

The First International Queer Death Studies  
Conference

“Death Matters, Queer(ing) Mourning,  
Attuning to Transitionings”

4-5 November 2019  
Karlstad University



## Contents

About the conference:.....	4
Programme:.....	5
Stream schedule:.....	8
Keynote speakers:.....	11
Stine Willum Adrian (Aalborg University, DK) .....	11
Patricia MacCormack (Anglia Ruskin University, UK).....	12
Kira O'Reilly (independent artist, IE/FI).....	13
C. Riley Snorton (University of Chicago, US) .....	15
Parallel sessions - abstracts & bios .....	16
Ana Abril (Central European University, HU).....	16
Katri Aholainen (University of Turku, FI).....	17
Varpu Alasuutari (University of Turku, FI).....	17
Maria J. Azocar (University of Wisconsin Madison, US) .....	18
Ester Martin Bergsmark (Stockholm University of the Arts).....	19
Lisa Berkert Wallard (independent designer, SE).....	20
Elizabeth Berman (Humboldt University of Berlin, DE) .....	21
Ally Bisshop (UNSW National Institute for Experimental Arts).....	22
Noah Bremer (independent researcher, LT).....	23
Zuz Buchowska (Aalto University, FI) .....	24
Vinh Cam (University of Chicago, US) .....	25
Sara Casartelli (University of Milano-Bicocca).....	26
Eliza Chandler, Kim Collins, Esther Ignani, Loree Erickson (Ryerson University, CA).....	27
Anna Chiara Corradino (Universities of Bologna and L'Alquila, IT) .....	28
Rob Cover (University of Western Australia, AU) .....	30
Vanbasten Noronha de Araújo (Central European University, HU).....	31
Pascal Dreier (Academy of Media Arts Cologne, DE).....	31
Jennifer Edwards (Central European University, HU).....	32
Layal Ftouni (Utrecht University, NL).....	33
Magdalena Górka (Utrecht University, NL).....	34
Matti Häyry (Aalto University, FI).....	35
Angela Patricia Heredia (Central European University, HU).....	36
Kathy High (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY, US) .....	37
Ida Hillerup Hansen (Central European University, HU) .....	38
Kuura Irni (University of Helsinki, FI).....	38

Nadia Jones (King's College London, UK).....	39
Silke Xenia Juul (independent artist and writer, DK/NL).....	40
Özge Kelekçi (Middle East Technical University, Ankara, TR).....	41
Lucia Kramárová (ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem, NL) .....	42
Björn Kröger (University of Helsinki, FI) .....	43
Anna-Katharina Laboissière (Ecole Normale Supérieure, FR/ Curtin University, AU).....	43
Nadine Lake (University of the Free State, ZA) .....	44
Mexitli Nayeli López Ríos (University of Oslo, NO) .....	46
Michelle R. Martin-Baron (Hobart and William Smith Colleges, US) .....	46
Jessie McLaughlin (Goldsmiths University/ Tate, UK).....	47
Francis Marion Moseley Wilson (University of Glasgow, UK).....	48
Jacqueline Moulton (IDSVA Portland, US).....	49
Judith Muehlbacher (independent researcher, AT).....	50
Milka Njoroge (Åbo Akademi University, FI) .....	51
Andria Nyberg Forschage (independent researcher, SE) .....	52
Rose-Marie Peake (Tampere University, FI) .....	53
Anne Bettina Pedersen (Aalborg University, DK).....	54
Jesse Peterson (KTH Royal Institute of Technology Stockholm, SE).....	54
Mattia Petricola (University of Bologna, IT) .....	55
Margherita Pevere (Aalto University, FI) .....	56
Marius Presterud (independent artist, NO/DE) .....	57
Jessica Rodríguez Colón (IDSVA Portland, US) .....	59
Seroconversion (queer noise project, SE) .....	60
Mariam Shalvashili (Free University of Tbilisi, GE).....	60
Margrit Shildrick (Stockholm University, SE).....	61
Vanessa Sinclair (independent psychoanalyst and researcher, US/SE).....	62
Eliza Steinbock (Leiden University, NL) .....	63
SJ Thiessen (York University, CA).....	64
Francisco Trento (UniArts Helsinki, FI).....	65
Sofia Varino (Humboldt University of Berlin, DE).....	66
Zafire Vrba (independent artist, SE).....	67
Annie Werner (University of Wollongong, AU) .....	67
Devin West (Queens University, CA).....	68

## About the conference:

The First International Queer Death Studies Conference: "Death Matters, Queer(ing) Mourning, Attuning to Transitionings" aims to create an arena for critical discussion of death, dying and mourning that goes beyond the dual approach to death – human death in particular – that is common within Western cultural frameworks of Christian tradition or secular biomedical perspectives. As such, the conference invites scholars who work with death, dying, mourning and afterlife in relation to: diverse cultural, socio-political, historical, and economic conditions; entangled relations between human and the environment in the context of the Anthropocene; differential experiences of marginalised communities and individuals excluded from the hegemonic discourses on death, loss, grief and mourning, associated for example with the heteronormative model of family bonds; and, contemporary forms of necropolitics: mechanisms of power that force certain bodies into liminal spaces between life and death (for instance, refugees whose lives in detention camps turn into the state of "social death" (Mirzoeff 2019)). Interventions that focus on practices that resist hegemonic norms, as well as queer and decolonialise mourning and remembering are also welcome.

In order to search for broad inspirations for alternative articulations and stories which queer, that is, unpack and question the normativities (Chen 2012; Sandilands & Erickson 2012) that often frame contemporary discourses on death, dying, mourning and afterlife, the conference is based on a transdisciplinary engagement involving not only academics, but also activists, artists and other practitioners. In the context of the conference, to queer issues of death, dying, mourning and afterlife means to unhinge certainties, "undo normative entanglements and fashion alternative imaginaries" beyond the exclusive concern with gender and sexuality, often associated with the term "queer" (Giffney & Hird 2008, 6). In particular, the conference calls for papers within the following three overall themes: (1) death matters and materialities, (2) queering mourning, and (3) attuning to transitionings run through both days and all four keynote lectures.

The conference is organised jointly by Karlstad University (KaU) and Linköping University (LiU), which both have been committed to the development of QDS since the official launch of the network in 2016. It follows up on three previously organised international workshops: Queer Death Studies Network Workshop (28-29 March 2017, Linköping Univ.), The Second International Queer Death Studies Workshop: "Coming to Terms with Death, Dying, and Mourning Differently?" (27-28 November 2017, Karlstad Univ.), and The Third International Queer Death Studies Workshop: "Death Matters: Death and Dying in a Queer Context" (30-31 May, Linköping Univ.). The conference also builds on the work conducted within GEXcel International Collegium for Advanced Transdisciplinary Gender Studies' research strand "Death Studies: Queerfeminist Materialist Perspectives".

For more on Queer Death Studies Network, see our website: <https://queerdeathstudies.net/>

## Programme:

### Monday, November 4th

8:00 – 08:30	<b>Registration</b> Place: Aula Foajén
08:30 -09:15	<b>Opening remarks</b> Place: Aula Magna
09:15 - 10:40	<b>Keynote</b> Patricia MacCormack (Anglia Ruskin University, UK) <i>Embracing Death, Opening the World</i> Place: Aula Magna
10:40 – 11:00	<b>Coffee Break</b> Place: Transformum
11:00 – 12:30	<b>Parallel Sessions:</b>  Stream 1 - Panel 1, room 1D226: Posthumanising death/life ecologies  Stream 2 - Panel 2, room 1D327: Decolonising death/questioning necropolitics  Stream 3 - Panel 3, room 1D 328: Queering mourning/decolonising grief  Stream 4 - Panel 4, room 1D340: Queering life/ death thresholds  Stream 5 - Panel 5, room 1D341: Queering death from the perspective of posthuman embodiment
12:30 - 14:00	<b>Lunch</b> Place: Solsta Inn
14:00 – 15:25	<b>Keynote</b> Stine Willum Adrian (Aalborg University, DK) <i>Stitching Stories of Broken Hearts: Rethinking technologies of Death and Dying at the Beginning of Life</i> Place: Fröding
15:25 – 15:45	<b>Coffee break</b> Transformum
15:45 – 17:15	<b>Parallel Sessions:</b>

Stream 1 - Panel 6, room 1D226:  
Posthumanising death/life ecologies

Stream 2 - Panel 7, room 1D327:  
Decolonising death/questioning necropolitics

Stream 3 - Panel 8, room 1D328:  
Queering mourning/decolonising grief

Stream 4 - Panel 9, room 1D340:  
Queering life/ death thresholds

Stream 5 - Panel 10, room Fröding:  
Queering death from the perspective of posthuman embodiment

**17.15 – 18:30**

**Reception**

Place: Aula Foajén

Welcome speech

“Silence Equals Death”: a queer performance and reading by Seroconversion.

Launch of the special issue Queer Death Studies:  
Coming to Terms with Death, Dying and Mourning  
Differently in the Journal *Women, Gender & Research*.

**19:30 – 22:00**

**Dinner (self-paid)**

Place: Restaurant Olssons Bazar, In the city Inre hamn

**Tuesday, November 5th**

**08:30 – 10:00**

**Parallel Sessions:**

Stream 1 - Panel 11, room 1D226:  
Posthumanising death/life ecologies

Stream 2 - Panel 12 room 1D327:  
Decolonising death/questioning necropolitics

Stream 3 - Panel 13, room 1D328:  
Queering mourning/decolonising grief

Stream 4 - Panel 14, room 1D340:  
Queering life/ death thresholds

Stream 5 - Panel 15, lecture hall Fröding:  
Queering death from the perspective of posthuman  
embodiment

**10:00 – 10:20**

**Coffee break**

Place: Transformum

**10:20 – 11:45**

**Keynote**

C. Riley Snorton (Cornell University, USA),  
*Mud: Queer Death and Teeming Forms of Wildlife*  
Place: Fröding

**11:45 – 13:30**

**Lunch**

Place: Solsta Inn

**13:30 – 15:00**

**Keynote**

Kira O'Reilly (artist and researcher, Helsinki, FI),  
*An un'seaming mourning*  
*(second iteration)*  
*a year later*  
Place: Fröding

**15:00 – 15:20**

**Coffee break**

Place: Transformum

**15:20 – 16:50**

**Parallel Sessions:**

Stream 1 - Panel 16, room 1D226:  
Posthumanising death/life ecologies

Stream 6 - Panel 17, room 1D327:  
Rethinking taboos on death, gender and sexuality

Stream 7 - Panel 18, room 1D328:  
Queering un/grievability

Stream 8 - Panel 19, room Fröding:  
Queering afterlife, absence and spirituality

