conference Program

Tuesday, 5 November 2024

14.20-15.10 Keynote Lecture

Andrew Culp, *On the Cruel Thrill of Exploiting Others*

15.10-15.20 Coffee Break

15.20-16.50 Panel 5 – Cruel Capitalism

Andrzej Frelek, *Bourgeois Coldness and Brutalized Nature*

Václav Sklenář, *Capitalist Realism Fifteen Years Later*

Katarzyna Szafranowska, *The Cruel Fantasy of Non-Relationality: Depressed Society in an Isolation Tank*

16.50-17.00 Coffee Break

17.00-18.30 Panel 6 Practices of Cruelty and Brutalism

Daniel Kisliakov, *Envisioning Sociocultural Communication: Australian Insights for Human Cohesion*

Maria Wodzińska, *Brutalism of Migration/ Migration of Brutalism*

Nestor Ngong Dzenchuo, *Cruelness of Belligerents – Ambassonian War*

18.30-18.40 Coffee Break

18.40 Closing Remarks

Szymon Wróbel, *Werner Herzog or Documents of Cruelty*



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Keynote Speakers

Joanna Bednarek
Independent Researcher

“That Misbegotten Accident of Space”. Realism, Materialism and the Question of Affect in Philosophy

ABSTRACT:

The theme of the indifference of the world is central to both contemporary realism (Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, Graham Harman, Eugene Thacker) and contemporary materialism (Thomas Nail, Karen Barad, Patricia MacCormack). Both tend to present human perspective and concerns as, following H.P. Lovecraft, a “misbegotten accident of space”. However, the theme is interpreted very differently, almost antithetically, mostly because of the serious ontological divergences between these two philosophical currents. Although they are often conflated, I am convinced we would be better off paying more attention to the differences between them. I would thus like to show, firstly, what the main ontological divergence consists of (the main points of contention are the presence of the concept of matter and the status of thought), and secondly, how it is being expressed in the affects produced by both currents (because I argue that philosophy produces not only concepts, but also, like art, affects). Whereas in



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realism the theme of the indifference of the world is being expressed mostly by the affects of malevolence and performative despair, in materialism it is being expressed by the affects of overwhelm and cruel affirmation.

BIO:

Joanna Bednarek – philosopher, writer and translator. Member of the editorial board of the journal „Praktyka Teoretyczna”. Author of the books „Politics Beyond Form. Ontological determinations of post-structuralist political philosophy”, „Lines of Femininity. How Sexual Difference Transformed Literature and Philosophy?”, „Life that Speaks. Modern Community and Animals”, and „Origin of the Family”. She translated (among others) Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. Collaborator of „Krytyka Polityczna” in the years 2006-2009. Her fields of interest are: poststructuralism, feminism, autonomist marxism and literature.

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Keynote Speakers

Andrew Culp

California Institute of the Arts

On the Cruel Thrill of Exploiting Others

ABSTRACT:

Liberal juridical and institutionalist theories of government often present statecraft as a pathway to peace—perhaps even Kant's elusive "perpetual peace." However, these accounts tend to overlook the dark underbelly of modern governance: cruel forms of governmentality. How, then, do we account for the political manhunts chronicled by Grégoire Chamayou, including the literal hunting of foreigners, the poor, and police hunts? These practices have not disappeared with the rise of modern liberal jurisprudence; rather, they have been regulated, formalized, and institutionalized. The professionalization of war, for instance, did not eliminate war crimes but instead enabled them on a global scale. Yet symbolic and physical violence continues to be depicted as a disruption in an otherwise peaceful world of law and order. As such, they are viewed as isolated events, allowing persistent cruelty to be dismissed as lone outbursts of defective personalities. In contrast, I argue that this cruelty is not a contingent aberration but a structural feature of governance. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I explore the underlying desire for brutal-



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ity that fuels such actions. By refusing to separate the leader's cruel glee from the structural features of government, I will examine the history of seizing war captives, the domestication of gender, the terror of bureaucracy, and the brutality of capitalism's silent compulsions.

BIO:

Andrew Culp, Professor, serves as the Director of the MA Aesthetics and Politics program at CalArts, where he teaches Media History and Theory in the School of Critical Studies. He is the author of two major books, *Dark Deleuze* (2016, University of Minnesota Press) and *A Guerrilla Guide to Refusal* (2022, University of Minnesota Press). As a member of the Destructionist International, he is the co-writer and co-director of *Machines in Flames* (2022, 50min) and *Breached: A Chronicle of Cargo Theft* (2024, 15min). His writing has appeared in various journals including *Stasis*, *symploke*, and *Angelaki*. He is currently finishing a book, *The Anarcheology of Power*, a comparative philosophy of government.

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Keynote Speakers

Paweł Dybel
Polish Academy of Sciences

Ontological Cruelty and Art. The Surreal World Of Hans Bellmer's *Dolls*

ABSTRACT:

In my presentation, I will raise the question of the status of the phenomenon of cruelty in art considered in the context of the transformations that occurred in modernity in terms of man's relationship to natural being. The effect of these transformations was a manipulative and domineering attitude of man towards this being. In it, it was - according to Heidegger - reduced to the role of a "storehouse" (*Ge-stell*), that man takes upon himself in an effort to exploit it to the maximum for himself. I call this attitude ontological cruelty. At the same time, I ask whether the transformations that have taken place in contemporary art under the influence of avant-garde theories correspond with these transformations? I try to demonstrate that this kind of analogy does not occur, because the representations of artworks are characterized by a completely different attitude to being since they are based on its "affirmation", not exploitation. However, the space of creative freedom opened by the avant-garde in relation to the material of the work of art prompts to raise a different kind of questions



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about the status of cruelty in art. I ask these question by considering the surreal world of female doll bodies in the work of German artist Hans Bellmer. This is a remarkable example, because in this work female bodies of dolls created by him undergo profound deformations in his artwork. They are mutilated in various ways, metal and wooden prostheses are attached to them, and so on. The question that arises is: what is the actual status and meaning of these deformations? What is the peculiar kind of aesthetic "cruelty" behind them?

BIO:

Paweł Dybel – Professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology PAN Warsaw. Philosopher, literary critics, historian. Main areas of interest: modern philosophy (hermeneutics, phenomenology, post-structuralism), psychoanalytic theories, theory of literature and art, history of Polish psychoanalysis. Scholarships: Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, The Kosciuszko Foundation, Thyssen Stiftung, DAAD, DFG, The British Academy, The Mellon Foundation a.o. Visiting Professor at: University of Bremen (1993, 1995); Humboldt University Berlin (1996); University Siegen (1997); University Würzburg (2004, University at Buffalo Institute of Sciences of Man, Vienna a.o. From 2020 member of Scientific Council at "Sigmund Freud Institute" in Frankfurt am Main. Books (selection): *Painting with a Body. The Philosophy of Painting by Merleau-Ponty* Gdańsk 2012 (Pol.), *The Faces of Hermeneutics*, Universitas Krakow 2012 (Pol.), *Gadamers Thought on Art.*, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych, Gdańsk 2014) (Pol.); *Psychoanalytische*



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Brocken. Philosophische Essays, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2016 (Ger.), *Psychoanalysis –the Promised Land? The History of Psychoanalysis in Poland (1900 – 1918)* Vol. 1 Peter Lang Verlag Berlin – New York – Oxford 2020 (Eng.), *Subversive Lectures (I.Kant, H-G.Gadamer J.Derrida, J.Lacan a.o.)* Universitas Krakow 2022. Grants: 2013-2014 co-director of grant „Psychoanalyse und Hermeneutik” (together with prof. Hermann Faller, prof. Hermann Lang, prof. Heinz Weiss) cooperation between Polska Akademia Nauk and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. 2016-2019 co-director of Polish – German grant (together with Ewa Kobylinska-Dehe) „Geschichte der Psychoanalyse in Polen im Kontext des deutsch-polnisch-jüdischen Kulturdreiecks.” Financed within the frames of „Institutionspartnerschaft” Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung. Cooperation between Pedagogical University in Kraków and International Psychoanalytic University in Berlin.

