The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television

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Preface

This handbook is structured in eight parts.

Part I – Paving the Way to Posthumanism: The Precursors

This section focuses on some of the intellectual influences that have paved the way for the posthumanist discourse.

William Brown begins with posthumanism's most referenced theorists, Deleuze and Guattari. Brown highlights the often-cited idea of 'bodies without organs' and 'desiring machines' as critical to understanding Deleuzian posthumanism. These decentring concepts of the human, leading away from a grounded, circumscribed, individuated entity, challenge simplistic transhumanist notions of the self, allowing Brown a critique of cinema from a posthuman/Deleuzian perspective, in which he argues that cinema has always represented a world 'teeming with life' to the point where humans have little or no control.

Jon Baldwin follows with a look into media theorist Baudrillard and his thinking that the digital world reduces us to the inhuman. Baldwin focuses on how alterity may be lost in our posthuman moment, in particular how virtual reality is represented as a space in science fiction (SF) for the eradication of difference. The copy and the clone become the hyperreal, or the new real, and the posthuman experience divorces us from ourselves.

Stefan Herbrechter wades into the difficult work of deconstruction theorist Derrida, arguing that 'Derrida is both a "proto-posthumanist" and a "media philosopher"', and that posthumanism and contemporary media would not even exist without Derridean deconstruction. Herbrechter teases apart Derrida as both someone screened and someone who comments on moving pictures such as film and television, and on visual media in general.

T. Hugh Crawford provides an examination of Latour's critique of modernity and how it relates to posthumanism. Crawford notes that Latour's critical approach undermines the notion of the posthuman because, as with being modern, we have never been human in the naïve Enlightenment sense. Latour's focus on the non-human provides a 'theatre of proof', whereby scientists like Pasteur were able to foreground certain dramatic elements in their experiments, thus making an impact in much the same mode as cinema.

Babette Babich ends this section with an overview of Nietzsche's Zarathustra 2.0, detailing how the philosopher's notion of the *Übermensch* relates to Singularitarian ideas of posthumanity, and how the popular imagination skews Nietzsche's idea towards posthuman supermen.

Part II – Varieties of People-to-Come: Posthuman Becomings

This second part deals with the various different ways we imagine the posthuman and the transhuman to be; that is, what we may one day be and what we are already in the process of becoming.

Rhys Owain Thomas starts the section off with a look at the cyborg in film and television. Thomas locates the postmodern cyborg within the discourse of critical theory so that its posthuman inflections are noted, namely, those of subject creation and identity. The screened versions reflect shared anxieties of the technologized human.

Dan Hassler-Forest applies ideas from critical theory to screened superheroes, according to which posthuman bodies are discursive processes being written today by technology. He sees the posthuman as providing a necessary tension for the superhero paradigm in its quest to overcome the body's limitations.

Anna Powell provides a Deleuzian reading of how the posthuman monstrous is comprised of processes of 'becoming, assemblages, anomalies'. She moves through examples of screened cloning texts, slowing down with a detailed reading of *Casshern*, a film with multiplicities of narrative, style and content that imagine posthumans as Deleuzian neo-sapiens.

David Roden tackles posthumanism within the context of the technological singularity as seen in film and television, attempting to understand how we will know that we have entered a truly post-singularity world.

Drew Ayers ends this section with a unique look into how swarm technology in digital media provides a metaphor for understanding posthumanism. For Ayers, the combination of digital and analogue elements forms a hybrid synonymous with our posthuman condition.

Part III – Rise of the Machines: Posthuman Intellects

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the focus of the third section.

It begins with *Kevin LaGrandeur*'s examination of androids as a cinematic trope wherein anxieties over the human losing control of its creation appear again and again, from outright enslavement to more subtle, nuanced representations of android/human interaction.

Sherryl Vint provides a comment on digital sentience, or 'supercomputers, distributed network AIs', to show that real-world posthumanism in this context is about the fusing of the human and the digital, while film and TV attempt to represent anxieties about such integrations.

Jeff Menne and *Jay Clayton* examine two foundational representations of AI: centralized, self-contained intelligences that grow in size and power, and those that come into being via networks. They examine how the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s does not appear in the movies until much later than expected. Even more recent is the exploration of the posthuman.