**16:50 – 17:45**

**Closing remarks**

Place: Fröding

## Stream schedule:

THE FIRST QUEER DEATH STUDIES CONFERENCE 'DEATH MATTERS, QUEER(ING) MOURNING, ATTUNING TO TRANSITIONINGS': PANEL SCHEDULE					
4 <sup>th</sup> Novem ber	Stream 1: POSTHUMANI SING DEATH/LIFE ECOLOGIES	Stream 2: DECOLONISING DEATH/QUESTIO NING NECROPOLITICS	Stream 3: QUEERING MOURNING/DECOLO NISING GRIEF	Stream 4: QUEERING LIFE/DEATH THRESHOLDS	Stream 5: QUEERING DEATH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POSTHUMAN EMBODIMEN T
11:00 – 12:30	<b>PANEL 1:</b> 1. <b>Anna-Katharina Laboissière</b> , <i>When should a species be allowed to die?</i> 2. <b>Judith Muehlbacher</b> , <i>'Melancholic? Naturally!'</i> - Impulses for cultural transformations from queer-ecological activism and art 3. <b>Jacqueline Moulton</b> , <i>Our Troubled Terrains—The Grief of Our Ghosts and New Narratives of Mourning Outside of Human Exceptionalism</i>  <b>MODERATOR:</b> Luca Tainio <b>ROOM:</b> 1D226	<b>PANEL 2:</b> 1. <b>Angela Patricia Heredia</b> , <i>Historical temporality, political agency and mourning in the NASA community of Colombia</i> 2. <b>Jessica Rodríguez Colón</b> , <i>From the Baquiné to the Streets: Performances of Grief</i> 3. <b>Layal Ftouni</b> , <i>Affirmative Ethics at the Threshold of 'Not-Life' in Occupied Palestine</i> 4. <b>Elizabeth Berman</b> , <i>Un/Grievable and In/Visible Bodies: Queering Religion, Decolonizing Jewish Grief</i>  <b>MODERATOR:</b> Anne Bettina Pedersen <b>ROOM:</b> 1D327	<b>PANEL 3:</b> 1. <b>Mariam Shalvashili</b> , <i>Living with the Dead: "Transgressive" Mortuary Practices in Samegrelo, Georgia</i> 2. <b>Özge Kelekçi</b> , <i>An Obligatory Aggregation of Queer Bodies: The Potter's Cemeteries in Turkey</i> 3. <b>Varpu Alasuutari</b> , <i>Ghostly Dimensions of Queer Kinship</i>  <b>MODERATOR:</b> Annika Jonsson <b>ROOM:</b> 1D328	<b>PANEL 4:</b> 1. <b>Andria Nyberg Forschage</b> , <i>The Death and Limit of the Excessive Object</i> 2. <b>Eliza Steinbock</b> , <i>Death-worlds: Cherishing and Perishing in Transgender Portraiture</i> 3. <b>Zafire Vrba</b> , <i>Death is my Pronoun</i>  <b>MODERATOR:</b> Wibke Straube <b>ROOM:</b> 1D340	<b>PANEL 5:</b> 1. <b>Margherita Peverè</b> , <i>Life and death of a biotech chimera: Semina Aeternitatis</i> 2. <b>Margrit Shildrick</b> , <i>Should We Care about Human Extinction?</i> 3. <b>Mattia Petricola</b> , <i>The Living, the Dead, the Living Dead, and All the Others: Queer Taxonomy and the Residual Undead</i>  <b>MODERATOR:</b> Mexitli Nayeli López Ríos <b>ROOM:</b> 1D341
15:45 – 17:15	<b>PANEL 6:</b> 1. <b>Katri Aholainen</b> ,	<b>PANEL 7:</b> 1. <b>Jennifer Edwards</b> , <i>Bodies</i>	<b>PANEL 8:</b> 1. <b>Ida Hillerup Hansen</b> , <i>Grief as</i>	<b>PANEL 9:</b> 1. <b>Annie Werner</b> , <i>Queer</i>	<b>PANEL 10:</b> 1. <b>Ester Martin</b>



	<p>Death of Aino the Whooper Swan — Entanglements of Nationality, Gender and Extinction  <b>2. Matti Häyry</b>, The un-mournable death of an animal: How a hailed discursive shift from social ethics to political justice may have helped to seal the plight of nonhuman animals in certain philosophical circles</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Varpu Alasuutari</b>  <b>ROOM: 1D226</b></p>	<p>on Boats: Functional Anonymity in the Neoliberal Necropolitical Imaginary  <b>2. Sara Casartelli</b>, Moving Bodies: Drowning and Creative Infrastructures for Identification  <b>3. Milka Njoroge</b>, Under what conditions is premature death predictable?</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Tara Mehrabi</b>  <b>ROOM: 1D327</b></p>	<p>diagnosis: safety lost and its biomedical cure  <b>2. Magdalena Górska</b>, Human and Non-Human Killability: A Posthumanist Intersectional Analysis Of Power For Socio-Environmental Justice  <b>3. SJ Thiessen</b>, Death as the Alternative? Medication Assistance in Dying for Mental Illness</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Morten Hillgaard Bülow</b>  <b>ROOM: 1D328</b></p>	<p>death, vulnerability and rage: Renegade cancer stories and the promise of ontological resistance in the face of terminal cancer.  <b>2. Sofia Varino</b>, Ecopathologies : Queering the Vital &amp; Deadly Transitionings of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity  <b>3. Silke Xenia Juul</b>, Sick of Dying: Diagnosing the Potentialities of Illness as Vague Death</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Nina Lykke</b>  <b>ROOM: 1D340</b></p>	<p><b>Bergsmark</b>, Voice Under  <b>2. Marius Presterud</b>, The Artist as Undertaker - Queering mourning and attuning to extinction  <b>3. Francisco Trento</b>, Neuro-queering the ghosts of typicality</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Marietta Radomska</b>  <b>ROOM:</b>  <b>Fröding</b></p>
5 <sup>th</sup> November	Stream 1: POSTHUMANISING DEATH/LIFE ECOLOGIES	Stream 2: DECOLONISING DEATH/QUESTIONING NECROPOLITICS	Stream 3: QUEERING MOURNING/DECOLONISING GRIEF	Stream 4: QUEERING LIFE/DEATH THRESHOLDS	Stream 5: QUEERING DEATH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POSTHUMAN EMBODIMENT
8:30 – 10:00	<p><b>PANEL 11:</b>  <b>1. Ally Bisshop</b>, Spider death rites: sex, sacrifice, survival in itself  <b>2. Ana Abril</b>, Cannibal feminist ethics: Reconceptualizing act(s) of eating as different</p>	<p><b>PANEL 12:</b>  <b>1. Maria J. Azocar</b>, Beyond poverty and scarcity: queering death in pension policymaking in Chile.  <b>2. Nadine Lake</b>, Contesting queer death: The significance of survivability, mourning and</p>	<p><b>PANEL 13:</b>  <b>1. Mexitli Nayeli López Ríos</b>, Queering the Grieving Body inside the Belly of a War Machine in Silvia Moreno-García's Certain Dark Things  <b>2. Michelle R. Martin-Baron</b>, The In-Betweenness of Earthly Existence: Anzaldúa and the Rituals of Mourning</p>	<p><b>PANEL 14:</b>  <b>1. Eliza Chandler et al.</b>, Crip-Queer World-Making  <b>2. Zuz Buchowska</b>, Life After Game Over  <b>3. Rob Cover</b>, Queer Death and Youth Discourses: Countering</p>	<p><b>PANEL 15:</b>  <b>1. Nadia Jones</b>, Death as a Liminal Zone: The Necropoetics of Queer Poetry  <b>2. Devin West</b>, Unmapping Heteronormativity: Queering Death</p>

	<p>processes of subjectivation affecting the notions of “human” and “non-human”</p> <p>3. <b>Kathy High</b>, <i>Dreams of Becoming Vulture</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Marietta Radomska</b> <b>ROOM: 1D226</b></p>	<p>belonging in Zanele Muholi’s visual activism and photography</p> <p>3. <b>Noah Bremer</b>, <i>Social Death and the Limits of the Suicideational Demand</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Luca Tainio</b> <b>ROOM: 1D327</b></p>	<p>3. <b>Vinh Cam</b>, <i>The Biopolitics of the Good Death Memoir</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR: Anne Bettina Pedersen</b> <b>ROOM: 1D328</b></p>	<p>Chrononormativites Towards New Ethical Liveabilities</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Ulf Melström</b> <b>ROOM: 1D340</b></p>	<p>Through Art Practice</p> <p>3. <b>Francis Marion Moseley Wilson</b>, <i>Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Annika Jonsson</b> <b>ROOM: Fröding</b></p>
	<p><b>Stream 1:</b> <b>POSTHUMANISING DEATH/LIFE ECOLOGIES</b></p>		<p><b>STREAM 6:</b> <b>RETHINKING TABOOS ON DEATH, GENDER AND SEXUALITY</b></p>	<p><b>STREAM 7:</b> <b>QUEERING UN/GRIEVABILITY</b></p>	<p><b>STREAM 8:</b> <b>QUEERING AFTERLIFE, ABSENCE AND SPIRITUALITY</b></p>
<p><b>15:20 – 16:50</b></p>	<p><b>PANEL 16:</b></p> <p>1. <b>Björn Kröger</b>, <i>The Deep Time of Death</i></p> <p>2. <b>Jesse Peterson</b>, <i>Can Water Die?: Dead Zones and Artificial Respiration in the Baltic Sea</i></p> <p>3. <b>Vanbasten Noronha de Araújo</b>, <i>Prismatic Death/Life Ecology – Pantone’s ‘Living Coral’ and the Death of Cup Corals</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Nina Lykke</b> <b>ROOM: 1D226</b></p>		<p><b>PANEL 17:</b></p> <p>1. <b>Anna Chiara Corradino</b>, <i>Liaisons dangereuses with Necrophiliac Women. Aspects of Female Dominance in Male-centred Discourse</i></p> <p>2. <b>Rose-Marie Peake</b>, <i>The sadomasochistic nun: queering 17th-century French Ursuline necrologies</i></p> <p>3. <b>Jessie McLaughlin</b>, <i>HELLO! MY NAME IS QUEER SOFT PURPLE GHOST: working with death, sex, queerness &amp; children</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR: Sølve Holm</b> <b>ROOM: 1D327</b></p>	<p><b>PANEL 18:</b></p> <p>1. <b>Anne Bettina Pedersen</b>, <i>Disobedient Daughters and Ungrievable Mothers: An Exploration of Child Neglect, Parentification, and the Death of an Estranged Parent</i></p> <p>2. <b>Kuura Irni</b>, <i>Cat obituaries: Love and death in the cracks of normative anthropocentric kinship stories</i></p> <p>3. <b>Pascal Dreier</b>, <i>Multispecies Mourning</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Ida Hillerup Hansen</b> <b>ROOM: 1D328</b></p>	<p><b>PANEL 19:</b></p> <p>1. <b>Lisa Berkert Wallard</b>, <i>The Self: Towards a Method for Queering Death (An Identity Testament)</i></p> <p>2. <b>Vanessa Sinclair</b>, <i>Psychoanalysis and Necromancy</i></p> <p>3. <b>Lucia Kramárová</b>, <i>A space for tears</i></p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Mexitli Nayeli López Ríos</b> <b>ROOM: Fröding</b></p>

## Keynote speakers:

**Stine Willum Adrian (Aalborg University, DK)**

**Keynote: *Rethinking technologies of Death and Dying at the Beginning of Life***

### Abstract:

Born with half a heart (hypoplastic left heart syndrome or HLHS), my firstborn child died in 2007 after living only three weeks. While processing the grief, the questions of 'what-if?', new questions emerged that not only focused on the loss, but more so on the norms, values and reconfiguration of the responsibility that takes place due to the technologies involved in ending or saving the lives of children born with severe congenital heart defects like my son. y stitching stories of families with infants of broken hearts together, I will in this talk examine and reconfigure perceptions regarding technologies of death and dying at the beginning of life asking: How do technologies remake death in relation to HLHS, and how is the responsibility for death and dying being reconfigured through technologies? B By addressing these questions, I combine auto-ethnography with media stories, interviews and medical documents related to children with HLHS. The what-if methodology is in this regard a way of reading diffractively (Haraway 1997; Barad 2007) and calling for a situated feminist ethics of the reproductive technologies of broken hearts.

### Bio:

**Stine Willum Adrian** is an Associate Professor in Techno-Anthropology at Aalborg University in Copenhagen, Denmark. She holds a PhD in feminist STS and cultural analysis. Adrian's work has always been interdisciplinary joining ethnography of medical technologies, feminist theory with cultural analysis, ethics and law. Her research interests lies in questions concerning reproductive technologies of life and death, gender, intersectionality, feminist materialisms, the entanglement of technologies and ethics, and ethnographic methods. Adrian has previously done comprehensive ethnographic studies on creations stories at fertility clinics in Denmark and Sweden, sperm banks, fertility traveling, cryopreservation of sperm deposits, and she is currently engaged with questions of technologies of death and dying at the beginning of life.

**Patricia MacCormack (Anglia Ruskin University, UK)**  
**Keynote: *Embracing Death, Opening the World***

**Abstract:**

Living well as a privileged human in Western excess necessitates myriad kinds of death, for individual lives, for living systems. For those who seek activisms to change this human exceptionalism and reverse the configuration as the Earth for humans toward humans for the Earth, we must convert our mourning, our compassion fatigue, to creative escape routes from anthropocentrism. This paper proposes two, both of which are a danse macabre and end a previous danse macabre. The first is absolute abolition of any use/exploitation of nonhuman animals, which is serially the next step in any agenda that values an end to minority oppression. This involves a dance of care with the nonhuman other to refuse the default anthropocentric logic that sees nonhuman life as existent only for human use or even human perception. It replaces the dance that breeds nonhumans purely to enslave and murder them. The nonhuman leads the dance. The second is a not-as-radical-as-you-think embrace of the cessation of the human species, what is known as anti-natalism. Neither murderous nor eugenic, the cessation of reproduction involves an end to the hyperhumanist dance of birth-marriage-breed-die which has constrained women, non-Western people and the patterns of which are also enforced on many non-human animals in their agriculture enslavement. Now the feminists, the queers, the refusers of institutional enforcement of how to live and consume lead the dance.