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Keynote Speakers

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee
Kyung Hee University

Mickey Mouse and Cruel Technicity: Revisiting Walter Benjamin's Concept of Technical Reproducibility in the Age of AI

ABSTRACT:

This paper reexamines Walter Benjamin's concept of technical reproducibility (*technische Reproduzierbarkeit*) through the lens of cruel technicity, focusing on his analysis of Mickey Mouse and its implications for understanding contemporary artificial intelligence. By exploring Benjamin's use of the suffix *-barkeit* and his notion of translatability, we offer a critical framework for interpreting the cruel aspects of modern AI systems, particularly LLM. Benjamin's analysis of Mickey Mouse as a paradigm of "post-human mimesis of mechanical reproduction" serves as my starting point. I argue that the cartoon character's deconstruction of the "hierarchy of creatures" and embodiment of anti-anthropocentrism prefigure the unsettling nature of AI-generated content. The paper draws parallels between Benjamin's view of Mickey Mouse as a "dream for contemporary man" and the current fascination with AI, highlighting the underlying cruelty inherent in both forms of technological representation. I ex-



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amine how Benjamin's concept of Mickey Mouse as "mimesis without resemblance to a human being" resonates with the non-human yet eerily familiar outputs of advanced language models. This analysis reveals the cruel technicity in AI systems – their capacity to mimic human-like outputs while fundamentally lacking human experience and understanding. Furthermore, I investigate Benjamin's idea that Mickey Mouse represents a "radical disavowal of experience" concerning AI's processing and generation of information. This perspective illuminates the cruel nature of "machine intelligence," which operates without human-like experiences yet profoundly impacts human knowledge and interaction in the digital age. The paper posits that Benjamin's ideas about the "virtual that lurks beneath the actual" and the "hidden relationship between the actuality of translation and the potentiality of the text" offer a framework for understanding the cruel interplay between human and machine-generated content. We argue that this cruelty manifests in AI's ability to produce simultaneously familiar and alien content, challenging our notions of creativity and authorship. By revisiting Benjamin's concepts through the lens of cruel technicity, this paper aims to provide new insights into the nature of AI and its relationship to human experience, creativity, and knowledge in the contemporary technological landscape.

BIO:

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee is a professor of cultural studies and a founding director of the Centre for Technology in Humanities at Kyung Hee



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University, Korea. He is also a visiting professor at the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics at the University of Brighton (UK) and Graduate School at The University of Santo Tomas (Philippines). He served as an academic advisor for Gwangju Biennale in 2017 and as a program manager for the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2021. He edited the third volume of *The Idea of Communism* (2016) and *Deleuze, Guattari and the Schizoanalysis of Postmedia* (2023), and his forthcoming monograph, *Communism After Deleuze*, is scheduled for publication in February 2025.

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Adam Lipszyc
Polish Academy of Sciences

At the Back of My Head: Cruelty, Submission and Desire in Dolan's *Tom at the Farm*

ABSTRACT:

The paper focuses on the exceptional analysis of cruelty, submission and desire – as well as the paradoxes of identity and identification – in Xavier Dolan's 2013 psycho-thriller *Tom at the Farm* based on the play by Michel Marc Bouchard. Taking Freud's, Lacan's, Deleuze's and



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Chasseguet-Smirgel's insights into the nature of masochism as my frame of reference, I will try to show Dolan's radical and highly original meditation on the role of cruelty in our desperate search for our identity and for the object of our desire. I will pay particular attention to the breathtaking cinematography of the film, including the characteristic shots of the backs of the protagonists heads, which I will read in the light of the rival philosophies of the face offered by Levinas and Deleuze.

BIO:

Adam Lipszyc is the head of the Center for Psychoanalytic Thought based in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He teaches in the Graduate School for Social Research and at the Franz Kafka University of Muri. In his work, he focuses on the philosophical implications of psychoanalysis, philosophy of literature, as well as on the 20th century Jewish thought. Most recently, he published (in Polish) a volume of essays on literature and psychoanalysis (*Paper Nose of Literature*, 2024). With Agata Bielińska, he co-edited a volume *Space in Psychoanalysis, Psychoanalysis in Space* (Routledge, 2024). He is the editor in chief of the academic journal „wunderBlock: Psychoanaliza i Filozofia” (wunderBlock: Psychoanalysis and Philosophy).

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Michał Paweł Markowski
University of Illinois Chicago

Cruelty, Community, and Culture. A Case Study.

ABSTRACT:

Cruelty, in the broadest sense, means to draw existential profit from inducing the mental and physical suffering of another being. It is anchored in the urge to compensate for the lack of individual or communal satisfaction. The more of this existential deficit in everyday life, the higher the chances for cruelty to creep into the life of an individual or a group. Taking as an example one of the founding texts of Polish Modernity, the author shows how cruelty becomes an efficient tool for reintroducing cohesion in a troubled community. Cruelty, along with scapegoating, hatred, and shaming, is not an unexpected deviation, a disposable excess, or an exception from a more sublime norm but a fundamental gesture of a community that wants to overcome persisting existential traumas. This community has no other remedy for its gripping experience than the violent and—simultaneously—relieving incapacitation of others, who become directly responsible for the existential misery of perpetrators. If this community happens to be, as in the case analyzed, Christian, the obvious con-



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sequence would be forcing a hypothesis about the cruel (not perverse) core of Christianity and—pushing the logic of the argument closer to our historical condition—about the cruel foundations of Polish Modern culture.

BIO:

Michał Paweł Markowski (1962), The Stefan and Lucy Hejna Family Chair in Polish Language and Literature at the University of Illinois, Chicago, and Head of the Department of Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian Studies at UIC. He is also a tenured Research Professor at Jagiellonian University, where he created in 2007 the Centre for the Advanced Studies in the Humanities at Jagiellonian, where he served as the first Director until he moved to Chicago in 2010. Since 2008 he has directed The International Literary Joseph Conrad Festival in Kraków. Now works as an expert for The European Research Council in Brussels. Author and editor of more than thirty books on literature and philosophy and several hundreds of articles and essays translated subsequently into English, French, German, Belarussian, Czech, Slovakian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Swedish, Slovenian, Hungarian, and Romanian. The most important monographs include *The Inscription Effect: Jacques Derrida and Literature* (1997), *Nietzsche: Philosophy of Interpretation* (1997), *Desire for Presence: Philosophies of Representation from Plato to Descartes* (1999), *Identity and Interpretation* (2003), *Black Waters: Gombrowicz, World, Literature* (2004), *Theories of Literature in the 20th Century* (2 volumes; 2006), *Polish Modern Literat-*



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ure (2007), *Universal Dissolution: Schulz, Existence, Literature* (2012). His *The Politics of Sensitivity: Introduction to the Humanities* (2013) opened a trilogy on social and political aspects of humanities, which has been complemented by *Wars of Modern Tribes* (2019) and *Poland, Bliss, and University. An Educational Story* (2021). His *Collected Texts* (1988-2023), gathering all papers and essays not included in authorial books, will be published in 2023-2024 in three volumes (t. 1: *Interpretation*; t.2: *Politics*; t. 3: *Representation*). His unpublished Polish essays on Polish literature will be edited in a volume tentatively titled *The Home and the World. The Dialectical Adventures of Polish Modern Literature*. He translated works by Proust, Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, Kristeva, Rorty, and Perec. He edited the writings of Friedrich Schlegel, Marcel Proust, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva. He penned six collections of essays: *Anatomy of Curiosity* (1999), *Excess: Essays on Writing and Reading* (2002), *Desire and Idolatry* (2004), *Life Measured by Literature* (2007), *Sun, Possibility, and Joy* (2010), and *The Dribble* (2015). Co-editor of two prestigious book series in Polish: *Hermeneia* (Jagiellonian Publishing House) and *Horizons of Modernity* (Universitas, over 100 volumes published). His book, *Day on Earth: Travelling Prose* (2014), combines fiction, travel essays, and photography. An exhibition of his photographs, *Line and Land*, took place in Chicago in 2015. He penned three travel photo essays (Andalusia, America, India) and has had a robust media presence for over three decades.