Finally, *Dónal P. O'Mathúna* looks into autonomous fighting machines and how they reflect our current posthuman moment. Mining both contemporary realist

film and television, as well as standards from SF, O'Mathúna sees, in modern technology like weaponized drones, a central mechanism for understanding how AI leads to posthumanism. For him, these fictions provide extrapolative scenarios with didactic lessons we should heed.

Part IV – Body and Soul: Posthuman Subjectivities

Focusing on virtual reality, this section explores the reality of the virtual and the virtuality of the real, and how both require and complement each other.

Curtis D. Carbonell argues that a contest of tropes exists in the most interesting representations of posthumanism in SF and fantasy. For him, examples of screened posthumans are telling illustrations of subject formation reflective of our highly technologized realities.

Hilary Wheaton examines how cybersex in film and television emerges at the intersection of technology and virtual space. The posthuman angle, for her, recognizes that these virtual interactions require us to reconcile the physical body with our understanding of desire and technology, before we can fully embrace what it means to be posthuman.

Joel Krueger shifts focus from the virtual to the embodied world by discussing some of the ways that transformative relations between embodiment and technology have been explored in film and television. Krueger concludes that 'these on-screen portrayals of posthuman embodiment remind us that to be an embodied subject is to be always in some way *transcending* that embodiment'.

Ivan Callus explores the resonances between the constructed worlds found in posthumanist fictions and possible worlds theory. Those fictions 'allow the contemporary imagination to play with degrees of (im)probability and the varying scales of pragmatic response to speculation on what could occur suddenly, imminently, gradually, fantastically or inexorably, given where humanity stands in the world(s) it has contrived', which in turn helps to define our actual world.

Tanya Krzywinska and *Douglas Brown* discuss the presence of the posthuman in SF-based games and in the way that film and television represents virtual reality, games and gamers. They argue that, although games do not only often represent posthuman concepts and imagery, they are also posthumanist in the way they are constructed, and usually serve a decidedly humanist agenda.

Part V – Better Humans: Posthuman Capacities

This section addresses human enhancement by considering representations in film and television of the various ways in which we imagine humans to become better through technological modification, as well as the outcomes of such practices.

Michael Hauskeller starts the section off with an exploration of radical life extension and post-mortality, arguing that it is the filmic representation of the vampire that shows most clearly not only the urgency of the human desire for immortality, but also the price that has to be paid for it.

Hub Zwart looks into a Lacanian understanding of posthuman cognitive enhancement. He views the broadening of our cognitive capabilities as providing a reflexive understanding of ourselves as limited human beings, often seen in film and television via neural implants or pharmaceuticals. Rather than providing a reading of the usual suspects, Zwart engages in a focused Lacanian reading of *Limitless*, wherein cognitive enhancers illuminate understandings of standard categories like masculine gender roles.

Kyle McNease also focuses on *Limitless* as a key cinematic text reflecting the problematic notion of human enhancement. He deftly steps through art criticism, philosophy and critical theory, viewing in the film a reminder to be wary of transhumanist promises.

James J. Hughes views popular culture as a contested site of subject formation, one with potential to further democratic pluralism. In particular, he moves through a variety of screened texts in which posthuman 'modalities' run the gamut from the extreme 'other' to sympathetic persons. He ultimately argues that the progressive trajectory from viewing the posthuman as monstrous to democratically agential persons can be seen clearly in SF film and television.

Finally, *Tarja Laine* discusses Ulrich Seidl's *Love*, *Faith* and *Hope* trilogy and argues that, contrary to the hopes of some transhumanists, emotional enhancement does not mean eradicating negative feelings. She sees in film a mechanism for viewers to work through negative emotions. Even more, she applies theories of critical posthumanism to the films, engaging in an ethical project 'aimed at altering our project of looking'.

Part VI – Creating Difference and Identity: Posthuman Communities

What kind of communities are possible and/or desirable in a posthumanist world? This section addresses this question by engaging with the social dimension of posthumanism, asking how we can and will live together in a community with other humans, non-humans and posthumans.

Ralph Pordzik explores how utopian and dystopian film reimagines the boundaries between the human and its varieties of often-extrapolated opposites, ultimately seeing dystopian inflections 'carve out a potential for debate' wherein stable humanist categories open themselves up to transformation.

