

# SYNN

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## INTRODUCTION

# Posthumanism at the Margins

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This special issue of *Synoptique* looks to reassess and rethink the notion of “moving beyond” the “human,” identifying the limitations of the posthuman movement in critical academic discourse—what we are moving away from, who is permitted to be seen as posthuman, what a posthuman world may entail—as well as reframing and renegotiating the normative, hierarchical configurations of the “human” that we wish to transcend (Jackson 2015). During the editorial process, we wrestled with how to best visualize the posthumanist movement. We asked ourselves: what kind of image can support and consolidate such an expansive mapping of evolving perspectives, applications, and pathways? Captivated by the enigmatic and fluid nature of their art, we were immediately drawn to Hong Kong-based artist Spime’s work, which manipulates temporal and spatial dimensions (<https://theartling.com/en/artist/spime/>). Featured on this issue’s cover page, “Morphing the Dining Room” evokes an aura of transcendence through the interaction and intersection of colors and lines which bleed into one another. Its title, too, speaks to the idea of changing and developing the normative and known. These blurred lines emerge from the margins, collectively moving towards a vast unknown and renegotiating their position in an indeterminate dimension of visions, disruptions, and pathways.

We began this project with the desire to pick apart the expansive nature of the term posthuman, and struggled to produce a contained, working taxonomy. Through works such as Kathryn Yusoff’s *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles’ *Touchstones for Deterritorializing Socioecological Learning: The Anthropocene, Posthumanism and Common Worlds As Creative Milieux*, and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” we encountered a number of definitions and permutations ranging from a descriptor for the technological afterlife of the “human” to a critical look at ways of being which move beyond traditional Western frameworks. The engagement with posthumanism which appears in this issue expresses and embodies an equally ubiquitous framework. It is for this reason that we have adopted an alternative structure for this special issue of *Synoptique*. Rather than assembling pieces into discreet, determined categories, we have chosen to embrace a posthuman amorphousness, mapping the posthumanist movement’s points of tension through a nonhierarchical configuration of perspectives and approaches that constantly converge in new and exciting ways.

Rooted in this issue’s pursuit of centering marginalized perspectives and departures from Western notions of linear time, we open with an exploration of Inuit futurism with Sarah Best’s “Time-Diffraction Stories: Inuit *Qaujimajatuqan-*

git and Temporal Sovereignty in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* and *Split Tooth*.” Expanding upon the work of posthumanist scholar Karen Barad, Best engages with temporal disruptions as decolonial knowledge production through a critical examination of Inuit films. Meanwhile, Geistė Marija Kinčinaitytė’s video essay, *The Pool*, addresses ontological reconfigurations of the “human” through the exploration of affective landscapes as modes of being and encounters with Otherness. With a focus on the arrivant, Kinčinaitytė’s sweeping landscapes and rigorous study of space question our relationship to nature and the land we live on.

Claire Henry’s “Queer Posthumanism Through the Wachowskis” furthers this concept of interconnectedness, turning inward toward an examination of the bounds of humanity and personhood and the imposed societal structures which demarcate the self from the Other. Drawing together a multitude of notable posthumanist thinkers and Queer theorists, Henry upends traditional structures of family and individuality through a Queer posthumanist look at *Sense8* and *Cloud Atlas*.

Turning to the digital, Kellie Lu brings a new perspective on AI art through “Sideways Age,” a short story co-written with the AI Cocreator. By weaving the question of digital ethics into both the story and the metanarrative of its writing process, Lu questions the nature of authorship and questions who writes our stories when the storyteller is far from human. In light of recent discourse around Artificial Intelligence over authorship and human involvement in AI art and writing, Lu’s work is cuttingly relevant in its questions and the issues it raises in our current age.

With such questions of humanity in mind, we turn next to Molly Joyce and Maya Smira’s *The End*, which dwells on loss and endings as an ultimate framework through which to explore the (post-)human. With long, gestural shots of entwined limbs lit by the glaring sun, “The End” literally sheds light on disability and posthumanist questions of what we lose when we lose ourselves.

In structuring this issue, we sought out complimentary concepts or ideas which might clash and, upon impact, create a spark of something new. Thus, we end on Mark Sloane Ebbay’s thought piece “Beneath *Barelife: Still-Birth*, Slow Cinema, and the Camera” and Rai Terry’s *Entering the \*Beyond*. Ebbay’s piece draws on the films of Lav Diaz to parse the experience of Filipino diaspora and Philippine agency in the face of specifically American colonialism. By proposing a state of still-birth in response to Giorgio Agamben’s *bare-life*, Ebbay lingers on Diaz’ particular style and politics to develop a theory of contemporary post-human existence.

Where Ebbay grapples with the struggle for agency in Filipino cinema, Terry explores the thrumming, desirous nature of Black joy in the face of ongoing and historical colonial oppression. By collating a collage of clips depicting the Black ecstatic, Terry begins at the human and takes us beyond into a posthuman that is not beholden to colonial histories or documentation. By drawing on archival footage, Terry questions the role of the archive in cultivating our Western understanding of the human and instead turns to the rapturous Other and its alternative mode of keeping time.

These new approaches to posthumanism are explored further in this issue's book review section. With Thomas Gow's review of *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, we explore Indigenous resurgence as a theory and interdisciplinary approach to the radical decentering of traditional Western paradigms, specifically as it relates to matters of "political economy, gender and sexuality, pedagogy, and aesthetics." Aparajita De expands upon the necessity to decolonize and disrupt Eurocentric critical theories in her review of *The Digital Black Atlantic*, edited by Kelly Baker Josephs and Roopika Risam. As De explains, the essays within this volume foreground conversations on the "intersections of diaspora studies, more specifically black and African diasporas and their connections with digital humanities," (re) mapping the construction of Blackness in the diaspora through negotiations on memory, crossings, relations, and their eventual becomings.

Shania Perera continues this conversation in her review of Moya Bailey's *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. This collection of essays reveals the discursive approaches taken to online digital resistance, highlighting "how black women utilize digital media to amplify their voices amid vitriol from a white, cisgender and heteronormative majority". We end this book review section with a reflection on queer European cinema through Olive Zeynep Kartal's review of editor Leanne Dawson's *Queer European Cinema: Queering Cinematic Time and Space*. As Kartal suggests, the essays in this collection engage with various spatial and temporal approaches to queer identity. These alternative approaches, which position queerness as central to their critical frameworks, reveal and offer up "new notions of citizenship and belonging".

By collating this collection of discursive works, we hoped to allude to the various fields of thought within posthumanism and to generate a traversal through the branching possibilities for what the posthuman can be. Rather than defining a singular understanding of this term, we sought to draw on writers and artists whose idea of the posthuman was as varied as their work. We hope that this issue inspires as much thought within its pages for you as it did for us.