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Keynote Speakers

Ewa Mazierska
University of Central Lancashire

The Violence and Kindness of Modernity

ABSTRACT:

The call for papers on 'Cruelty and Brutalism Today' suggests that we live in particularly cruel times. In my paper I want to take a partly polemical stand towards the points made in this call, by contextualising the apparent contemporary cruelty and brutality in relation to history. My point of departure is the influential book by Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, published first in 1982. Its title refers to *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels that pronounces that capitalism, which is the main characteristic of the modern age, destroys the solid world which existed beforehand. Marx observes this destruction or 'melting' with horror and admiration. Berman, similarly, recognises the violence of modernity, but he is its unapologetic defender, claiming that we must never forget 'the cruelty and brutality of so many of the forms of life that modernization has wiped out'.

During the forty or so years, since Berman's book was published, we have observed many changes, some of which are mentioned in the CfP, such as the growth of (unmediated) social media. I argue,



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however, that they are part of the same processes of modernisation, described by Berman, which have technological and social dimensions. These changes point to opposite directions: democratisation of entrance into the fight for positions of prestige, influence and power, and increased difficulty to reach these positions, due to a growing competition. The paradox of opening the new possibilities for everybody is thus more disappointment and disillusionment than might be the case if people were locked in their prescribed roles, as was the case in ancient and medieval times, which might appear cruel. The question is how to deal with this disillusionment on the social and personal level.

BIO:

Ewa Mazierska is Professor of Film Studies at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. She published over thirty monographs and edited collections on film and popular music, including *Popular Polish Electronic Music, 1970–2020: Cultural History* (Routledge, 2021), *Polish Popular Music on Screen* (Palgrave, 2021) and *Poland Daily: Economy, Work, Consumption and Social Class in Polish Cinema* (Berghahn, 2017), and monographs of several directors, such as Roman Polanski, Jerzy Skolimowski and Nanni Moretti. She is the principal editor of *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*. Her work was translated to over 20 languages. Mazierska's new project concerns Roman Polanski's films after *The Pianist*.

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Keynote Speakers

Jakub Momro

Jagiellonian University in Krakow

Terror of the Ear

ABSTRACT:

Contemporary cultural and scientific doxa states that we live in the power of the gaze, of sight, subjected to the need to look as a necessity to rule over the external world. It is not difficult to find various versions of narcissism in this diagnosis: from perceptual, through social, to civilizational. But it is not sight that is the most important way of the senses today. In contrast to the re-representational nature of sight, the sound sphere is filled with certain formations of objects over which we only seemingly have no control (as in composition). Sounds touch us to the core in their directness, but at the same time they constitute something like the principle of incoherence and evasion. The cruelty of sounds results from the fact that it touches the body of the one who hears and listens, but it is also the cruelty of presence, about which Antonin Artaud wrote. Namely it is violence present in several places at the same time: from sound as a mathematical point, through sound as a material object, to sound as an element of composition (both harmonic and heterogeneous). In this context, I would like to look at the territory of the ear in three vari-



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ants: psychoanalytical (in the case of the psychotic exile), biopolitical (the cruelty of sounds as permanent elements of torture in the concentration camps and contemporary detention camp), and ontological (in a more general reflection on sounds as components of the territory and environment).

BIO:

Jakub Momro, PhD, is a full professor at Jagiellonian University (Krakow), Department of Polish Studies. He is a philosopher, literary scholar, essayist, and translator (e.g. books and texts of J. Derrida, P. Lacoue-Labarthe, J.-L. Nancy, J. Kristeva, R. Barthes, P. Szendy). He published a monograph of Samuel Beckett: *Literature of Consciousness. Samuel Beckett – Subject – Negativity* (polish edition, 2010, Universitas, Krakow, English edition: Peter Lang, 2015), and (in polish) study: *Hauntologies of Modernity. Geneses*, IBL PAN Editions, Warsaw, 2014, and “*Ear has no Eyelid*”. *The Sonic Primal Scenes*, WUJ, Krakow 2020. He is a member of Editorial Board of bi-monthly Journal “Second Texts”, and is a member of the editorial committee of the New Humanities publishing series. He is currently preparing a book on the natural history of radical modernity.

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Monika Rogowska-Stangret
University of Bialystok

Slow Brutalism of Exhausted Bodies-Environments. Case Study for the Cross-Scale Ethics for the Anthropocene

ABSTRACT:

In the following paper I wish to examine the case of exhaustion as an illustration of “slow brutality”, entanglement of “sadistic Superego” and “masochistic Ego” as well as a point of departure to think through the entanglement of oppressive power structures and self-exploitation, that is complicity in oppression. I suggest to view exhaustion in broad terms – not limited to human and its societies (vide Han’s “burnt-out society” (2010)) but instead grasped as operating across scales of bodies-environments and Haraway’s nature-cultures (2003). Positioned in this way exhaustion proves to be in line with diagnoses of “our today” conceptualized as times of crises (and – I would argue – exhaustion) of several interlinked layers (or scales): of ways of thinking, imagining, and acting, of humans and societies, of economics and politics, of nature, non-humans, landscapes, so called “resources”, or even planet as a living system. To grasp the nuances of exhaustion and how it might be understood



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today, I offer a concept of “cross-scale ethics”. As exhaustion happens across scales, we need ways to respond to it that will think through the concept of scale itself. Scale is more and more recognized as one of the key issues to consider today (e.g. Clark 2012, Oppermann 2018, Smith 1992, Zylińska 2014) and is seen not merely as a methodological tool but rather a (politico-) ethico-onto-epistemological (Barad 2007) concept, with “fundamental political, ecological, and ethical implications” (van der Tuin and Verhoeff 2022: 167). How, then – through the phenomenon of exhaustion – scale is generated and to what effects? How scale is generative and to what effects? How can we „do analyses that move through the range of scales of injustice [of slow brutality], not by pointing out similarities between one place or event and another, but by understanding how those places or events are made through one another” (Barad 2007: 246)? “Cross-scale ethics” is offered here as a feminist, posthumanist response to slow brutality of exhausted bodies-environments and is developed with reference to arts of noticing (Tsing 2015), entanglement (Barad 2007), and anthropo-de-centering.