Francesca Ferrando follows with an intriguing look into screened utopian SF as 'seeds of the future', focusing on difference as a key mechanism in articulating the posthuman through gender and sexuality, through the category of race, through the identity of the cyborg as other and through their acceptance as chimeras and hybrids deserving of love.

David Meeler and *Eric Hill* examine the notion of governance as a missing concept in most screened representations of the posthuman. They see such narratives as driven by a struggle between humans and posthumans, rather than a focus on 'shared communities'. They ultimately question if true governance can be represented between posthuman and human communities.

Teodora Manea focuses on skin as the element we most encounter between ourselves and the other. She provides 'epidermal readings' in her examination of 'our posthuman skin condition'. Moving through close readings of a wide range of screened texts, she foregrounds skin as a mechanism for challenging normative identity.

John Bruni ends this section with a unique view of environmental posthumanism, or 'muddy worlds', eschewing the usual suspects in SF and fantasy, for contemporary realist film and TV like *Zabriskie Point* and *Treme*. These texts can be used to imagine a truly post-anthropocene environment in which humanity has been displaced by a posthuman reality of scarcity and challenge.

Part VII – Us and Them: Posthuman Relationships

This section grounds the previous one, beginning with *Anat Pick*'s admission that screened animals have more narrative importance than usually admitted. In fact, her Deleuzian and Latourian understanding sees cinema as an assemblage of reflections in which animals feature prominently as dominated elements. She highlights the 'cinematic animal' as a 'new kind of being'. The posthuman context, here, works along the trajectory of valuing the non-human animal in an increasingly complex parliament of things.

Phil Henderson follows with an examination of the latest *Planet of the Apes* films as highly humanist, even in their most posthuman inflections. He sees these posthuman narratives as advocating a challenge to the traditional human/animal dichotomy, while still reinforcing a fundamental humanism.

Alexander Darius Ornella steps away from the human/animal dichotomy towards themes of human/machine relationships wherein SF film and TV represent a 'return to an (idealized) nature, erotic encounters, social robots, and cybernetics'.

Steen Christiansen playfully offers the 'posthumanous' as a way to rethink the posthuman beyond terms of the life/death dichotomy. He foregrounds how the dividing line between life and death is 'inherently unstable and problematic'. Thus, 'we need a posthumanous subject to articulate the liminality of life'.

James DiGiovanna ends with the important subject of personhood as a posthuman category. He sees SF as keenly situated to ask philosophical questions about identity, functioning as a type of thought experiment through which future posthuman realities may be constructed.

Part VIII – More Human than Human: Posthuman Ontologies

This final section turns towards the examination of how it is that we construct and work through frameworks and structures to reconnoitre our conception of human being. The authors evidence the ontological foundations of the posthumanist framework through the use of SF examples, influences and themes.

Elaine Graham sees in SF film and TV a shift to both a post-secular and posthumanist world, viewing their conjunction through a religious frame. She shows that SF today, while still retaining its core 'elevation of scientific enquiry

and secular humanist values', is also 'post-secular' in that religious elements exist in a vibrant tension with secular humanist elements.

Brett Lunceford follows with an important question from the philosophy of mind, whether we are truly 'thinking machines' that 'can be reduced to their own information processing'. His focus on sentient machines as a trope in SF film and TV relies on the notion that memory and emotions are key to defining our humanity and, even with technological interventions into the posthuman, very fundamental human categories remain.

Pramod K. Nayar examines how superhero and dystopic films exhibit a dialectic between the evolved superhuman and 'species cosmopolitanism'. Nayar reads this dialectic as providing either a contracting of discursive properties for the former or a broadening for the latter. He sees, ultimately, 'a significant posthumanist strain in them, and that is the possibility of trans-species yet human morality and ethics'.

Thomas D. Philbeck uses the way our relationship to technology is represented in film and television to trace the paradigm shift that has occurred during the last half century, leading us from a broadly humanist paradigm that takes the separation between technology and humanity and the self-containment of human agency for granted to a posthumanist paradigm that acknowledges the distributed nature of our collective subjectivity.

Graham Harman ends the final section with a description of object-oriented ontology wherein he teases out the differences between speculative realism, posthumanism, transhumanism and materialism. He relates these to film and art theory, seeing in cinema, theatre and live television an encounter between objects and viewers that suggests a complex relationship of posthuman viewpoints.