**Bio:**

**Patricia MacCormack** is Professor of Continental Philosophy at Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge. She has published extensively on philosophy, feminism, queer and monster theory, animal abolitionist activism, ethics, art and horror cinema. She is the author of *Cinesexuality* (Routledge 2008) and *Posthuman Ethics* (Routledge 2012) and the editor of *The Animal Catalyst* (Bloomsbury 2014), *Deleuze and the Animal* (EUP 2017), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema* (Continuum 2008) and *Ecosophical Aesthetics* (Bloomsbury 2018). Her new book is *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activisms for the End of the Anthropocene* (Bloomsbury 2020).

**Kira O'Reilly (independent artist, IE/FI)**

**Keynote: *Un'seamed (un'seamingly)***

***Second iteration***

***A year later***

**Abstract:**

In this reading of a series of movements, I want to locate and remember acts of desire and of agency that led to a particular death, and to figure that passing within the countenance of desire and agency.

In this reading I will unfold a process of mourning, a keening for a particular body; a body of public mourning, of private Sex, of private mourning, of public Sex.

In this reading I will reassemble a voice and perform its semblances as empty utterances and releases and evacuations.

Listen for where the voice disappears

Where the vocal cords creak

Where only the sound of breath animates the careful sight of seeing for oneself

Pay close attention, there is no text to read and linger over on an afterwards.

**Bio:**

**Kira O'Reilly** is an Irish visual artist currently based in Helsinki. Her practice, both wilfully interdisciplinary and entirely undisciplined, stems from a visual art background; it employs performance, installation, photography, biotechnical practices, writing and anything that comes to hand with which to consider speculative reconfigurations around The Body. She writes, teaches, mentors and collaborates with humans of various types and technologies and non-humans of numerous divergences including mosses, spiders, the sun, pigs, cell cultures, horses, micro-organisms, bicycles, rivers, landscapes, tundras, rocks, trees, shoes, food, books, air, moon and ravens. Since 1998 her work has been exhibited widely throughout the UK, Europe, Australia, China and Mexico. She has presented at conferences and symposia on both live art and science, art and technology interfaces. Her practice and research have been presented across multiple contexts from visual arts to art, science and technology, performance and liveart, dance, medical humanities, and has been extensively written and discussed in both academic research literature and visual arts publications. She has completed significant residencies at SymbioticA, the art science collaborative research lab, School of Anatomy and Human Biology, University of Western Australia and School of Biosciences, University of Birmingham in collaboration with Dr. Janet Smith, both funded by Wellcome Trust. In 2013 she completed a three-year Arts and Humanities Research Council funded creative fellowship at Department of Drama, Queen Mary University of London developing Untitled Techné writings and art works, that hinged between the thresholds of the laboratory and the gallery. In 2016 she created and led the short lived but impactful pilot masters

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*Death Matters, Queer(ing) Mourning, Attuning to Transitionings*  
4-5 November 2019, Karlstad University, Sweden.

programme in Ecology and Contemporary Performance at University of the Arts, Helsinki. Her most recent work was a durational site-based installation/performance, *what if this was the only world she knew* commissioned and produced by SymbioticA for Unhallowed Arts, Perth, Australia in October 2018. Currently a Taike artist grant recipient, 2019 sees her collaborate with Laura Beloff (FI) on a Kone Foundation funded artistic research project on ticks and later take up a residency at Saari. The monograph *Kira O'Reilly: Untitled (Bodies)* edited by Harriet Curtis and Martin Hargreaves was published in autumn 2017 as part of the Intellect Live series. <http://www.kiraoreilly.com/>

**C. Riley Snorton (University of Chicago, US)**

**Keynote: *Mud: Queer Death and Teeming Forms of Wildlife***

**Abstract:**

This talk, drawn from a larger project, tentatively entitled *Mud: Ecologies of Racial Meaning*, dwells with the relationships between and among the uninhabitable, the unbearable, and the unimaginable. *Mud* takes up narratives about swamp people and swamp things, as they punctuate the story of the New World, from the maroon communities constituted by Native peoples and formerly enslaved Africans beginning in the early sixteenth century to the first Asians (Filipinos) to arrive in the US, who settled in swamps surrounding modern day New Orleans in 1763. What Sylvia Wynter describes as the development of a ‘new world view,’ a system of ordering logics that accompanied the ‘discovery’ of the Americas and that were expressed according to a series of binary oppositions including master and ‘natural’ slave, rational and irrational, habitable and uninhabitable territories.

The swamp becomes a rubric for reading how freedom is neither abstracted nor wholly performative but an exercise that works in and on the body—a praxis Harriet Jacobs exemplifies in her foray to and from the swamps, which she described as a “hiding place” when “in no situation to choose” (Jacobs 1861, 171). As a place that is neither land nor water but both, the swamp functions as the material ground for a series of considerations about ontological transformation, life/death, freedom and choice. But perhaps also, and in concert with Jose Munoz, the swamps might be fecund ground for an exploration of intersubjective racialization, against the common sense of ethnic comparison and toward a hermeneutic that disidentifies with the ethical indifference that hinders critical survival—albeit unevenly.

**Bio:**

**C. Riley Snorton** is a cultural theorist whose work focuses on race, gender, and sexuality. He is Professor of English and Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Chicago. Snorton is the author of *Nobody is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2014) and *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2017). His research has been supported by the Ford Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities and writings have appeared in *SOULS: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, *the Black Scholar*, *GLQ*, and *TSQ*.

## Parallel sessions - abstracts & bios

### Ana Abril (Central European University, HU)

**Title:** *Cannibal feminist ethics: Reconceptualizing act(s) of eating as different processes of subjectivation affecting the notions of “human” and “non-human”*

**Abstract:**

The Derridean carno-phallogocentric system involves a process of subjectivation built on the act of eating animal meat. The sacrificial structure permits the killing of animals yet obscures the problematization of this specific type of violence and death of the objectified Other-animal. This functioning of Western societies instigates a metaphysical division between human/animal and positions the male meat-eater individual as the only full subject possible. I wonder if the hierarchies and violence between human and non-human/animal can be subverted by a deconstruction of the act of eating. By considering Tupinamba cannibal rituals, I propose a decolonial intervention in this Western conceptualization of the act of eating. According to Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro) and cosmologies, the subjectivation happens when the Self incorporates the perspective of the Other through the act of eating human flesh. Achieving subjectivity by eating those of your own kind allows a rethought of the traditional functioning of the categories human and non-human/animal based in problematic dualisms, such as civilized/savage. Moreover, this decolonial way of eating encourages a reexamination on how the institution of the subject takes place and who is feasible of be considered as a full subject. The cannibal feminist ethics, by considering Tupinamba cannibal rituals together with biological and material operations of the body and the digestive system, proposes the reconceptualization of act(s) of eating as productive, collective and relational interactions between Self/Other. Considering that, the oppressive and violent division between human/animal strongly supported on and by the carno-phallogocentric system can be dismantled and further questions about the divergences and encounters between human and non-human can be posed.

**Bio:**

Ana Abril (Jaén, 1992) is a researcher in art, philosophy, and critical gender and queer studies. She is a PhD candidate in Comparative Gender Studies at Central European University (CEU), and she holds a Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe (GEMMA). From a decolonial perspective, Ana's research conceptualizes metaphysical and epistemological debates in the relationships between human and non-humans in the act of eating, considering the figure of the cannibal as a valuable place of theorization. Her interest is to analyze and deconstruct categories and hierarchies between humans and animals by focusing in the material and symbolical processes of eating, digesting, vomiting and excreting of the human and non-human body.

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 11



## **Katri Aholainen (University of Turku, FI)**

**Title:** *Death of Aino the Whooper Swan — Entanglements of Nationality, Gender and Extinction*

**Abstract:**

In 1950 there were 15 pairs of whooper swans nesting in Finland. Finnish author Yrjö Kokko wrote novels about swans and started a campaign to save this endangered species. It became a huge success: nowadays a number of whooper swans is increased to 10 000 pairs. In my paper I'll focus on a story from Kokko's novel *Ne tulevat takaisin* (1954, *They Are Coming Back*) about a young whooper swan who stays for a winter in a lake in Middle Finland. Unfortunately she gets hurt and dies in captivity in a zoo.

This swan is named Aino, which refers to Finnish folklore and Kalevala, where Aino is a young woman who refuses to marry an old man and rather drowns herself in the sea. By naming whooper swan after her Kokko places Aino the swan in an intersection of questions about nationality and gender which are tightly linked to death and conditions of dying. In my paper I lean on Sarah Ahmed's theories about performativity of emotions. I read Aino as "a sticky object" since a figure of Whooper Swan got saturated with emotions and affects linked to ideas of nationality in 1950's post-war Finland.

As mentioned before, whooper swans were endangered in Finland which makes extinction as an important context to Aino's story. In this light she is not just a symbol of anthropocentric ideas of nationality and gender but a material, non-human agency which is highlighted in her death as she is one of the last whooper swans known to live in Finland. In my paper I will draw on Karen Barad's notion of posthuman performativity and ask how entanglement of nationality, gender and extinction effect on how Aino's death gets meaningful in Kokko's novel.

**Bio:**

Katri Aholainen MA is a postgraduate student of Finnish literature in University of Turku, Finland. In her doctoral dissertation she studies Finnish author Yrjö Kokko's works by focusing on how birds participate in processes of writing and photographing. Her theoretical frameworks include posthumanism and material feminism, especially Karen Barad's agential realism.

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 6

## **Varpu Alasuutari (University of Turku, FI)**

**Title:** *Ghostly Dimensions of Queer Kinship*

**Abstract:**

Within the study of queer kinship, a lot has been said about the chosen versus the biological kin (e.g. Weston 1991). In this presentation I suggest that kinship can be much more complex than that, breaking the binaries of the biological and the chosen and the living and the dead. I will revisit and rethink the theory of continuing bonds (e.g. Klass et al. 1996) by combining it with queer theoretical

conceptualisation of kinship in order to examine my empirical material: interviews focusing on death and loss with LGBTQ people living in Finland.

My analysis has been inspired by Sasha Roseneil's (2009) concept of haunting. As Roseneil argues, people who are dead – or rather, the memories of them – keep on haunting, or affecting, the lives of the living, making thus visible the “ghostly dimensions of relationality” (Roseneil 2009, 411-413). Even though death cuts people apart, the affective bonds between the living and the lost are not, therefore, entirely separated. These bonds matter both when mourning the loss of others and when thinking about one's own, forthcoming death.

I have traced these affective bonds in my empirical material and suggest that they manifest in the interviewees' stories on three levels: in their beliefs and hopes concerning spiritual afterlife, in their wishes regarding burial and in their thoughts concerning property sharing or inheritance. I argue that through these affective bonds it becomes possible to examine the ghostly dimensions of queer kinship and to find out who the interviewees want (and do not want) to keep on relating beyond death, achieving thus a sense of continued kinship and post-mortem futurity.

## References

Klass, Dennis; Silverman, Phyllis R. & Nickman, Steven L. (1996) *Continuing Bonds: New Understanding of Grief*. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.

Roseneil, Sasha (2009) Haunting in an Age of Individualization: Subjectivity, Relationality and the Traces of the Lives of Others. *European Societies* 11(3), 411-430.

Weston, Kath (1991) *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. Columbia University Press: New York.

## Bio:

Varpu Alasuutari is a PhD candidate in gender studies at the University of Turku, Finland. She is working on a dissertation titled as *Death at the End of the Rainbow – Rethinking Queer Kinship, Rituals of Remembrance and the Finnish Culture of Death*, in which she studies personal memories of loss of LGBTQ people living in Finland. The presentation is based on the findings of the dissertation. Her research interests include e.g. queer death studies, queer kinship studies, feminist affect theory and bereavement studies.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 3

## Maria J. Azocar (University of Wisconsin Madison, US)

**Title:** *Beyond poverty and scarcity: queering death in pension policymaking in Chile.*

## Abstract:

In recent years large nationwide protests in Chile have demanded a major reform to the pension system. However, experts see protesters' demands for greater security in old age as not a viable policy option. Drawing on archival data covering 40 years of pension policy debate, 72 interviews

with policymakers, and 95 videos of the national expert commission's public hearings, I studied the debate in pension policy in Chile to explore the claims mobilized by experts to dismiss protesters' demands. I conclude that they have used the scientific appearance of expertise to circumvent democratic debate about which public fears about the future are most important for experts to study and dispel. In the second part of this paper, I want to advance in an alternative understanding of pension policy. My aim is to suspend the meaning of pension policymaking as a technology that creates capital, transforms death in an individual responsibility and controls the uncertainties of the future. So, I propose to put at the center the question of "how do we wish to die" to advance a more democratic and inclusive discussion about security in old age. In other words, I expect to have a conversation around what kinds of deaths and lives are worth preserving and protecting, which securities are most urgent to be eradicated, and how anxieties for controlling the future can be reimagined as desires for uncertainty.