BIO:

Monika Rogowska-Stangret, Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of Białystok, philosopher conducting research at the intersection of feminist philosophy, environmental humanities, and critical posthumanism, translator. She was a member of the Management Committee in the European project New Materialism: Net-



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working European Scholarship on “How Matter Comes to Matter” (COST, 2013-2018). She is a recipient of a number of national and international grants and awards, most recently the National Science Center supported her project *Anthropocene Ethics. Redefining the Concept of the Human in Posthuman Philosophy* (nr 2022/45/B/HS1/00849). She published in, among others, “Feminist Theory” (2020), “Philosophy Today” (2019), “The Minnesota Review: A Journal of Creative and Critical Writing” (2017). She is the author of *Ciało – poza innością i tożsamością. Trzy figury ciała w filozofii współczesnej* [The Body – Beyond Otherness and Sameness. Three Figures of the Body in Contemporary Philosophy] (Gdańsk 2016, 2019) as well as *Być ze świata. Cztery eseje o etyce posthumanistycznej* [Be of the World. Four Essays on the Posthuman Ethics] (Gdańsk 2021). She is the editor-in-chief of “Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research”.

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Szymon Wróbel

University of Warsaw, Polish Academy of Sciences

Werner Herzog or Documents of Cruelty

ABSTRACT:

Werner Herzog's films are marked by the intriguing perspective of a documentarian, who, while observing the disintegration of selected fragments of reality, also observes various incarnations of cruelty. From his early films, *Signs of Life* (1968), in which a traumatized German paratrooper, enjoying Chopin's "erratic" music, terrorizes a Greek town by threatening to blow up an ammunition dump; *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), in which an impulsive schemer repudiates the king's service in an attempt to establish his own kingdom on the El Dorado River, in a world where "God never finished his work"; through *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), the story of an "orphan of Europe" who has no idea what violence is, even though he himself is killed in an incomprehensible act of insidious violence; *Woyzeck* (1979), the story of a simple soldier who, like a Gnostic, prophesizes that "everything earthly is evil" and "even money is subject to decay"; to *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), in which Klaus Kinski plays the role of a dreamer trying to build an opera in the middle of the jungle, and finally *Cobra Verde* (1987), where an adventurer, a bandit and a loner, a slave



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trader, once again played by Klaus Kinski, himself becomes a hostage to violence, and an irreversible violence at that. The documentary sense grows in Herzog's work, and it seems that the observation of acts of destruction, apocalypse, and possible reactions to it is gaining in scope and intensity. Already in the 1977 film *La Soufrière - Warten auf eine unausweichliche Katastrophe*, Herzog looks at the fate of an island that is part of Guadeloupe, doomed to an "inevitable catastrophe", which, by the way, does not happen. In the film *Bells from the Deep: Faith and Superstition in Russia* (1993), the director tells the story of the city of Kitezh, which was submerged in a lake, and the superstitions that arose from this event. In *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007), Herzog observes an Arctic laboratory that seems to be a bridgehead and a seed of "humanity" preparing to leave the planet Earth after its destruction. Finally, in *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), Herzog observes from a bird's eye view the devastated oil fields of Kuwait after the Gulf War. In this film, we hear the question of life without fire – has life without fire become unbearable for us? We also hear the story of a mother of a child trampled during the war who loses his speech and, in his last sentence, complains mutely: "Mommy, I never want to learn to speak again." During my presentation, I would like to reflect on these various documents of cruelty recorded by Herzog and ask what conclusions should be drawn from them. How can we go beyond a catalogue, an archive of cruelty, beyond simple documentation, and beyond a registration that would be something more than an act of awareness?



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BIO:

Szymon Wróbel is a full professor of philosophy at the Faculty of *Artes Liberales* at the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He is the author of numerous books and articles scattered in various scientific journals. His books in English include: *Deferring the Self* and *Grammar and Glamor of Cooperation*, published in 2013 and 2015. In Polish: *Ćwiczenia z przyjaźni (Exercises in Friendship)*, *Lektury retroaktywne (Retroactive Readings)* and *Polska pozycja depresyjna (Polish Depressive Position)* published by Kraków Publishing House Universitas. In 2016, IFiS PAN published his book, *Filozof i terytorium (Philosopher and Territory)* on the Warsaw School of Historians of Ideas. Together with Krzysztof Skonieczny, he is co-editor of three books – *Atheism Revisited. Rethinking Modernity and Inventing New Modes of Life* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020) and *Living and Thinking in the Post-Digital World* (Universitas 2021), *Regimes of Capital in the Postdigital Age* (Routledge, 2023). Currently, he is the head of the experimental Laboratory of Techno-Humanities at the Faculty of *Artes Liberales* where for several years he realizes the “Technology and Socialization” project.

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Alicja Antosz
University of Warsaw

Unbearable Happiness of Writing. The Cruelty of Euphoria according to Franz Kafka's Letters and Diaries

ABSTRACT:

Literature is no joy but essential happiness. It does not please, instead it constitutes sense. Brings no peace, yet harmonizes all within itself. Its paradox consists of its extreme nature which makes one who accesses it touch sometimes the very opposite of the expected.

The greatest or the only form of being, according to Franz Kafka, *being* literature has nothing of a triumph unless the triumphant is literature itself. For it does not call with the sweetest of songs, but haunts a writer, demanding him to give up his voice in favor of a howl. Kafka's thoughts concerning writing, in Diaries or Letters (to Felice, to Milena), give the idea of getting closer to literature, mastering one's technique, achieving real happiness which grows accordingly to what seems to be a still deeper misery. For the happiness of writing demands enduring its impossibility of embodiment.



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The speech will consist on question: what is or appears to be cruel in relation between literature and the writer. The main reference will be the case of Kafka's interest in frontier of knowledge, being an almost ecstatically captured border between sane and insane. Fragments of intime pieces by Kafka will be accompanied by the context of ecstatic-epileptic boundaries in Paul Virilio's "The Aesthetics of Disappearance" (2009).

BIO:

Alicja Antosz MA – I am a recent graduate at the faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw. I have obtained my master's degree (2024) by defending the thesis entitled "Creation – the Need for Indiscretion. The Necessity of Revelation of Marcel Proust and Ludwik Hering". My interests concern questions about the essence of literature, especially the idea of literature's fragility, meaning it to be a subject exposed to be potentially harmed, faulted or sinned against by its author. Since 2022 I am in constant cooperation with Instytut Literacki "Kultura" (eng. 'Kultura Literary Institute') in Maisons-Laffitte, realizing grants (2024), traineeships (2022-2024) and projects which concern activity of the Institute, as well as my own scientific interests.

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Jakub Babuška

University of Warsaw, University of Edinburgh

Dorota Orzechowska

University of Warsaw, University College London

Cruelty Without Intimacy. Cruelty Beyond Subjectivity - The Great Silence of Institutions

ABSTRACT:

This paper investigates the concept of cruelty the cinematic exploration of violence in Sergio Corbucci's *The Great Silence*. The focus will be placed on the character of Tigrero, played by Klaus Kinski, who is ruthless bounty hunter who stands out from the usual cliché by achieving his cruel and clandestine deeds always adhering to normative law and abstaining from manifesting his desire. The aim of this paper is to examine whether violence exercised by a desiring subject is still thinkable. The key coordinates for this exploration will be provided by oeuvres of three authors, namely Jacques Lacan, Jean Baudrillard, and Antonin Artaud.

Lacan, in a lesser-known chapter of his *Écrits*, contrasts the Marquis de Sade's 'delight in evil' with Kant's universal imperative, ultimately suggesting that the pursuit of absolute cruelty - or its opposite,



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absolute altruism - requires the erasure of the subject as an enjoying being.

