

Editorial

Rose Brander, Jyoti Mistry

The 2019 PARSE conference “HUMAN” invited contributions to “reimagine, remake, expose and expand the human vis-à-vis notions of the nonhuman, inhuman, subhuman, post-human and inhumane.”

Dave Beech, Erling Björgvinsson and Kristina Hagström-Ståhl, who conceived the conference posed the following questions in their call for submissions:

How can we rethink the conditions for a political imaginary capable of structural transformation and justice for human and nonhuman alike? What is at the heart of current debates on the human? What political imaginaries have enabled the current wave of xenophobic and neo-colonial dehumanisation? How can the arts respond to what may be termed a crisis in humanity?

The conference programme subsequently included cross-disciplinary art practices—music, theatre, film, fine arts and more—coupled with conceptual and theoretical considerations on the expansive conceptions of the *human condition. Participants and delegates from varied and disparate research propositions considered the past and current state of the human condition, and speculated on human futurity in the context of current geo-political, economic and environmental urgencies.

At the time of the conference, in November 2019, when participants and delegates from across the globe came together, it was a celebration of exchanging ideas in person, with presentations, deliberations and conversations over meals and coffees in shared spaces. The conference programme included many forms and formats and collectively we watched films in screening venues, moved through galleries to engage with art projects and gathered in large auditoriums to jointly listen to the addresses by keynote speakers. The fragility of our global interconnectedness could not have been felt more palpably than in the months that followed this energised communal experience of the “HUMAN” conference.

The preparation for this *PARSE journal* issue took place in the months that followed, when we were all isolated from one another, following the outbreak and spread of Covid-19. The pandemic, global heating, social justice eruptions and escalating right-wing political discourse dominated the larger part of 2020. It has been a period during which what it means to be human has been challenged and demanded the mettle of our humanity—as we watched hundreds of thousands of people die and millions more were left destitute from the economic impact of job losses, hunger and homelessness. Bringing this *PARSE journal* issue together felt more urgent in the context of these events and required more strident interrogation of what “human” means now—but tempered with compassion towards each other as we recognised the intrinsic need for human sociability and human physical contact. The spirit of the conference generated conviviality, generosity and human connection, which we can only hope is captured in the breadth of the contributions here.

This collection offers no singularly defined notion of human. Instead it offers positions and analysis,

performances and speculations on variegated ideas of the human—with its multiple pre-fixes, hence *human. The contributors all search for revitalised understandings of human in the context of revised histories, uncertain present conditions and in a future when technology, algorithms and environmental concerns, biodiversity and human biology converge in an ethical and political quagmire.

The working group of the “HUMAN” conference—which included Rose Brander (was Borthwick), Jessica Hemmings, Jyoti Mistry and Sanne Kofod-Olsen—expanded the conference structure with the aim of more colleagues from HDK-Valand and HSM engaging directly with the participants, guests and delegates. The structure of this journal issue reflects this direct engagement with the array of primary contributions, here offering a set of framing texts to provide contextual accounts of the artistic and/or theoretical, philosophical enquiry that follow.

Joanna Bourke and Barbara Albert each focus on embodied experiences, where Bourke looks at various examples from art, while Albert reflects on her representation of women’s bodies and their experiences in her film practice by way of an interview.

Focusing on collaborative activism, Benjamin Gerdes looks at labour issues, using his video practice to offer close-encounter observations of Swedish worker rights and union organisation.

Daniel Jewesbury provides an introduction to two video works by artists Paolo Cirio and Oliver Ressler, which situate financial transactions in relation to human actions and their political agency. The works explicitly home in on the ethical considerations surrounding financial systems and their impact on political structures.

Nathan Jones considers the implications for contextual critique in using new media, where he draws from a range of art examples and concludes with an extensive critique via his own interventions with experimental podcasts.

Kerstin Bergendal’s art project *PARK LEK* has led to an important and valuable challenge to the densification of residential spaces. In her dialogue with Sanne Kofod-Olson, she discusses the process and different phases of the project and the direct impact on the future planning of Rissne, Hallonbergen and Ör in Sundbyberg.

The contribution by the Autotheory group, contextualised by Annelies Vaneycken, provides another moment where the conference participants considered the impact of collective processes: listening-hearing, digesting and acting-activity. The Autotheory group offered the conference attendants reflections on student learning, drawn from their personal and embodied experiences in the form of a staged reading/performance, here presented as a script.

Drawing on Arjun Appadurai’s, *The Right to Research: Globalisation, Societies and Education* (2006), Onkar Kular and Henric Benesch perform an act of misreading, the process of which is described by Monica Sand in her introductory comments to their presentation from the conference, iterated into video form for this issue.

Maaïke Bleeker offers an interpretation of the entangled relations of thinking human and non-human through the proposition of *mise en scène* and through a set of case studies, demonstrating how artistic creations are part of thought apparatuses.

Mercedes Vicente in turn explores human thinking through indigenous knowledge, outlining the Māori world view,

which provides an urgent and necessary contribution to expanding the strictures of Western post-human discussions.

In an inspired political proposition, Joan Anim-Addo shows how thinking is entangled with subjectivity and reflects on institutional structures that perpetuate the absence of black subjectivity in the literary classroom.

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson draws on the notion of trophallaxis as a way to reconsider the historical construction of the black female body and subject, which in its explosive form promises the potential for a radically new future.

Closing this issue, Garðar Eyrjólffsson offers a tale that transforms the future of human-animal-human relations into one of co-dependencies and synergies. The stories here are composed of creatures developed from this Northern world, but cue towards an imagined future relevant to us all.

We would like to acknowledge colleagues from the PARSE working group for their support in the selection of the contributions for this issue and their participation during the conference. We would particularly like to thank all the speakers and participants for contributing to the success of PARSE 2019, "HUMAN" conference. Colleagues from HDK-Valand and HSM aided in the facilitation of sessions and we are grateful for their input. The conference would not have been realised without the commitment of student assistants, colleagues, caterers, delivery persons, technicians, administrators, cleaners and caretakers, who together helped make the conference possible. We are indebted to Sanne Kofod-Olson for the stewardship in ensuring that this issue #12 could be realised.