**Bio:**

Maria J. Azocar is a doctoral candidate in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Sociology. Her research interests are at the intersection of the sociology of knowledge, sociology of professions, social theory, social policy, intersectionality and queer studies. Her work has been published in *Gender & Society*, *Latin American Research Review*, *Sociology Compass*, *Latin American Perspectives*, and *Revista de Derecho* (Valdivia) Chile.

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**Stream:** 2, **Panel:** 12

**Ester Martin Bergsmark (Stockholm University of the Arts)**

**Title:** *The Voice-Under*

**Abstract:**

My talk presents the voice-under, a decentralized narration technique and poetic concept intended to offer a counterweight to the rational Western subjectivity model that traditionally drives narrative. A departure from the authoritative speaker of the voice-over, the voice-under is a rumbling chorus from the underworld; a dirge from the border between life and death, where much queer life exists.

Throughout my work, lowly creatures like snails, ticks, pigeons, and cockroaches play important roles. These beings, associated with bacteria, illness, and death, are objects of an abhorrence based partly on a fear of the unknown. Yet, life is constituted from the messy dirtiness of that which crawls and creeps. Only in the fantasy of commercials is life sanitized.

In my films, therefore, lowly creatures function as guides, bringing humans closer to the parts of their own being which, though tremendously alive, are relegated to the shadowlands because they don't fit the dominant model of subjecthood and its stories. Like the tick in *Something Must Break*, insects show us a gateway to the unfamiliar—to true intimacy and new ways of being.

Queer film must contend with the impossibility of using simple representation to portray truly queer experiences, beyond axiomatic heteronormativity and its attendant structures. Using a

greater register of sensations, we can gesture toward what is just beyond the border of what we think we know.

In these wriggling, slithering crevices of the world, I locate the voice-under: the echo of your fear of death. The grief from trauma expressed as a multitudinous dirge. In all this: the potential of survival and thriving, blossoming from the dark chaos. The voice-under is the disordered interconnectedness of all life, a chorale of booming noise, unified but made up of a multitude of individual voices. It roars if we just listen deeply.

**Bio:**

Ester Martin is a PhD student at Stockholm University of the Arts and a Swedish filmmaker who explored both fiction and documentary formats. Their latest feature film, *SOMETHING MUST BREAK*, was awarded the 2014 Hivos Tiger Award at the Rotterdam Film Festival. The film also wrote history when main actress Saga Becker was the first trans woman to receive a Guldbagge for Best Actress.

2006 – Svälj

2008 – Maggie in Wonderland (Original Title in Swedish: Maggie Vaknar på Balkongen)

2009 – Dirty Diaries (Fragment: Fruitcake)

2012 – She Male Snails (Original Title in Swedish: Pojktanten)

2014 – Something Must Break (Original Title in Swedish: Nånting Måste Gå Sönder)

2018 - Swedish Candy, Some Violence and a Bit of Cat

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**Stream: 5, Panel: 10**

**Lisa Berkert Wallard (independent designer, SE)**

**Title:** *The Self: Towards a Method for Queering Death (An Identity Testament)*

**Abstract:**

“The Self: Towards A Method for Queering death” is an identity testament, a speculative method for designing the space of your own funeral before you die. It is a format to create a fair memorial of a person’s identity that does not feel welcome or fits in the current formats of burial ceremonies we have in Sweden today, usually connected to Christianity or other religious traditions. Even the secular burial traditions of Sweden today have a very clear traditional format and aesthetic that can be intimidating to a lot of members of society. “The Self – Towards A Method for Queering Death” is also a method to relegate the power of narrative to whom it belongs.

This paper demonstrates and problematizes the secular burial traditions in Sweden and how the common rituals are still based on the norms of Christianity, heteronormativity and traditional values, and why this is oppressing a lot of individuals in society. It does so by using a speculative method of an identity testament, which gives every human the right to own the narrative about

their persona and who they were to the afterlife. It also problematizes the hierarchies and norms in society of what “family” means, and how consanguinity is valued by state and law. The paper asks and answers questions such as: How could a new type of burial ceremony look, feel and be arranged to be more connected to what we can relate as religion today? Is it possible to create an organized system to collect information about a person’s identity to be used as a formal ground to create a fair burial ceremony after the person’s death?

**Bio:**

Lisa Berkert Wallard is a Stockholm based scenographer, product designer and spatial designer working in the fields of film, photography, performance arts, art installations and exhibition design amongst others. She has a passion for crafts and works a lot with three-dimensional research and sketching in her process. She graduated from Konstfack with a Master in Fine Arts in Design in the spring of 2019 focusing her work on aesthetic norms of the Swedish Burial Ceremony, the spaces and artefacts that surrounds it and how it affects humans process of grief. She works as an independent creator in spatial design, and has been working actively on her own since 2013 in the field with both commercial and non-commercial clients.

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**Stream:** 8, **Panel:** 19

**Elizabeth Berman (Humboldt University of Berlin, DE)**

**Title:** Un/Grievable and In/Visible Bodies: Queering Religion, Decolonizing Jewish Grief

**Abstract:**

In *What Does a Jew Want?* Judith Butler writes of Jewish beliefs surrounding death: “no one’s death is going to be redeemed in a future world or in an afterworld; there is no redemption. Which means that life has to be protected. It is precarious. I would even go so far as to say that precarious life is, in a way, a Jewish value for me” (215). In combination with insights regarding the intersections of Jewish-diasporic and queer embodiment in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, and drawing on an auto-ethnographic approach to my queer and Jewish life in Berlin, I am interested in how mourning for Palestinian death while living in Germany enacts a “queering” of temporalities and of death(ly bodies).

My paper will address: how does Jewish mourning for the *present* and *future* of Palestine negotiate topographies of grief, the fetishization of Jewish victimhood, and whiteness in post-Holocaust Germany? How might grief be temporally refigured, or “queered,” to account not only for those “spectacular” deaths that have already occurred, but also those that “slow” deaths (Berlant, 2007) that are coeval or yet-to-come? I am interested in how Jewish grief for deaths of Palestinians can disrupt the hegemony of secularity and the death of the sacred brought on by globalizing neoliberalism. Thinking Jewish-religious grief and attentiveness to “precarious life” can unravel the alignment of Jewish identity with ethnic national belonging and resurrect what Ann Pellegrini terms “queer structures of religious feeling” (2009). In light of Germany’s recent criminalization of the non-violent Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, I will argue for a queer reading of the diasporic, non-Zionist Jew to consider how multi-directional, de-colonial collective mourning

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4-5 November 2019, Karlstad University, Sweden.

functions as an affective tool for *queering death*, and for building kinship networks to mobilize resistance against boundaries of religion, “race,” and nationhood.

#### References:

Lauren Berlant, “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency),” in *Critical Inquiry* 33, No. 4 (Summer 2007): 754-780.

Ann Pellegrini, “Feeling Secular,” in *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 19, No. 2 (July 2009): 205–218.

*Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, ed. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

*What Does a Jew Want? On Binationalism and Other Specters*, ed. Udi Aloni (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

#### Bio:

I am pursuing a Master’s degree in Transdisciplinary Gender Studies at the Humboldt-Universität Berlin, where I was also a Fulbright student researcher in 2017-2018. I hold a Bachelor’s degree from Brown University (U.S.A.) in German Studies and the History of Art and Architecture. In 2018-2019, I led a collaborative research workshop entitled “Queering Death” for B.A. and M.A. students. My scholarly focuses include: religious studies, queer theory, visual culture, critical theory, racism and globalization, affect theory, and death studies.

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**Stream:** 2, **Panel:** 2

### Ally Bisshop (UNSW National Institute for Experimental Arts)

**Title:** Spider death rites: sex, sacrifice, survival in itself

#### Abstract:

Nowhere is the porous threshold that interpolates life into death more tangible than in reproductive behaviours that embed the bodily mortality of their actants at the same time as they seek to extend those bodies in replicated biological code. This paper explores the death/life ecologies that flourish along the queered axes of spider reproductive behaviours—from cannibalistic sex to matricidal birth—and how the affective language and concepts through which these behaviours are understood both reflect and distort heteronormative human accounts of gender/sex, life/death and thresholds between. Our understanding of this behaviour is underwritten by accounts of spider sex roles that borrow from anthropomorphic gender tropes: the disinterested/passive female, the active/performative male, the deceptive conceit of the sexual lure. These accounts are buoyed by popular media narratives, supported by scientific observation, and, as has been argued, written into scientific practice and theory in ways that ‘naturalize’ misogynistic conceptions of gender/sexual relations and violence. Implied in spider sex stories is the thrill of possible death, in which mortality becomes both eroticized and biologically rationalized. The teleological outcome of ‘reproductive sex’—generation of spider progeny—also embeds a deathly caution: potential cannibalism of the mother by her children, overwritten in

scientific and popular accounts as an altruistic act of ‘maternal self-sacrifice’. This paper seeks to recalibrate storied accounts of spider death rites through a critical, creative posthumanist approach to nonhuman life as zoë (Braidotti). It presents a queered reading of fatal arachnid narratives of sex/birth in which death is not violence or programmatic terminus, but a zoëtic expression of desire as conatus: endlessly reaching for affirmative becomings through (re)productive cominglings of bodies—whether by penetration, modulation, ingestion, absorption. A spiderly weaving together of sex and death thus effects the conditions for the creative survival (inherence) of life itself.

**Bio:**

Ally Bisshop is an artist, writer and researcher, currently collaborating with spider/webs in Studio Tomás Saraceno’s Arachnophilia Department. She first studied biology (B.Sc. Hons 1 Microbiology), before turning to artistic practice—studying at UDK Berlin through Olafur Eliasson’s Institut für Räumexperimente, and completing a practice-based PhD in 2018 (UNSW National Institute for Experimental Arts). Taking inspiration from subjects as varied as science/science fiction, mythology, process philosophy and nonhuman encounters, her work is an exploration of materiality as movement: experimenting with intensive variations in organic, geologic and temporal processes, and testing the porous categories of life/nonlife. [www.allybisshop.com](http://www.allybisshop.com)

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 11

**Noah Bremer (independent researcher, LT)**

**Title:** Social Death and the Limits of the Sucideational Demand

**Abstract:**

In 2012, workers at Foxconn's central manufacturing site in Shenzhen went on a human strike: 200 people collectively went to the roof and threatened to jump, if wages and conditions were not bettered.<sup>1</sup> The company accepted all of their demands. Contrasted with the widely publicized suicide wave of the same period, these workers merely used death's threat, to leverage demands for life.

Evidenced here is the ability to disconnect suicide from the teleological end of literal self-murder and engage with its multivalent connotations – as what Berlant has called suicideation: “not only the foreclosing act of finitude”<sup>2</sup>, but the speculative leaning towards non-belonging as a zone for the articulation and prefiguration of other possible worlds. Developing this concept, I turn to the work of two anthropologists, Banu Bargu and Jocelyn Chua; who both, in their own way, address the usage of sucideational demands as a tactic of those structurally subjugated (in their case studies by marriage and prison) to gain symbolic identity and agency.

Yet, in grounding a politics on the idea of death as a leveraging position, suicideational practices seem to confront their own impasse, namely: the threat of death only seems audible as a threat insofar as the subject making it is not already deemed ‘socially dead’. Here, the question arises of how one goes about conceptualizing agency, or political existence for those who do not bear the status of human beings.

For the theorist Jackie Wang, the first step would imply rejecting the 'politics of innocence'. In refusing the moral guarantees of the stance, one enters the imaginary of the socially dead and their forsaken, illegitimate, unrecognized worlds – worlds which I will argue hold essential forms-of-life for those committed to abolishing the current state of things.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> People & Nature, “China: collective resistance against Slavery”, 2016. Available here: <https://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2017/10/23/china-collective-resistance-against-slavery/> [accessed 2.5.19]

<sup>2</sup> Lauren Berlant very loosely sketches the idea of suicideation in the following lecture, but the term seems to never have been developed. See here: “On Being in Life Without Wanting the World: Living in Ellipsis” available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PU4AzjY9rjI> (13:48). [accessed 2.5.19]

**Bio:**

My thinking has been captured by the suicidal imaginary for the past two years. I suppose the theme came to me out of both my living situation (Lithuania) known for very high rates of suicide , as well as my politics: queer, nihilist, anti-vitalist, libertarian communist. So far, my output around this topic has been a two part essay in Blind Field Journal, 'There is, after all, Still Air to Breathe in Hell' (<https://blindfieldjournal.com/2019/02/20/there-is-after-all-still-air-to-breathe-in-hell-part-1/>). My academic background is in philosophy (BA, New School, NYC) and political theory (MA Social Political Critique, Kaunas, Lithuania). I'm currently involved, as a co-initiator, of a storefront space in Vilnius, which supports militant-research through workshops, talks, screenings, a kitchen, reading groups and a zine library/ distro.