Furthermore, Baudrillard's analysis of the era of simulation, complemented by Adam Curtis's *I Can't Get You Out of My Head*, underscores a contemporary landscape where cruelty seems to lose its substance, becoming a spectacle without real consequence.

Finally, the inclusion of Artaud further directs this inquiry. The Theater of Cruelty, which demands a visceral, transformative experience that shatters the boundaries between reality and representation, contrasts sharply with the cold, detached cruelty of institutions depicted in *The Great Silence* and Baudrillard's world of simulacres.

Despite the intensity of political hysteria, outcomes that once might have threatened reality now merely reinforce the status quo. Hence, in these hyperreal times, we need to find out how to address more diffused cruelty which is detached both from subjectivity and from its old-fashioned transgressive allure.

BIOS:

Jakub Babuška graduated with an LLB from the University of Warwick and an MA in Medical Ethics and Law from King's College London. He is currently continuing his legal studies at the University of Warsaw and is set to start a PhD at the University of Edinburgh.

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Dorota Orzechowska holds a Mechanical Engineering degree (MEng) from the University of Warwick and is now studying for an MSc in Data Science and Ecology at University College London, as well as pursuing a Master's in Philosophy at the University of Warsaw.

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Tirza Ben-Ezzer
Emory University in Atlanta

Civilization and its Digital-contents: Fascism in the Internet-Age

ABSTRACT:

This paper investigates digital cultural practices involving anonymity and humor in order to elucidate psycho-social undercurrents for the ever-urgent question: Why do the masses desire fascism? These selected aspects of digital cultural practices share in common a paradoxical relationship with the principle of identity in homogeneity. The drives are multiplicitous – there are contradictory drives that coexist together simultaneously. On the one hand there is the



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heterological drive to escape the demands of homogeneous identity, on the other hand it is specifically this heterological drive that will act as a key unifying force in social practices that cultivate libidinal bonds in a homogeneous community, in all forms on the spectrum, including facism. Practices of anonymity online and distributing memes based on a shared humor can be seen as the products of social compromises between competing drives and the condition of existing with others. These digital practices are consolatory gratifications – by producing contained means for simulated heterogeneity, social stability can be maintained. So it is specifically that there are practices that allow for the temporary gratification of heterogeneous expenditure which sustains a will to maintain the homogenous identity. This expenditure is further linked to erotic and ecstatic affectual experiences such as the pressure of libidinal forces, laughter, self-annihilation, sadomasochistic indulgence, etc. This is why these sorts of practices take up shape in various forms across demographics and social groups – which is also what makes them distinctly suitable strategies for radicalization online. It is at this conflictual and paradoxical crossroads that fascism strategizes its entry. The crucial point to emphasize is that the contemporary rise of fascism is mobilized through tapping into libidinal drives and erotic gratifications which are not merely present in those explicitly aligned with fascist political ideologies, but are inherent in us all.



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BIO:

Tirza Ben-Ezzer is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the Department of Philosophy at Emory University. Their main areas of study are Social and Political Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy of the Digital, and Philosophy of Sexuality. They have received a certificate in Psychoanalytic Studies and have additionally completed a fellowship at the Emory University Psychoanalytic Institute, which focuses on the study of psychoanalysis in the clinical context. They have written and presented multiple works on the intersections of politics, the psyche, and digital cultures, including papers on psychoanalysis and conspiracy theories, memes and humor, libidinal economies of abjection, as well as their Masters thesis on digital "subjectivity" and the mythology of the End of History. The submitted abstract is a condensed sample from their dissertation project which brings together the thought of Bataille, Fanon, Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, Freud, Klein, and other various psychoanalytic thinkers in order to link the psyche, politics, and digital technologies in the context of the contemporary re-emergence of fascism.

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Felix Birch

Independent Researcher

Infrastructure and the Rhythm of Cruelty

ABSTRACT:

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe military engineering quietly became civil engineering, and the new practice set about building substitutes for making war. Distinct from architecture or the work of journeymen, engineering had been shaped by the demands of warfare. The rapid construction of forts and military roads that were key to the organisation of defensible territory outpaced the work of architects and demanded new construction techniques which could quickly utilise unskilled labour. This discipline was used to deliver a nascent civil life. The public works which civil engineering created were a new means of social organisation, containing a military division of labour that set the rules for each closed environment, famously barracks, prisons, and schools. However, unexplored among these spaces, is the transport infrastructure that proliferated in the early modern period.

This presentation treats transport infrastructure as a key technology in shaping modern subjectivity. Infrastructure organises the perception of each person who uses it because it mediates our



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relationship with the world. Its rules and codes must of course be followed for it to operate, but its ubiquity begins to overshadow all other space, the natural environment, and even the image of thought. As a space created by the state, infrastructure fosters a dependency, where the modern subject relies upon the mediation of the state to negotiate its environment. There is no space for a sensitive spatial awareness when the structures of everyday life rest on the brutalist foundations of military engineering. Our surroundings are organised by a logic which bypasses the vernacular of local environment or the particular skill of an individual, and instead requires quantifiable and interchangeable labour. This presentation will give examples of the subtle occupation of civilian space, and politicise infrastructure to show its role in producing and circulating alienated subjects.

BIO:

Felix Birch is a geotechnical engineer for Network Rail, in Glasgow. After finishing his masters in Civil Engineering at Edinburgh University in 2021, he worked as a researcher in the Geosciences department where he started investigating the history and philosophical foundations of engineering practice. His papers and conference presentations have all sought to politicise engineering practice and situate its development within a broader history of capital. He is not affiliated with any academic institution.

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Ivan Dimitrijević
University of Warsaw

Cruelty Through its Opposites

ABSTRACT:

In *Horrorisms* Adriana Cavarero had implicitly pointed at the fact that the victim of cruelty is characterized by defenselessness (*inermità*, literally: “being without arms”). The defenseless status of a person can be either situational (in the event of being at mercy of someone) or ontological, as in the case of an infant. Given that Cavarero argues that human being is structurally dependent and relational and, as such, defenseless by nature, this means that there are no boundaries to cruelty to be found except for the force of the political power (law, sovereignty, state apparatus). In this paper I aim to explore the limits to cruelty by taking into account its opposites: pity and sympathy. By considering the pre-institutional praxis of the “Homeric society”, I will argue that pity posits a potential limit to cruelty even when legitimate power commanding compassion and refrainment from excessive violence is missing. On the other hand, the modern concept of cruelty is semantically and logically linked to the concept of sympathy. I will argue that modern cruelty and its opposite are potentially limitless, given that one can act cruelly in order to empower or impose



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sympathy among human beings: to be cruel towards a cruel person equals to showing sympathy towards mankind, to being just. The sympathy, developed by Scotch moralists in order to counter Hobbes's possessive individualism, operates as a moral force of socialization and makes the cruelty appear uneconomic. A cruel deed can be defined as an action without profit. Here lies the reason why some anti-capitalist thinkers have tried to reevaluate cruelty – as in the case of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in which cruelty is a "Nietzschean" force that shatters false realities.

BIO:

Ivan Dimitrijevic teaches philosophy at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw. His research interests include political philosophy, philosophy of praxis, and conceptual history. His last works have been devoted to the conceptual history of political and practical aspects of concepts of madness, work and movement: *Critique and Care: Madness Before and After Basaglia* (2022, in Italian), *Dispute on Work* (2022, in Polish) and *To Go and to Arrive at the Same Time: Four Essays in the Critique of Therapeutic Politics* (2023, in Polish).

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Nestor Ngong Dzenchuo
Independent Scholar

Cruelness of Belligerents – Ambassonian War

ABSTRACT:

War has never appealed to the human conscience – not in any form. This is because in war humanity descends into brutes, even feral and soulless.