Contributors

Drew Ayers researches, teaches and writes on the subjects of cinema, visual culture, digital technology, visual effects and non-human theory. Since finishing degrees from Carleton College, the University of Texas at Austin and Georgia State University, he has taught at Northeastern University, Antioch University and Santa Barbara City College. His work has appeared in *Animation*, *Film Criticism*, *Configurations*, *Scope* and *In Media Res*, and an essay will appear in a forthcoming British Film Institute anthology on special effects. He is currently at work on a manuscript that explores the digital logic and 'vernacular posthumanism' of hybrid images in contemporary film, media and visual culture.

Babette Babich is Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University in New York City. She is the author of numerous books, including *The Hallelujah Effect: Philosophical Reflections on Music, Performance Practice and Technology* (2013), *La fin de la pensée? Philosophie analytique contre philosophie continentale* (2012), *Nietzsches Wissenschaftsphilosophie* (2010), *Eines Gottes Glück, voller Macht und Liebe* (2009), *Words in Blood, Like Flowers* (2007), *Nietzsche e la Scienza* (1996) and *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science* (1994). Her two most recent edited collections include the 2013–2014 special issue of *New Nietzsche Studies: Nietzsche and Kant* and, co-edited with Dimitri Ginev, *The Multidimensionality of Hermeneutic Phenomenology* (2014).

Jon Baldwin teaches at the London Metropolitan University and is the author of *The Financial Crash and Hyper-Real Economy*. He has published widely on film and media, continental philosophy, poetics and culture. He is contributing editor of the collections 'Baudrillard and Politics' and 'Baudrillard and Film-Philosophy'. He is on the editorial boards of *Film-Philosophy*, *Subject Matters* and the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*.

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Graham Harman is a distinguished university professor at the American University in Cairo. He is the author of 12 books, most recently *Bells and Whistles: More Speculative Realism* (2013) and *Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Political* (2014). He is a founding member of the Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology movements, and edits the Speculative Realism book series at Edinburgh University Press and (with Bruno Latour) co-edits the New Metaphysics series at Open Humanities Press.

Dan Hassler-Forest was born in New York and now resides in the Netherlands, where his lifelong addiction to film, television and books currently finds a

welcome outlet in his position as Assistant Professor of English Literature at the University of Amsterdam. In his work, he struggles to align his passion for pop culture with his dedication to radical Marxism, the results of which are published from time to time in international journals and edited collections. His own books include the monograph *Capitalist Superheroes*, and an edited collection on comics and graphic literature.

Michael Hauskeller is Professor of Philosophy at the Department of Sociology and Philosophy, University of Exeter, UK. He specializes in moral philosophy, but has also worked in various other areas, including the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of art and beauty, phenomenology and the philosophy of human enhancement. His important recent publications include *Biotechnology and the Integrity of Life* (2007), *Better Humans? Understanding the Enhancement Project* (2013) and *Sex and the Posthuman Condition* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Phil Henderson received his Bachelor's degree (Political Science) from the University of Western Ontario in 2014. Master's studies are ongoing at the University of Victoria (Cultural, Social and Political Thought) and are anticipated to conclude in 2016. Henderson's thesis intends to bring a focus on the sense of *ressentiment* that poverty, resulting from neoliberal policies, has induced in Canadian rural communities. This work is meant to be tied into a larger literature on white settler societies, ultimately highlighting the impasse that neoliberalism has created against the decolonizing project.

Stefan Herbrechter is an independent scholar and Privatdozent at Heidelberg University, Germany. Until 2014, he was Reader in Cultural Theory and Postgraduate Programme Manager (Media) at Coventry University, UK, where he remains an honorary research fellow. He is the author of a number of volumes and edited collections, and many articles on critical and cultural theory, English and comparative literature, and media and cultural studies. His most recent volume is *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (2013). He is also a translator of Derrida, general editor of the monograph series Critical Posthumanisms and director of the Critical Posthumanism Network.

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Thomas D. Philbeck is Global Leadership Fellow at the World Economic Forum in Geneva. He previously served as Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for the New York Institute of Technology, and holds a PhD from Florida State University and MBA from HEC Paris. His areas of interest are in philosophy of technology, especially the roles of phenomenology and ontology. He enjoys science, technology and the question 'Where are we going?'

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