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**Stream:** 2, **Panel:** 12

## **Zuz Buchowska (Aalto University, FI)**

**Title:** Life After Game Over

**Abstract:**

Video games are considered to be a medium focused on winning, and the majority of them define winning as not dying. Most queer characters in video games are sentenced to death, but not because of their deliberate practice of the queer art of failure (Halberstam, 2011), but because of following the “kill your gays” trope (Petit, 2019). Most of these characters are either already dead (Rachel in Life is Strange), soon-to-be-dead (Bill in The Last of Us), or at least invisible and banished (Sam in Gone Home).

This paper (academic essay with slam poetry inspirations) draws a parallel between that trope and lived experiences of queer people who are often forced to symbolically die, as in, hide the most lively parts of themselves - either in or even outside the closet. (Sedgwick, 1990).



In this presentation I will explore alternative forms of gaining agency over one's death based on two cases: a video game and a real life experience. In *The Missing*, a trans woman character "tears off her own legs and arms to solve simple physics, (...) throws her body at her obstacles, again and again, screaming and writhing in pain as she moves forward." (Muncy, 2018) In a performance piece *Fun-eral*, (Helsinki, 2018), Nando de Bruijn organises his own funeral to celebrate an official start of his transition.

By reclaiming the narrative of their own death, queer people attempt to gain the agency of it. And by extension, to gain back the agency of their lives.

The paper further explores the questions of agency over death: if the only way to exist is to die, who owns the queer person's death? Who is the one to kill them? And by extension, who owns their life? (Mirzoeff, 2019). As a medium that offers the illusion of agency, could video games be used to process grief and queer death (Harrer, 2019)?

**Bio:**

Zuz Buchowska is a Helsinki-based artist, comedian and games developer, pursuing their Master's degree in Game Design and Production at Aalto University. Their artistic practice and academic research focuses on the themes of the agency of queer bodies, expressing intimacy through tangible game controllers, and the violence of fun in video games. Currently, they are working on "Go date yourself!", an interactive installation with alternative controller gaming elements, that aims to deconstruct the dating simulator genre of video games.

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**Stream:** 4, **Panel:** 14

## **Vinh Cam (University of Chicago, US)**

**Title:** *The Biopolitics of the Good Death Memoir*

**Abstract:**

Everywhere we look we find testimonies to survival; at the same time, this is the era of the terminal illness memoir. If "the appearance of this literature is itself a striking reversal of the absence of writing about death in the first half of the twentieth century" (Hawkins 1991, 301) then this archive offers a unique history of the present that also revises the biopolitical account of the contemporary West as a "death-denying society" (Kübler-Ross 1969; Foucault 1976; Aries 1980). My paper focuses on a subcategory of terminal illness narratives critics have dubbed "the good death memoir." Characterized by a rational confrontation with one's mortality—or to "stare death in the eye" as one critic put it, recent good death memoirs by Christopher Hitchens, Paul Kalanithi, and Cory Taylor, do not only contravene the historical disqualification of death but also the mortalist stratification of privilege and subjugation in contemporary political discourse. Indeed, in biopolitical terms, how do we account for the tendency of self-identified privileged subjects to identify with their "extinction" (in Hitchens' words) under a regime supposedly centered on life? While queer and anti-racist scholars have described how late capitalism induces modalities of social death, slow death, surplus life, and other precarious subjectivities, less attention has been paid to the way biopower articulates the "normative" relation to death. How might the liberal desire for terminality

(Farman 2017) complicate queer theory's positioning of death as the ultimate site of resistance against "reproductive futurity" (Edelman 2004)? In the good death memoir, I argue, a "form of death" is emerging beside the survival-form of life that revises the biopolitical relation to death, characterized by Foucault as "let die."

**Bio:**

Vinh Cam is a PhD candidate at the University of Chicago's Department of English Language and Literature. His research centers on genres of "death writing" in the Post-45 era, including the autopsy report, documentary, and memoir, in order to track counter-histories of modern death and its emergent forms. As a queer-of-color scholar, Vinh's interest spans gender and sexuality, critical race studies, affect theory, and biopolitics. He has taught at the University of Chicago's Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality; reviewed films and books for *Bright Lights Film Journal* and *Critical Inquiry*; and is currently producing a documentary on the queer relation to death in the post-Stonewall era.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 13

**Sara Casartelli (University of Milano-Bicocca)**

**Title:** *Moving Bodies: Drowning and Creative Infrastructures for Identification*

**Abstract:**

This article empirically analyses how the unknown bodies of migrants who died in the attempt to reach Europe are managed and potentially identified. Shifting attention away from the border, the paper provides a new angle to the crisis unfolding in the Mediterranean, investigating the practices to know and attend to the dead migrant's body. Exploring the initiatives of identification in Italy, the article presents an ethnographic account of the emergent forensic infrastructure. It does so by looking at movement. The movement of bodies towards identification. Attending to the very fact that a dead body cannot be left where it is found, but necessarily must be moved to be identified or only to be buried, I engage with the circulation of bodies and bodily material to explore how the forensic infrastructure to manage and study them emerges. The pursuit is informed by Science and Technology Studies (STS); the focus is on material practices aimed at the eventual identification of unknown bodies. Taking stock from recent debates in the anthropology of infrastructure in which scholars critique the idea that infrastructures are passive architectures comprising circulations, the paper proposes an alternative perspective on infrastructures. I argue that infrastructures are processes of constant and creative adjustment and that these ongoing changes are the effect of circulation. Following the circulation of bodies in the infrastructure whose purpose is identification, in my analysis I use *Moving Bodies* to demonstrate that circulations are performative events. The argument will be developed in two steps. Firstly, foregrounding the movement of the body in the journey towards identification, the paper demonstrates the forensic infrastructure is enacted through the circulation of body and bodily material. Secondly, providing examples of infrastructural activity, the article shows that infrastructures are a creative praxis done by movement, rather than a prior and fixed road.

**Bio:**

Sara Casartelli is a medical anthropologist graduated Cum Laude in the Research Master's Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam, currently undertaking the advanced course in Critical Theory of Society at the University of Milano-Bicocca. During her studies she conducted fieldwork in Italy exploring practices of identification of unknown bodies of dead migrants who died in the attempt to reach Europe. Her research project resulted in an article written with Amade M'charek, "Identifying dead migrants: forensic care work and relational citizenship" (Citizenship Studies, 2019). Her current research interests include forensics, border politics, the body, power and anthropology of science.

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**Stream:** 2, **Panel:** 7

**Eliza Chandler, Kim Collins, Esther Ignani, Loree Erickson (Ryerson University, CA)**

**Title:** Crip-Queer World-Making

**Abstract:**

This presentation takes up creative works which engage themes of queer-crip necropolitics and crip-queer futurity (Kafer 2012; Schalk 2018). We discuss Deathnastics, a performance that opens up public dialogic spaces to reflect on what is vital and political about energizing a crip-queer world-making project (Warne 2000; Hamraie 2017) from the entrypoint of death. We take up crip-queer world-making as a project wherein we imagine and perform multiple and divergent worlds that desire difference.

Deathnastics takes up stories that emerge in the wake of the newly passed Canadian medical assistance in dying (MAiD) legislation. One story, Archie Rolland, a disabled man, describes electing for MAiD, in the face of inadequate access to care, including having his lips moistened. This story is demonstrative of contemporary forms of crip necropolitics. Deathnastics animated how MAiD was presented to Rolland as his only viable option, an example of how sovereign biopower makes clear delineations between who is made to live and who is left to die (Mbembe, 2003). We detail how Deathnastics grappled with key themes related to necropolitics and world-making from the vantage-point of death. We discuss how Deathnastics connected lip moistening to expressing desire for ourselves and others (e.g. to express care, to communicate desire, to stay alive) through a queer sensibility. We examine how crip orientations to "cultures of undesirability" (Erickson, 2015) can highlight connections between desire and care. Queering the act of lip moistening reveals that in order for care interactions to be effective, even life-giving, desire must flow interdependently. We close with reflection upon future work in which we recontextualize Deathnastics in other projects such as Killjoys Kastle: A Lesbian Haunted House and what is gained through collaborative world-making beginning from vantage-point of death.

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The First International Queer Death Studies Conference  
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### **Bios:**

Esther Ignagni is an associate professor with the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University.

Eliza Chandler is an assistant professor with the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University.

Kim Collins is a research associate with the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University.

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**Stream: 4, Panel: 14**

## **Anna Chiara Corradino (Universities of Bologna and L'Alquila, IT)**

**Title:** *Liaisons dangereuses* with Necrophiliac Women. Aspects of Female Dominance in Male-centred Discourse

### **Abstract:**

Can female necrophilia be defined as an intrinsically queer 'perversion'? I dare answer this question in the affirmative. First of all, female necrophilia seems to question the social identity category of "woman" which prescribes women in a passive position; secondly it questions binary and heteronormative order that establish sexual intercourse between two opposite-sex and alive people as the only acceptable. Both psychiatric<sup>1</sup> and literary<sup>2</sup> outspoken descriptions of female necrophilia are indeed scarce. This is a consequence of the tabuistic nature of necrophilia itself, and

of the double-acting perversion in which female necrophilia is plotted, by not only transgressing boundaries between life and death, but also perverting prescribed gender roles.<sup>3</sup>

Female necrophilia may be hard to detect and moreover it may be hidden under not expressly necrophile narratives, which nevertheless structurally refer back to necrophiliac dynamics. These dynamics are clearly variegated along with the possible nuances of necrophilia itself, mainly depending on the different point of view from which we decide to analyse it.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of my talk will be to analyse a defined dynamic of female necrophilia in male-centred discourse, by identifying how female necrophilia may be regarded as a way to describe female dominance, in Western European culture, as a problematic condition. This condition is linked to men's fear of de-virilisation, as a consequence of a non-dominant position, and to men's fear of self-objectification. This paradigm may be detected in ancient myths' risemantisation regarding female hypogamy<sup>5</sup> from Roman until Contemporary times. Therefore, I will analyse some cases of female necrophilia in contemporary art, by tracing a line that dates back to Ancient and Baroch literature and art, with a specific focus on mythologies regarding Endymion and Adonis, that I regard as structurally necrophiliac.

#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> See the most recent Aggrawal, A. (2010). *Necrophilia: Forensic and Medico-legal Aspects*, Boca Raton: Crc Press and Rosman, J. P., Resnick, P. J. (1989). Sexual attraction to corpses: A psychiatric review of necrophilia. in «Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law» 17.2, pp. 153-63.

<sup>2</sup> See. Downing, L. (2002). *See Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature*. Leeds: Taylor Francis Ltd for some modern examples.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. W\_anggren, L. (2012). Death and desire: Female necrophilia as gender transgression. In M. Foley, N. McRobert, A. Stephanou (Eds.), *Transgression and Its Limits*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Many points may be problematized see MacCormack, P. (2006). Necrosexuality. in «Rhizomes» 11.12, who points out some crucial elements in the analysis of necrophilia.

<sup>5</sup> In Greek Literature condition of female dominance and hypogamy is a-problematic, differently from the reception of the myths onwards.

#### **Bio:**

Anna Chiara Corradino is PhD student in Comparative literature at Universities of Bologna and L'Aquila since November 2018. She graduated both in Classics and in Italian Modern literature, with a special focus on classical reception of mythology in Renaissance, Baroque and Contemporary literature and art. Her research project aims to show how the study of the reception of Endymion's myth can be a useful tool to analyse the archaeology of a peculiar kind of fetishism: necrophilia committed by a dominant woman against a passive and objectified male, as well as defining the contemporary tendencies of female necrophilia in feminist literature.

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**Stream: 6, Panel: 17**

## **Rob Cover (University of Western Australia, AU)**

### **Title: Queer Death and Youth Discourses: Countering Chrononormativities Towards New Ethical Liveabilities**

#### **Abstract:**

Discourses that circulate among young people, particularly in online settings and peer-networked settings regularly provide evidence of both the persistence of normative approaches to comprehending liveability, and counter-normative, radical and resistant practices and ideas on what should constitute a liveable, intelligible and coherent life. Between the circulation of norms and counter-norms the site for certain practices of queering discourse can be apprehended.