The world has never been gripped with bated breath like when a new war breaks out, no matter the reason in the world's polycrisis. This is because the first real victims are the women and children as has been noted and still in the ongoing war in the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon based on Linguistic Lines, otherwise known as Ambassonian War of Independence. This war pits the military and Southern Cameroon Revolutionary Guards, the separatist fighters.

The torture and execution of captured opponents without respect of international convention on war by both sides lend credence to the cruelty and barbarity of war. The mistreatment, rape and sometimes execution of local girls by the military because they are 'Ambassonian women' by the soldiers with callous disregard by the



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authorities is heart-rending, thoughts that make culpable international communities such as the African Union and the United Nations as silent accomplices to war's cruelty and barbarism today.

The war began when both disgruntled Common Law lawyers had come out on the street bearing peace plants, demanded a translation of the OHADA (Business Law) texts from French into English of Cameroon's bijural system. The legal minds were severely manhandled by security elements. On the heels of that the Cameroon Anglophone Teachers Trade Union (CATTU) to came out to protest, demanding salary increment and improve working condition like their French counterparts. They too were severely beaten with police batons. This war has seen pregnant women caught and put behind bars for being spouses of separatist fighters. Or, the bodies of slain separatist fighters decapitated and burnt to ashes by the military and vice versa. The cruelty perpetuated by the belligerents, Ambassinian fighters and the army, makes war an unpleasant thing to wish for.

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Andrzej Frelek
Polish Academy of Sciences

Bourgeois Coldness and Brutalized Nature

ABSTRACT:

One of the less known concepts in Adorno's critical repertoire is that of 'bourgeois coldness'. It denotes a type of affectivity and ethics, in which one's world becomes reduced to a private sphere, enclosed upon one's own interests. This reduction proceeds through a process of abstraction from the particularity of other beings, and most of all from their interests and suffering. A form of subjectivity related to such coldness is seen by Adorno as inherent to subjects caught within capitalist social relations which incentivize it. Those who have commented upon this concept in Adorno's writings rightly see this type of coldness as the prerequisite for various forms of brutality, which is visited upon both individuals and their groups. Unfortunately, it is rather rarely non-instrumentally stretched outside of the realm of human relationships.

My goal in this paper is therefore first to present the concept itself briefly, and then to put forward that the coldness it describes influences, for Adorno, the violence of inter-species relations just as much as intra-species ones. In his writings the indifference felt



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towards the particularity of external nature is both the key to understanding the indifference of humans towards other humans, as well as a tragedy in itself. It is the condition of possibility for mass slaughter and instrumental usage of non-human nature.

Moreover, I will argue that departing from the critique of this coldness it is possible to speak about ethics of otherness in Adorno. This denotes an ethical approach centered on the recognition of any and all forms of particularity, which is based on an elective affinity with the capacity of other beings to suffer. This is a concept of ethics of compassion and care, and the sole goal of this approach is to prevent suffering in a wider sense and without boundaries.

BIO:

Andrzej Frelek is a PhD candidate at IFIS PAN. His work centers on the relationship of the critical theories of Marx and Adorno to the contemporary climate crisis, as well as to other issues surrounding the human exploitation of nature.

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Daniel Kisliakov
University of Divinity, Melbourne

Envisioning Sociocultural Communication: Australian Insights for Human Cohesion

ABSTRACT:

As cultural change erodes connectedness, traditional modalities of sociocultural dialectic and relatedness prove increasingly inadequate, contributing to rising cruelty and brutality. This situation demands a re-envisioning of communication methods that can adapt to rapid technological changes, including the rise of artificial intelligence, while acknowledging that established approaches fall short in negotiating evolving socio-cultural norms.

This paper seeks to expand on anthropological insights from an Australian perspective. Distinct from Eurocentrism, the philosophical understanding rooted in Australia's natural environment and Indigenous culture offers another perspective on the human condition, addressing the limits of established modalities. Rather than negating established narratives, the approach seeks to reflect the breadth of human experience, recognizing the value in diverse cultural frameworks.



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Drawing on contemporary theological and philosophical thinkers, alongside communication theory and relative ontology, the paper proposes a multidisciplinary approach to addressing fundamental human need. While human dialogue is universal, practices like “yarning” offer valuable insight. Australian perspectives thus present alternatives that challenge established models, suggesting a mode of dialogue and relatedness that is inherent to the human condition. Sociocultural categories emerge beyond existing modes, enhancing cohesion and reducing brutality in an increasingly interconnected world.

The lecture concludes by proposing that this conceptual expansion, exemplified in the Australian context, calls for a re-envisioning of social dialogue and communication practices to encompass all human experience, with a particular focus on nations with Indigenous peoples. These conclusions are relevant to the global human experience and provide an model for navigating sociocultural and technological change without limiting the scope of analysis.

BIO:

Daniel Kisliakov is a scholar at the University of Divinity, Melbourne. He specializes in the history of Eastern European theology and philosophy. His research examines the interaction between Eastern European and Western traditions, focusing on their influence on contemporary sociocultural dynamics. By interdisciplinarity, he integrates Australian perspectives, proposing expanded anthropological frameworks that challenge the limits of conventional



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sociocultural categories. He has published several articles in peer-reviewed journals, contributing to a deeper understanding of human connectedness and cohesion in light of socio-cultural change. His work has been presented at various academic conferences, furthering the understanding of the human condition from both historical and modern perspectives.

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Nikolai Kostin

Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow

“Techne”, personality and violence. The theories of L. Karsawin and Y. Hui

ABSTRACT:

The close relationship between violence and technology is a popular theme in many contemporary discourses, whether philosophical, sociological or political science. Violence begets violence, but it is often technology that acts as a tool of brutality. In this article, we will rely on an understanding of technology as ‘techne’, i.e. as a philosophical category, separating the concepts of ‘technicality’ and ‘technology’ from it.



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When we speak of 'techne', we emphasise its anthropological character - on the one hand, it is something separate from man, outside of him, something that mediates the dialogue between the individual and the world, something created by man. On the other hand, it is something that is deeply immersed in man, is an important part of him, has a special closeness to man and is therefore hidden from him. How, then, are violence and technology related to the individual?

To answer this question, we can synthesise the ideas of two very different thinkers, Lev Karsawin (a 20th century Russian and Lithuanian philosopher) and Yuk Hui (a contemporary Hong Kong philosopher and technology theorist). Despite their seemingly vast difference, one can imagine a synthesis of their concepts: 'Karsawin's 'pulsating personality' and Hui's 'techne as cosmotechnics'. The dynamic understanding of personal structure (Karsawin) allows us to understand the locality and regionality of techne (Hui). Moreover, thanks to the locality and anthropological character of 'techne', we can realise that it is directly related to the philosophy of personhood.

How to think of the Other? - To stop thinking of him through correlation and leave him to his anonymous entity. And it is through knowledge and technology that violence occurs, what Karsawin calls the 'extinction of thinking' (brutalism). How does the 'extinction of thinking' relate to an understanding of 'techne'? - To this question, the paper assumes a combination of the above two concepts as a preliminary answer.



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BIO:

Nikolai Kostin is a doctoral student at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland (Faculty of Philosophy). Doctoral thesis focus on the philosophical ideas of Knorozov, a well-known Maya language researcher, anthropologist, historian, linguist and semiotician. While the figure of Knorozov is not well-known in the field of philosophy, the main focus of the thesis is to identify, systematise and investigate the context of the scholar's theoretical concepts.

Academic interests include Russian philosophy of the late period (20th century) - especially understudied researchers. Philosophical anthropology, philosophy of language, theory of the collective.

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Denis Petrina

Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, European Humanities University in Vilnius

The Cruelty of Code

ABSTRACT:

In his seminal text “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, Deleuze famously proclaims that “the language of control is made of codes”. In this presentation, I draw heavily on queer theory, where the heteronormative arrangement of society is understood as “coding of sexuality” (Cockayne 2017), to problematize the normative, and thus cruel, implications of code as “the language of control”. In his formulation of biopolitics, Foucault distinguishes between disciplinary norms and biopolitical normalization, the latter characterized by its immanent nature, processuality, and modulation. Within the monstrous coupling of ever-growing digital governance techniques and the neoliberal regime, often referred to as cybercapitalism, coding takes the form of affective modulation, molding, and management (Lazzarato), marking a decisive break from the panopticon to the panopsychon, as extensively argued by Byung-Chul Han. Despite its neutral or even progressive appearance, this pervasive, control-driven governmentality permeates both the body and the mind, reaching into arguably most intimate domains of its



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recipients – their brains, as illustrated by Warden Neidich, who exemplifies the new modus operandi of digital control through the governance of the prefrontal cortex via meticulously coded “assemblages of attraction”. Meanwhile, Patricia Clough emphasizes the paradoxical nature of control, astutely noting that it operates without the need of targeting a particular subject. The presentation encompasses the designated problematic field, viewing coding and codes as (a) mechanisms of digital and social regulation, (b) tools of translation of the analog affective into the digital, and, ultimately, (c) as an epistemological principle of normalization underpinning the latent yet cruel “semiotics of exploitation”.

BIO:

Denis Petrina (he/him) is a Researcher at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute (Department of Contemporary Philosophy) and a Scientific Fellow at European Humanities University (Vilnius). He has successfully defended his doctoral dissertation on philosophical interpretations and biopolitical implications of the notion of affect (Vilnius, Lithuania, 2022). His research interests include affect theory, new materialism and speculative epistemologies in both media and philosophical contexts, digital studies, posthumanism, queer and sexuality studies.

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Václav Sklenář
University of Pardubice

Capitalist Realism Fifteen Years Later

ABSTRACT:

In 2009, two masterly analyses of brutality inherent in the neoliberal order emerged: Berardi's *Precarious Rhapsody* and Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*. These texts uncovered twofold systemic brutality. First, unlimited deregulation of free market destroys the public sphere and subjects it to the process of commodification. At the same time, cyber space filled with innumerable transmitters overburdens our nervous systems with an amount of information and interpellations which we are unable to process meaningfully. The first attack brutalizes public spaces, while the second invades the subject in such a way that it restructures its constitution and brings about psychological and cognitive disorders in forms of over-excitation, dyslexia and panic. This results in desensitization, disaffection, social dissociation, and aggressiveness towards both oneself and others. Berardi and Fisher attempted to formulate strategies for emancipation. For Fisher, the instability of neoliberal order was signalled by the appalling rise of psychological illness, while Berardi saw opportunity in new forms of organization of mass intellectual labour.



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Fifteen years later, the system seems to be even more impenetrable than before, producing ever more aggressivity in the form of wars, political violence, school shootings, generalized masochism, and so on. My presentation will focus on the ways in which neoliberalism reacted to threats to its stability presented by Fisher and Berardi. My thesis is that emancipatory opportunities have been blocked by a renewal of disaster capitalism, starting with covid and followed by many other states of emergency. This strategy submits us to ever harsher conditions of competition on the one hand, while presenting ever more threats to what is called “our way of life” on the other. Constant fear for economic and bare physical survival is added to the information overload, showing that while Fisher’s and Berardi’s analysis is still valid, we need to look for new and more complex strategies to break the vicious circle of systemic and individual aggressivity.

BIO:

Dr. Václav Sklenář has recently started his academic career as an assistant professor at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at University of Pardubice. His work focuses on Hegelianism and critical theory as sources for rethinking and restructuring current political frameworks.

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Eero Suorsa
University of Turku

Brutalized Body: Representations of Aesthetic Surgery and Wretched of the Earth

ABSTRACT:

In my paper, I conceptualize the concept of the colonized body during late capitalism in aesthetic surgery. My central question is: how the representations of aesthetic surgery reproduce brutalized figures of oppressed people in popular culture? The case study of my paper, and the article behind it, is *Nip/Tuck*-television series (2003-2010).

Aesthetic surgery is no more the luxury of the upper classes; smaller operations, such as breast operations and dangerous, permanently harmful, different vaginoplasties and hyaluronic acid operations, are readily available for working-class people and other groups in society that live in the most harmful position. Aesthetic surgery has been advertised as an easy way to improve employment opportunities in precarious working conditions, especially for various marginalized groups, such as people of color, gay men, and working-class women.

I use as my framework Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Matthew Beaumont's *How We Walk: Frantz Fanon and the Politics*



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of the Body (2024). I want to ask if the philosophy has been unable to answer the questions posed by the growing culture of cosmetic surgery. As my empirical framework, I use Bonnie Perry's *Appearance Bias and Crime* (2019) to demonstrate how the brutality of appearance does not stay on the TV screen.

My main argument is that philosophers must take clear standpoints when analyzing representations of popular culture. The argument is normative and goes beyond descriptive accounts; why it will be necessary to talk about aesthetic surgery and how it is reinforced in popular culture and why we will need to talk about the harmful beauty norms we often take for granted. These beauty norms often harm marginalized groups both in the Global North and South.

BIO:

Eero Suorsa (he/him) is a doctoral researcher in the Unit of Philosophy at the University of Turku. He is working on his Ph.D. *Ethics of Aesthetic Surgery*. Other research interests include the history of philosophy and aesthetics. He also writes regularly about class, popular culture, and the philosophy of history both in academic and mainstream platforms.

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Bettina Szabados

HUN-REN Research Centre for Humanities in Budapest

Does Cruelty have Ethic?

ABSTRACT:

In 1918/1919 was a turning point in the history of Hungary. The long years of the Great War was followed by the short-lived Aster Revolution and by the equally ephemeral Hungarian Soviet Republic. The war and these revolutionary states claimed many lives, and demanded even self-sacrifice, which awakened the need for a new ethical perspective.

Can the killing of one person, or even hundreds of people, be morally justified if it is done for the “greater good”? And what does the “greater good” even mean? Is it merely a utopia, or is it a reality that can be achieved?

These were the main questions of interest for a circle of thinkers. György Lukács and his contemporaries not only asked these questions, but they also tried to live according to them. Lukács’s main task was to “create” an ethic that involved committing sin. This ethic, which I call the ethic of sacrifice, is based on the idea that changes in reality can only be achieved if we are even capable of killing for it.



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However, if someone commits to this idea and lives by the rules of this ethic, they may be capable of the most inhuman cruelty, because there can be no boundary when the “greater good” is at stake. Lukács’s answer to this, in his famous article *Tactics and Ethics*, was that only sacrifice can be a measure: sacrifice reveals whether an act is motivated by cruelty or by love for humanity. However, those who commit to this ethic also sacrifice their own moral purity.

The main task of this case study is to try to understand how the ethic of sacrifice changed in the process of its application, or whether we can still speak of an ethic in the context of cruelty. To explore this, I will examine two cases: the dictatorship of Stalin and the terrorist group, the Red Army Faction.