This presentation draws on the findings of a recently-completed Australian Research Council Discovery Project called Queer Generations, which investigated the experiences of support, identity and belonging among two different generations of young people growing up in periods of political and cultural change in relation to minority subjectivity and citizenship. Across both generations, topics of death, and the relationship between death, gender and sexual diversity emerged with surprising regularity.

Two particular topics of queer death were discussed across many of the project sites, focus groups and interviews: (i) suicidality as a normative experience in young people's lives, whether participants' own, their peers or their understandings of suicide norms, with particular reference to the suddenness of suicide while also remaining a backdrop to youth transitions to adulthood; and (ii) the frequency with which they find gender- and sexually-diverse television and film characters 'killed off' in surprise but regular plot twists, and the protest culture that has built around attempting to combat the offensiveness of what has become known as the 'Bury your Gays' trope.

Between the articulations of suddenness and surprise that mark these manifestations of queer death is also the articulation that this is part of the cultural milieu in which being queer is experienced: to be addressing death and engaging with it in an everyday capacity. What this does is provide a framework for understanding queer death as simultaneously 'sudden' and 'slow death' in Lauren Berlant's framework. The disruption to neoliberal chrononormativities that young people's articulation of queer death as simultaneously sudden and slow is significant, and provides a potential nodal point for rethinking queer death not merely as an interruption to temporality, but queered in its multiple temporalities. Within this queering, it can be argued that new approaches to ethical liveabilities might be considered.

#### **Bio:**

Rob Cover is Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences, at The University of Western Australia. He is Chief Investigator on a current Australian Research Council Discovery Project Queer Generations (2015-2018) examining the frameworks of LGBTQ youth belonging, support and health; and on a Discovery (2018-2020) investigating the role of on-screen representation of gender- and sexually-diverse themes narratives in the production of social change, inclusivity and diversity. He is currently leading a project team of scholars from nine countries on Communicating Good Health and Wellbeing in an Era of Digital Media and Populist Anti-Expertise Discourse. Recent books include: *Queer Youth Suicide, Culture and Identity: Unliveable Lives?* (Routledge 2012), *Vulnerability*

The First International Queer Death Studies Conference  
*Death Matters, Queer(ing) Mourning, Attuning to Transitionings*  
4-5 November 2019, Karlstad University, Sweden.

and Exposure: Footballer Scandals, Masculine Identity and Ethics (UWAP 2015), Digital Identities: Creating and Communicating the Online Self (Elsevier, 2016), and Emergent Identities: New Sexualities, Gender and Relationships in a Digital Era (Routledge 2018). He is co-editor of the anthology Youth, Sexuality and Sexual Citizenship (Routledge 2018).

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**Stream:** 4, **Panel:** 14

## **Vanbasten Noronha de Araújo (Central European University, HU)**

**Title:** Prismatic Death/Life Ecology – Pantone’s ‘Living Coral’ and the Death of Cup Corals

### **Abstract:**

To give plastics their color and determine their malleability, industries have been using a chemical component, known as plasticizer. Once in the open ocean, where they are exposed to sunlight, microplastics and other plastic materials start going through a photo-degradation process that break them into smaller particles, releasing into the ocean plasticizers that will bioaccumulate throughout the food chain and disrupt the endocrine system of the contaminated subjects. Due to this process of degradation, most of the plastics that are seen in the ocean have a less vivid aesthetic since they start losing their intense color and also change in size and form. For this presentation, having in mind the discourses and materialities of plastic pollution and its deadly impacts to nonhumans and humans, I will analyze the connections between death/life discourses and color-coded politics bearing in mind Pantone’s color of 2019, which is named ‘Living Coral.’ Annually, Pantone, a globally known color institute, selects a new ‘color of the year’ to be widely used in consumer-oriented economies. For the past 20 years, Pantone has been the most present company in color development for the fashion and design economies, ‘producing’ colors and selling them to companies across the globe. Thus, my argument will develop from questioning how Pantone’s color of the year relates to the actual death of orange cup corals due to ocean acidification and plastic pollution. Through the analysis of the ocean’s death/life ecology and the use of cup coral’s color to produce plastic products, I will explore how posthuman environmental politics can emerge from a prismatic death/life ecology.

### **Bio:**

Vanbasten de Araújo is a PhD student of Comparative Gender Studies at the Central European University and holds an MA in Critical Gender Studies from the same institution. He is interested in cultural studies, science and technology studies, and environmental humanities.

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 16

## **Pascal Dreier (Academy of Media Arts Cologne, DE)**

**Title:** Multispecies Mourning

**Abstract:**

The work *Collecting bones my partner consumes*, turning them into a porcelain urn (2019) began with a simple question in mind: how could relationships between people with different models of acting morally be told and examined differently? I do not eat any animal products, but over a period of half a year, I collected the bones connected to my partner's meals. I calcined the bones and turned them into fine ash by hand with a mortar. At the end of this process there is a porcelain urn, with the ash not being inside of the vessel, but part of the material. As *Bone China*, this is still a common way of producing ceramics. Here, the beings who were involuntarily involved are visible through the object, which is not spotless, but full of marks, deformed and shaped by the ash of their bones. The work now consists of multiple layers I want to address and connect in this talk: animal agency, rituals of mourning and remembering as well as grievability in multispecies relations.

**Bio:**

Pascal Dreier is working at intersections of art, design, strategy and research—by crossing and dissolving boundaries between speculation and realities, research and practice, but most importantly between species. After studies at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and University of DesignHfG Schwäbisch Gmünd, Pascal now is a graduate student and tutor at the Dept. of Media Art/Transmedia Spaces at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, Germany. He held talks at various conferences including the European Feminist Research Conference and the Symbiotica 2018 Quite Frankly – It's a Monster Conference at the University of Western Australia.

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**Stream:** 7, **Panel:** 18

**Jennifer Edwards (Central European University, HU)**

**Title:** *Bodies on Boats: Functional Anonymity in the Neoliberal Necropolitical Imaginary*

**Abstract:**

This paper discusses the necropolitical ramifications of a collection of contemporary statues depicting the present “refugee crisis”. These statues are intended to evoke empathy in the contemporary neoliberal subject for the plight of the Refugee on a Boat, in part through gestures of universality via anonymization of the refugee figure. I argue that these sculptures underscore the political necessity of the dehumanization of the refugee to enable violent, neoliberal anti-refugee state policy. This work addresses “La Balsa de Lampedusa” by James Taylor (2016), Ai Weiwei’s “Law of the Journey” (2018) and Yoko Ono’s “Add Color Painting (Refugee Boat)” (2018). Each of these installations addresses the specific image of the refugee adrift, and each incorporates anonymity and defacement in distinct but interconnected ways. I consider these works through the lens of Agamben’s analysis of homo sacer, Esposito’s immunity paradigm, and Butler’s work on the politics of mourning in order to uncover the function of anonymous masses of racialized bodies in the capitalist geopolitical imaginary. This turn of dehumanization enables a public endorsement for what Nakhoul calls “the fantasy of wishful sinking” made true- violent nationalistic anti-refugee policy, particularly in places where refugees most often arrive via boat. I intervene in this debate about dehumanization by arguing that extreme state-sponsored violence relies upon the national



imaginary casting the refugee as a faceless Other, void of anything but bare life, justifiably murdered to protect the body politic, and unmourned by that body. I argue that the artistic depictions of the refugees on boats expose and underpin this imaginary. I call for a radical politics of humanization, in opposition to the present necropolitical, neoliberal regime which rests on the generation and maintenance of replaceable, unmournable bodies.

**Bio:**

Jennifer Edwards is an MA student in Critical Gender Studies at Central European University. She is a queer scholar and activist from the United States whose work primarily focuses on intersectionality, racial and class justice, and centering marginalized voices and experiences. Her interest areas include queer theory, biopolitics, queer anthropology, embodied scholarship, discourse analysis, and disability studies. Jennifer is currently working on an ethnographic thesis on the theory and practice of queer community in Madison, WI, USA.

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**Stream: 2, Panel: 7**

**Layal Ftouni (Utrecht University, NL)**

**Title: Affirmative Ethics at the Threshold of 'Not-Life' in Occupied Palestine**

**Abstract:**

This presentation explores the ways in which the boundaries between life and death are defined by a set of political relations (political violence, racism, discrimination) that justify the violation of certain bodies through injury, debilitation, or death. At stake in this discussion is the question of who counts as human, whose lives are worthy of living and whose lives are disposable.

In light of these debates, the session critically addresses the recent turn in post-human theory towards affirmative ethics, a post-anthropocentric vision of the subject capable of overturning the most negative of affects and relations into joyful affirmation. (Braidotti 2006, 2018).

Focusing specifically on the context of Occupied Palestine, I question the potentiality of this ethical stance in conditions produced by what Jasbir Puar names as 'inhuman biopolitics' of infrastructural, bodily, and psychical debilitation under Israeli settler colonialism. Departing from Braidotti's ethical project, I ask; What would it mean to consider wounds as sites for the summoning of new political imaginaries at the threshold state of 'not-life' under conditions of biopolitical/necropolitical violence? Building on the work of Hortense Spillers (1987) and Alexander Weheliye's (2014) I ask how can life be affirmed outside the confines of the legal and political adjudication of what it means to be human today?

**Bio:**

Layal Ftouni is an Assistant Professor in Gender Studies at the Graduate Gender Programme, Department of Media and Cultural Studies, at Utrecht University and a research affiliate at the Institute of Cultural Inquiry (ICON) at the same university. Through her research and teaching, Layal trained transdisciplinarily, working across gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, visual studies and critical race studies. Before joining Utrecht University in Sept 2016, she lectured

The First International Queer Death Studies Conference  
*Death Matters, Queer(ing) Mourning, Attuning to Transitionings*  
4-5 November 2019, Karlstad University, Sweden.

(2013 - 2016) as a senior teaching fellow at the Centre for Media and Cultural Studies at SOAS, University of London and completed her PhD in 2017 at the University of Westminster. She is the co-founder of the transnational network Arab Cultural Studies and is the editor (with Tarik Sabry) of *Arab Subcultures: Transformations in Theory and Practice* (I.B.Tauris, 2017).

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**Stream:** 2, **Panel:** 2

## **Magdalena Górka (Utrecht University, NL)**

**Title:** Human And Non-Human Killability: A Posthumanist Intersectional Analysis Of Power For Socio-Environmental Justice

### **Abstract:**

While human rights discourses are based on the idea of equal value of human life, analysis of biopolitical (Foucault 1978) and necropolitical (Mbembe 2003) operations of power relations shows the opposite. Based on intersectional processes of privileging and discrimination, some lives are more breathable than others and some are perceived as more worthy of preservation or protection while others are rendered killable. This paper addresses the question of killability of human life together with killability of non-human life. By analysing how certain human and non-human lives are rendered disposable, the paper articulates a posthumanist intersectional analysis of power. The goal of the paper is not to flatten human and non-human relationality but show how this relationality is both intra-actively (Barad 2007) constitutive as well as differential, and how challenging contemporary discourses and practices of killability requires approaches where social and environmental justice are not only thought together but, more importantly, are understood as fundamentally co-constitutive.

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Mbembe, Achille. 2003. 'Necropolitics'. *Public Culture* 15 (1): 1–40.

### **Bio:**

Magdalena Górka is Assistant Professor at the Graduate Gender Programme at the Department of Media and Culture Studies and Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Utrecht University. Her research focuses on quotidian, individual, and structural conditions of un/liveability that make some lives more breathable or suffocating than others. Her dissertation book *Breathing Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability* develops a non-universalizing and politicized understanding of embodiment where human bodies are conceptualized as agential actors of intersectional politics. Her work offers intersectional and anthropo-situated while posthumanist discussions of human embodiment and agency and focuses on the quotidian bodily and affective practices of living as political matters. She is a founder of the Breathing Matters Network.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 8

## **Matti Häyry (Aalto University, FI)**

**Title:** The unmournable death of an animal: How a hailed discursive shift from social ethics to political justice may have helped to seal the plight of nonhuman animals in certain philosophical circles

### **Abstract:**

My native academic scene is applied philosophical ethics. Many years ago, I used to advocate animal rights. It was simple then. All good social ethicists agreed that we should account for all human and nonhuman beings in our decisions. In Judith Butler's terms, all lives were grievable and all deaths mournable.