BIO:

Bettina Szabados is a PhD student in Philosophy at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Her research interests include Hungarian and German history of philosophy of the 19th and 20th century, the history of ideas of the 19th and 20th century and the philosophy of Georg (György) Lukács.

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Katarzyna Szafranowska
University of Warsaw

The Cruel Fantasy of Non-Relationality: Depressed Society in an Isolation Tank

ABSTRACT:

In the “society of tiredness” marked by exhausted and depressed subjects (Han 2015), it seems almost self-evident that there is a growing interest in R.E.S.T., or restricted environmental stimulation technique. A substantial body of research has shown that the temporary sensory deprivation provided by REST has beneficial effects on the symptoms of anxiety and depression (eg. van Dierendonck and Nijenhuis 2005, Lashgari et al. 2024). Isolation tanks, originally designed in 1954 by John C. Lilly as an experiment in mind control with potential military applications (Williams 2019) are now widely available for commercial use. They offer a form of solitary confinement that is no longer viewed as a severe punishment, but as a treatment for overstimulation – cognitive, emotional, and sensory overload resulting from the intensified connectivity of contemporary life.

Arguing that the sensory isolation offered by REST is a cruel fantasy of non-relationality, I examine its philosophical premises and socio-



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ethical implications. Firstly, I propose that float tank therapy represents an attempt to optimize rest, boredom, and contemplation. In the context of the therapeutic culture (Illouz 2008), I demonstrate how non-relationality is commodified and marketed as a form of self-care. Secondly, I analyze the withdrawal and comfortable numbness implied by the promise of minimal sensory input — a temporary erasure of both environmental and bodily context. As such, sensory deprivation is more than another rendition of self-absorption (Sennett 1974), becoming an elaborate, yet failed, exercise in non-existence, a strategic pause in the basic interdependence of living beings. Thirdly, I argue that isolation tank therapy presents self-referentiality as a “technology of the modern non-self” (Pickering 2010). By deliberately erasing the other as a point of reference (Han 2016), it becomes a form of escapism from the inconvenience of others (Berlant 2011, 2022). Fourthly, I claim that due to its commercialisation, delusive character, and idealisation of non-relationality, REST is ultimately cruel, as it deepens the crisis of connection (Way et al. 2018), and hinders both ethical and political responsiveness (as understood by Butler, Athanasiou 2013). The popularity of isolation tanks signals a trend toward anesthetization, serving apathy instead of empathy, and thereby further eroding the social.

BIO:

Katarzyna Szafranowska teaches and researches at the University of Warsaw. She is a philosopher and cultural theorist, working as an



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Maria Wodzińska
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Brutalism of Migration/ Migration of Brutalism

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of my speech is to pay attention to two intersecting phenomena: the radicalization of migration policies and the expansion of security measures. Based on Achille Mbembe's term, I refer to them as brutalism of migration and migration of brutalism respectively. In the presentation, I will show the applicability of the term brutalism in both contexts by discussing concrete examples of practices.

The starting point is the recognition that we are living today at a time when migration has become the norm. There are many reasons for this, most often linked to the policies of specific countries, wars,



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economic crises, or climate change. These factors frequently overlap and intensify each other, giving the impression of being scattered hotspots on the map that need to be isolated, contained, and regulated using „states of emergency”, walls, barriers, and border protection technologies. Systemic violence at national borders has become an immanent part of modernity, which in this case can be described, to paraphrase the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, as the „brutalism of migration”.

A parallel phenomenon is the migration of brutalism. This process is associated with the implementation of practices and the use of infrastructures previously used for different purposes - often of a military nature or related to the desire to ensure broader security in a particular place on the world map. The control methods and technological solutions used by the US Army during the Iraq War (2003-2011) were applied to the management of the US population after it ended. The situation is no different on the Polish-Belarusian border. We are dealing both with the transplantation of solutions developed as a part of the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in international military contingents, associated with operating in a state of war, to a place where (at least declaratively) there is peace, and with the application of practices aimed at reducing migration, developed and implemented on the Balkan route as part of state and international migration policies.

The topics I have taken up in the presentation are the result of my research and activist work carried out from 2015 to the present day



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on the borders of European countries (Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Poland).

BIO:

Maria Wodzińska holds a bachelor's and master's degree (2014-2019) from the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" at the University of Warsaw. She received her Ph.D. degree in Humanities (discipline of Culture and Religion Studies) in 2023 based on her dissertation „Geontopolitics characterised through concept, image, and evidence. Possible ways to include nature in biopolitical and necropolitical reflection” which was written under the supervision of Professor Szymon Wróbel. At the center of her research interests are, on the one hand, biopolitical and necropolitical structures of power, and on the other, forensic research and the whole spectrum of relations between nature and the environment, and extractivism. She recently published a text „Prawo jako spekulacja”, (in: "Hakowanie antropocenu. Nowe koncepcje wspólnot więcej-niż-ludzkich w ekologicznych fabulacjach spekulatywnych”, ed. Małgorzata Sugiera, Jagiellonian University Press, Kraków 2023) and the article „How to Inscribe Nature and the Environment Into the Philosophy of Politics” (in „Philosophy Study”, March 2023, Vol. 13, No. 3).

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The Gray Race: How Tech is Re-racializing White Supremacy in the Age of Brutalism

ABSTRACT:

Instead of critiquing the far right as simply weird, we need to look behind its conceptual apparatus to its ideological and financial backers. For instance, in a bad, un-ironic ripoff of Deleuze's *Control Society*, Balaji Srinivasan in his *Network State*, writes that

Tech loyalists ("Grays") will don Gray shirts, and carry Gray ID cards (for swiping into the Gray sectors of town). Everyone would be welcome at the Gray Pride march—everyone, that is, except the Blues. Blues (liberals) will be banned from the Gray-controlled zones, unlike the Republicans ("Reds").

Here it seems gray is the new white. In this remarkable passage, Srinivasan re-racializes white supremacy while calling for the ethnic cleansing of liberals. But despite the violence of the passage, the term



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Gray evades the woke callouts toward yt subjects. Gray also invokes exposed brutalist functionalism merging the self-interest of the white citizen subject, the white invested worker who identifies up toward their founder gods, and the gray middle manager cog.

Now the gray race has not taken hold yet. However, Project 2025 does propose to abolish racial categories in future census reports. So, this isn't just about coercion or turning the individual consciousness towards fascism or hailing white subjects. It is instead the class unconsciousness of the moderates, the ironic bros, and the dopamine-infused behavioral habits that link liberals, libertarians, fascists, and even social democrats together in ways that are uncomfortable to acknowledge.

This essay aims to unpack these dynamics, exploring how the greying of society is symptomatic of the broader collapse of clear ideological boundaries. Through the lens of media and political theory, we will delve into the paranoia, political angst, and anomie that define our current moment, where both sides of the spectrum are, perhaps unknowingly, in the words of Felix Guattari – part of the same brutal machine of subjection.

BIOS:

Brett Zehner is a writer working on a book called *Capital and White Anxiety Volume 1: The Automation of White Anxiety*. His research spans digital culture and cultural politics. He is also an experimental language artist working across media. Brett received his MFA from



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UCSD and his PhD from Brown University. He is currently a Lecturer in Media Theory and Artificial Intelligence at The University of Exeter.

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Adam Kingsmith works on the politics of mental health and the development of emotion-AI systems to improve social and economic outcomes. He has a Ph.D. from York University, where his dissertation focused on the political economy of anxiety and the rise of biomedical industry. He is also co-founder and managing director of EiQ Technologies Inc., an emotion-AI startup previously incubated at Toronto Metropolitan University's Creative Innovation Studio.

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