I recently returned to the scene, only to find out that the non-speciesist ethos is gone. Some still defend the lives of nonhuman animals, but others object on various pragmatic and ideological grounds. This puzzled me, until I came up with a possible explanation.

I currently study justice and its alternatives. I have managed to draw a map of the political moralities linked with competing theories of justice. The map has many dimensions, but the main three are public/private control of means of production, universality/positionality, and tradition/calculable wellbeing.

The strength of the map is that it distinguishes six main approaches to justice – care, communitarian, neoliberal, capability, utilitarian, and socialist – and describes well their features, differences, and similarities. The weakness of arguing in terms of justice, the map suggests, is that we can plausibly defend many views within their own background assumptions, which are difficult to challenge in the absence of a shared foundation.

This means that if we talk about political justice, which seems reasonable, we may end up making the deaths of animals unmournable again. At the very least, we make the possibility negotiable, and that can have dire consequences. In the presentation, I will explain this in further detail, and show how political moralities are prone to revoke the ethical mournability of animal deaths.

### **Bio:**

Matti Häyry is Professor and Head of Philosophy at Aalto University School of Business. In 2004–2013, he was Professor of Bioethics and Philosophy of Law at the University of Manchester, and before that, Professor of Moral Philosophy (Preston), Philosophy (Kuopio), and Practical Philosophy (Helsinki). Of his publications, *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* (Routledge 1994) reflects his early interest in the history of moral and political philosophy; *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge: Making People Better?* (CUP 2010) summarizes his long involvement in bioethics; and *The Varieties of Justice* (CUP, forthcoming) demonstrates his current interest in theories of equality and justice.

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**Stream: 1, Panel: 6**

## **Angela Patricia Heredia (Central European University, HU)**

**Title: Historical temporality, political agency and mourning in the NASA community of Colombia**

### **Abstract:**

The political subjectivities that have emerged in the context of oblivion, silence and impunity of the Colombian armed conflict challenge a Western understanding of political agency that focuses on an emancipation from the past, bringing into the fore a sense of temporality that is forward and future oriented and valuing a break from tradition, secularism and the creation of the new (Mahmood 2001). In this talk, I want to explore how the NASA community in the Cauca region of Colombia unsettles this vision of the political subject through their understanding of historical temporality, agency and mourning implicit in their way of living political and ethical subjectivity. Thinking political subjectivity from the Colombian Afro, indigenous and peasant movements requires an understanding of historical temporality and agency that focuses in the remembrance of a future anterior (Weheliye 2014) and not in the overcoming the past. This implies a particular vision on mourning of death that refuses to see it as an emancipation from trauma through oblivion. Furthermore, their relation to the territory, tradition, and communal life challenges the limits of what is mournable (Butler 2004) (Man's individual death) under Western neoliberal eyes. In this sense, the political subjectivity of these movements comes from a version of humanity that unsettles the overrepresentation of the human as Man (Wynter 2003).

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### **Bio:**

Angela Patricia Heredia is a PhD student in the department of Gender Studies at Central European University. Her current research attempts to cross-fertilize feminist posthumanist and decolonial thought to rethink the historical temporality and political agency of the body beyond their modern/colonial understandings. Previously, she has been interested in the way in which existential phenomenology and poststructuralism have theorized about the body in relation to political subjectivity. She holds an M.A in Gender Studies from Central European University in Budapest and an M.A in Philosophy, as well as B.A in History and Philosophy from Los Andes University in Bogota.

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**Stream: 2, Panel: 2**

**Kathy High (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY, US)**

**Title: Dreams of Becoming Vulture**

**Abstract:**

In this paper, Kathy High will present art works and speculative theory related to her research on systems of adaptation in death/life ecologies such as ruderal ecologies, and gut microbiomes, offering a means to possible queer alternatives, conceiving scenarios for imagined futures.

Looking at ruderal ecologies -the plants, animals and micro organisms that flourish in devastated post-industrial wasteland, how can these ecologies live in the midst of toxic conditions? How do they grow out of building rooftops, in brick mortar and at the edges of parking lots? What stories do these landscapes offer us about our future, where plants grow in ever-increasing heat and polluted situations, thriving in what might previously have killed them? As collaborator artist Oliver Kellhammer asks: Are there novel symbiotic partnerships for bioremediation and detoxification evolving under our very noses?

With the current interest in the microbiome and how it operates within a body, what is the model for a perfect microbiome and what is an imperfect one? What does it mean to have a differently-abled gut with a chronic degenerative inflammatory bowel disease, producing a gut microbiome that is “in the red” – deficient of bacterial species and diversity, a dysbiosis, missing microbes? Is this a form of “slow” death, or is there a way to consider a genetic mutation towards adaptation?

Currently there is biotech research to engineer bacteria communities to correct this condition, with colonies of gut microbes “curated” for a particular disease type to replace what is “missing”. But perhaps there is need to look at counter models, queer alternatives. One example is the vulture’s highly evolved digestion system allowing it to consume decomposing, dead food – sharing similarities to human gut dysbiosis. Perhaps models of differently-functional human gut microbiomes are evolving towards an affinity with vultures and other scavenger animals, better suited for the limited food sources available to human populations of our future.

**Bio:**

Kathy High is an interdisciplinary artist working with technology, art and biology. She collaborates with scientists and artists, and considers living and dying systems, empathy, animal sentience, and the social, political and ethical dilemmas of biotechnology and surrounding industries. She has received awards including Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for Arts. Her art works have been shown at Museum of Modern Art, (NYC), Science Gallery, (Dublin), NGBK, (Berlin), MASS MoCA (North Adams). She has had residencies with SymbioticA (2009-10), Finnish Society of Bioart (2013), Coalesce UBuffalo (2016-17), Djerassi Scientific Delirium Madness (2019). High is Professor in Arts at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY.

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**Stream: 1, Panel: 11**

**Ida Hillerup Hansen (Central European University, HU)**

**Title: Grief as diagnosis: safety lost and its biomedical cure**

**Abstract:**

Attending to the phenomenon of grief as diagnosis, and being as a condition of uncertainty emphasised by poststructuralist injections of loss into the world's imagined stability (Derrida 1973; Kirby 1997), this paper proposes that a biomedical rendering of the phenomenon of the deceased (DSM-5 and ICD-11) constitutes a vehicle for the enactment of a particular model of reality and the containment of the bereaved, living subject within it. Taking contemporary biomedical research literature as its site of study, this presentation traces the formulation of grief as psychiatric diagnosis through the influence a neurochemical configuration of the brain has achieved in the neurosciences (Rose 2007; Dumit 2004; Vidal 2009) and via its conjoined history of articulation with melancholia and depression (Freud 1917; Horwitz and Wakefield 2007). Looking specifically at the ways a logic and practice of psychopharmacology helps solidify its rendering as 'hallucination', this paper explores how a biomedical interpretation of the felt presence of the phenomenon of the deceased as 'disruptions' to 'reality' (ex. Castelnovo et al. 2015) serves to reassert and materialise the limits of the world according to a Western metaphysics of presence and neovitalist renditions of life's opposition to death. Thinking with Saidiya Hartman's notion of 'founding violence' (2008, 10), as the ontologising gestures by which the world is set and ordered through violent de/valorisation of some existences, and Denise Ferrera da Silva's problematisation of a 'Kantian knowledge program's method of 'determination' (2017, 5), this presentation asks how a biomedical configuration of the phenomenon of the deceased may be conceptualised to illuminate the ontological violence and erasures necessary for a stable and containable model of the world to persist. It wonders, in other words, about the onto-epistemological costs of the model of reparation a biomedical rendering of grief relies on and invokes.

**Bio:**

Ida is a PhD-candidate at Central European University's Department of Gender Studies and currently a visiting researcher at Utrecht University's Institute for Cultural Inquiry. Their work examines the phenomenon of grief through a lens of contemporary discourse. Namely, autobiographical accounts of loss (Didion 2005; 2011 and Aids 2017) and biomedical literature pertaining to grief as diagnosis (ex. Shear et al. 2013; ICD-11; DSM-5). Embedded in poststructuralist conceptions of mourning, new materialist configurations of embodiment and theorisation of death in a biopolitical perspective, Ida's research wonders broadly about the conditions of existence and the ethical-political stakes in examining such through embodied experience of loss.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 8

**Kuura Irni (University of Helsinki, FI)**

**Title: Cat obituaries: Love and death in the cracks of normative anthropocentric kinship stories**

**Abstract:**

This paper is committed to cats, who are significantly neglected in both critical and other animal studies. In existing research papers, cat deaths have usually been discussed either from the perspective of losing a pet (Schuurman 2018) or in the context of justification for killing cats as invasive species threatening biodiversity by their hunting (Barcott 2013). Despite that cat memes and videos are ubiquitous, it is surprisingly hard to find scholarship that appreciates cat lives and deaths as worth of research, and that attempts to think through and rework cat-human relations in novel and ethical ways (Alger & Alger 2003; McKeithen 2017; Myers 2015; Steinbock 2017).

In this paper I focus on an alternative, slightly less-known genre of cat stories that have affectively “grabbed” (Paasonen 2011) my attention in the midst of all cat publicity, namely, obituaries of rescued cats who never lived as part of human families. This paper draws from feminist science studies scholars (e.g. Despret 2016; Haraway 2016) who have stressed the importance of telling alternative stories about nonhuman animals and human-nonhuman animal relations, and joins feminist and queer critics of white middle class hetero-, homo- and couple normativity (e.g. TallBear 2018; Luna 2018; Willey 2016) in order to explore alternatives to the contemporary Western kinship stories.

I specifically focus on obituaries written by cat rescue organisation activists in Finland. I read these cat obituaries as alternative stories about love and death that fall in the cracks – or enact cracks – in the dominant stories of love, romance, coupledness and nonhuman animals as resources. I explore whether queer theoretical perspectives, such as Harlan Weaver’s (2015) notion of “transient kinship”, could help in conceptualising the importance of these stories about fleeting but intensive moments of contact with cats who never became family members.

**Bio:**

Kuura Irni works as University Lecturer in Gender Studies at University of Helsinki. Irni is interested in feminist science studies, transdisciplinary encounters within feminism, and postcolonial, transgender and queerfeminist theory. Currently they explore how queer theoretical insights could be rethought with feminist animal studies. They also lead a research project called “Climate sustainability in the kitchen – everyday food cultures in transition” (2018-2020) and work with the group “Slow academy for anti-authoritarian queer and trans thinking.” In addition to their academic endeavours they live with four rescued cats and are involved in an activist drumming group.

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**Stream:** 7, **Panel:** 18

**Nadia Jones (King’s College London, UK)**

**Title:** Death as a Liminal Zone: The Necropoetics of Queer Poetry

**Abstract:**

In this paper I postulate a queer ‘necropoetics’, through the work of several queer American poets during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Death, I argue, is a spatiotemporal zone the poet

enters in order to reposition queer bodies in relation to the past and reorientate the potential narratives of the future. Necropoetics, thus, is not simply lyrical form and poetic movement pertaining to the theme of death, but a figurative, spatial territory used to remap the geography of a poem, and in turn, alter and augment time. Bodies are resurrected, deaths are re-lived and ritualised, garish humour and unspoken testimonies are enunciated to disrupt the erasure of queer life.

The main concept takes from Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, the 'ultimate expression of sovereignty' that dictates 'who may live and who must die'. If, as Mbembe argues, those who are sovereign are not impeded by the limits of death, necropoetics frustrates state power; death is not a finite, end-point, but rather a zone to be entered, re-entered, ritualised and morbidly embodied. In this way, necropoetics allows power over queer narratives of life and death to be regained.

Using theory drawn from Giorgio Agamben and Elizabeth Povinelli, I will consider the work of Judy Grahn, CA Conrad and the late Kevin Killian, observing how death, at the hands of these poets, is not just a mortal state, but a realm of political potential to which abstracted bodies can enter and be reimagined, and in which death can be rendered visible.

**Bio:**

Nadia Jones is a writer and researcher based in London, and is currently completing an MA in Contemporary Literature, Culture and Theory at King's College. They have worked as an editor and music writer. Their research interests currently focus on queering/racialising theories of the abnormal.

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**Stream:** 5, **Panel:** 15

**Silke Xenia Juul (independent artist and writer, DK/NL)**

**Title:** Sick of Dying: Diagnosing the Potentialities of Illness as Vague Death

**Abstract:**

This paper investigates how illness manifests as the death of possible futures. Living is posited as movement along a continuum of dying, where sickness becomes an incubator for speed, affecting the very temporality of life and death, enabling understandings of the self as a fragmented collection of existences, rather than one unified coherent entity. In this paper, several voices speak of separate aspects of the non-linear and unclear – the felt and the theorised – in an attempt to disrupt hegemonies of both death and sickness, as to reposition the living, the dying and the sick as perceptions of ourselves.

This paper applies Sarah Ahmed's notions of the feminist killjoy and coming to a feminist consciousness to the sick – the dying – thus conceptualising the sick killjoy and coming to a sick consciousness. These concepts link closely to Lauren Berlant's notion of slow death and Jasbir K. Puar's work on debility and the subsequent accumulation of profit for the very system that reinforces debilities and disables individuals. Challenging Puar's notion of debility as a capacitating machine, this paper proposes the sick killjoy as reclaiming sickness and thus, dying, as a productive



and legitimate subject position. The sick killjoy denies, through existence and insistence, capitalism's devaluation of the sick in terms of labour power, and equally capitalism's necessary exploitation of the sick to fuel industry such as pharmaceuticals, healthcare and insurance.

This paper understands illness as vague death and dying as a means of living. It attempts to grant radical agency to the ill, while allowing the dying to linger in self-mourning, as unlived memories of future lives manifest as both fuel and anchor. Theoretical writing is braided together with poetry, as it feels impossible to write about taxonomies of dying and precarious permanence without crying onto every other page.

**Bio:**

SX Juul is an artist and writer based in Amsterdam. Her work investigates the liminal boundaries between academic writing and performance. Often interjecting scholarly texts with poetry, personal narrative, stand-up, and sonic rituals through live performance. Juul's interdisciplinary practice explores illness, existential personhood and perceptions of time as experienced through the precarity of capitalism. Juul holds MA in Critical Studies from the Sandberg Instituut and a BSc in Philosophy, Logic & Scientific Method from London School of Economics, specialising in the metaphysics of physics.

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**Stream:** 4, **Panel:** 9

## **Özge Kelekçi (Middle East Technical University, Ankara, TR)**

**Title:** An Obligatory Aggregation of Queer Bodies: The Potter's Cemeteries in Turkey

**Abstract:**

In Turkey, the potter's lands are radical and marginal spaces of death since they are not only the cemeteries of unidentified X Does but also they may turn into the cemeteries of the bodies of officially non-recognized identities. According to the Turkish law, even though friends, partners (since gay marriage is not legal in Turkey, the partners are not counted as family) or any other person did claim and identify the dead person, if any family member does not claim the body, the deceased have to be buried in the potter's field. As haunted and interrupted spaces of homeless bodies, X Does, refugees, drug addicts, LGBTQI bodies, prostitutes, "terrorist" bodies, body parts, still births etc.; potter's lands exemplify the suspension of any kind of embodied and affective relation with the deceased ones. The potter's fields symbolize the outer limits, a threshold/queer point for not only urban life but also familial relations and the remembrance capacity of any community located in cities. In this queer space of death, all those marginalised bodies are buried alongside, mostly without names (although the names are known), or even without any signifiatory mark.

Throughout this paper, I would like to evaluate the potter's cemeteries with an in-dept analysis of how queer identities of all kind are assembled together unlike any other urban space under the form of a cemetery; of how the right of mourning of non-blood relatives are taken from their hands; of how social exclusion stigmatizes bodies and emotions and also spaces not only during their lives but also during dying, death and, (impossibility of) mourning; of how liminal identities and queer

lives are represented in potter's field as a nonexistent, obliterated form of "life"; therefore of how potter's cemeteries turn into spaces in which temporal and social relationalities are resolved, dissolved but not to be reconstructed.

**Bio:**

Özge Kelekçi is a PhD student in the Philosophy department of Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. She graduated from Bogazici University Philosophy Department with a master's thesis titled as "The Disclosure of Petrified Unrest: The Gezi Protests from the Perspective of Jean-Luc Nancy and Walter Benjamin" Her research interests are mainly philosophy of life and death, politics of memory, queer philosophy and new subjectivities/objectivities.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 3

## **Lucia Kramárová (ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem, NL)**

**Title:** A space for tears

**Abstract:**

A space for tears explores the relations of the phenomenon of absence and performance and their implications for both art and life practices. The connections are uncovered through the exploration of the forms and modalities of absence, the positionality of absence as a constitutive element of performance, the affinity of absence and the questions of embodiment and the interconnection death and mourning ritual with performance. The driving force of this research is the need for (re)establishing a healthy relationship with absence, which would not be confined exclusively to the realm of the artistic. The motivation for this expansion lies in the understanding of absence as overarching the artistic so significantly, that to rely solely on the context of the artistic would not yield a complex enough perspective.

The paper is conceived as a hermeneutic study in a polemic tone, utilising theoretical and literary works of poetry and prose as well as folk literature as equal sources. The plurality of sources and especially their form and origin ties in with the expansion beyond art practices, which bids to consider alternative repositories of knowledge. The bias of the author as a theatre maker, bisexual woman and Central European is acknowledged and personal experience and sensibility stemming from this context significantly informs the text. The work finds its theoretical support in the works of Antonin Artaud, Gaston Bachelard, Tadeusz Kantor, Peggy Phelan and Joseph Roach among others.

Capturing and keeping the fluidity and ambivalence of the researched topics is a key feature of the research, which remains thoroughly visible. The study keeps the weave of conclusions open, ready to be correlated with practice, which is a logical and organic companion and continuation of the research – it provides maps and traces hungry for interpretation.

**Bio:**

Lucia Kramárová is a theatre director and dramaturg, performer, singer, poet and researcher. She studied Directing and Dramaturgy for Alternative Puppet Theatre at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts Prague and is currently enrolled in the Master of Theatre Practices at ArtEZ University of the Arts in Arnhem. In her research her main areas of interest include: the intersections of theatre and ritual, the physical aspects of mourning ritual, the particularities and subversive nature of the sadness of women, the implications of both tabooisation and fetishization of sadness and mourning.

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**Stream:** 8, **Panel:** 19

## **Björn Kröger (University of Helsinki, FI)**

**Title:** The Deep Time of Death

**Abstract:**

With life death originated and evolved over geological time. Different ways of dying and various modes of afterlife of once living organisms, ecological communities and evolutionary lineages shaped and continue to shape our planetary conditions. We are used to look at biological evolution as a constant stream of life through bodies, be it via genes, molecular regulatory networks or metabolic pathways. Life, in this sense, is inherited from the ones that are now or soon dead. But myriads of dead bodies and their past dying haunts every living organism, every living community and every living ecosystem. Fossils, humus, oil, ooze, coal, limestone constitute a very present exosomatic deep time material heritage of specific ways of dying. The same can be said for clear ocean water for breathable air and for meandering rivers. Dying, in this sense, can be seen as an opening of the living toward a geological temporality of becoming, which causes positive or negative taphonomic feedback cycles with loops that last for hundreds of millions of years.

**Bio:**

Björn Kröger is a curator of the Palaeontological Collections of the Finnish Museum of Natural History and docent at the Helsinki University, Finland. He earned his PhD at the Freie University of Berlin, Germany and worked in Germany, France, and Sweden. He is an expert on the evolution of the oldest cephalopods. His current research focus is on the early evolution of large-scale ecosystem engineering in the oceans. He has also an active interdisciplinary interest in how our knowledge on earth's deep time is produced, narrated and used.

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 16

## **Anna-Katharina Laboissière (Ecole Normale Supérieure, FR/ Curtin University, AU)**

**Title:** When should a species be allowed to die?

**Abstract:**

The ostensible and public goal structuring most current conservation biology practices and proposals is: more life. Across a suite of more or less embedded, more or less suspensive practices of care for endangered species (ex and in situ, rewilding, translocations, freezing, captive breeding, and so forth), it is the individual or collective survival, the bringing of a species or a few of its members into the future, that is being sought and fostered. And yet, these salvific projects also have a counterpoint, a shadow twin that underpins everything conservation biology does or tries to do: they are techniques of death as much as of life, practices of extinction as much as survival.

In this paper, I would like to ask whether conservation biology needs to think about how it provides the possibility for species to die as well as to live, and what this necessity might mean for rethinking what a human intervention into and mediation of a “good death”, in ecological terms, might look like. Thinking about species death as something that can happen in more or less generative and cooperative modes rather than something that must never happen at all is my proposed methodological entry into a questioning of simple linear extinction and extinction mitigation narratives. Living in the belly of the sixth mass extinction, in a time of what Deborah Bird Rose calls “the death of death”, requires a more robust concept of what extinction and linked species deaths are and do if we are to understand the transitions currently taking place, avoid too-simple technophilic hopes and start the necessary work of interspecies mourning. Working through a few concrete examples taken from current conservation practices is one of the many possible entry points into this question, but I hope it might generate useful tools for thinking about what extinction as a generative event actually does, and understanding why and when allowing death might be necessary.

**Bio:**

Anna-Katharina Laboissière is a PhD candidate at the Department of philosophy of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, France and the Centre of Culture and Technology at Curtin University, Australia. Her research focuses on the ex situ conservation of wild species, and looks to working through several examples of what could be called transformative conservation – assisted evolution, assisted migration, the search for crop wild relatives – in order to present a partial grammar of the speculative and generative practices at work in conservation biology. Her interests include the history of conservation biology and gardening, extinction and counter-extinction, the philosophy of multispecies co-constitutions, philosophical ethology, and feminist and queer ecologies. She has upcoming publications in *Cultural Studies Review* and in edited volumes published by K Verlag and Ohio University Press.

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 1

**Nadine Lake (University of the Free State, ZA)**

**Title:** Contesting queer death: The significance of survivability, mourning and belonging in Zanele Muholi's visual activism and photography

**Abstract:**

The term “corrective rape” has become synonymous with black lesbian sexuality in a post-apartheid South African context. Corrective rape has been defined as rape perpetrated by heterosexual men in an attempt to “correct” or “cure” women of their lesbian sexuality. The phenomenon was first reported in South African print media in 2003 and has consequently strengthened the erroneous assumption that homosexuality is “unAfrican.” Racialised and gendered stereotypes that emerged with colonialism continue to play out in violent ways when representing the queer community in a contemporary South African context. News reports on corrective rape are revealing of sexist and racist politics in South Africa and black lesbians are often represented as violated victims of homophobic violence. These representations have reinforced heteronormative trends specific to post-colonial contexts focused on “nation building” and the concomitant emphasis on heterosexual families in Africa. Therefore, despite South Africa’s adoption of a liberal constitution that enshrines the rights of sexual minorities, little has been done to stem the tide of violence and homophobia. Contemporary South African artists, activists and academics are however challenging homophobic and racialised regimes of representation. The problematic representation of black lesbian sexuality and death and the deconstruction thereof features strongly in the work of South African artist and visual activist, Zanele Muholi. Muholi’s collections of work titled Hate Crime Series and Faces and Phases 2006-2014 foreground the importance of intersectional markers that have contributed to the ungrievable status associated with black lesbian lives. Muholi furthermore debunks these stereotypes by highlighting the liveability and plural identification of queer women and transgender men in South Africa today. In Muholi’s collection of work titled Faces and Phases 2006-2014, I have identified the themes of survivability, mourning and belonging as significant counter-discourses that speak back to the unliveable and ungrievable signifiers that have attached themselves to lesbian life in South Africa and further afield.

**Bio:**

Dr. Nadine Lake is a lecturer and director of the Gender Studies programme in the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the University of the Free State, South Africa. She was awarded an Erasmus Mundus scholarship and spent 22 months at the Centre for Gender Research (CfGR), Uppsala University where she completed her PhD titled “Corrective rape and black lesbian sexualities in contemporary South African cultural texts.” Nadine is collaborating with Uppsala University (Sweden) and the University of Eduardo Mondlane (Mozambique), on a Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) research project titled “Gender Mainstreaming: Developing competencies in Higher Education for Gender Equality, Peace-Building and Gender-Sensitive Research Coordinators.” The primary objective of the five-year research project (2017-2022) is to create an enabling environment for gender sensitive research and researchers at the University of Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique. Nadine’s research interests include African Queer Theories, Lesbian Sexuality, Gender-Based Violence in Southern Africa, and Post-Colonial critique.

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**Stream: 2, Panel: 12**

**Mexitli Nayeli López Ríos (University of Oslo, NO)**

**Title:** Queering the Grieving Body inside the Belly of a War Machine in Silvia Moreno-García's *Certain Dark Things*

**Abstract:**

For Achille Mbembe, war machines, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari, are fundamental to the development of regimes shaped by necropower, the term he coined to “account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective” (2013, p. 161). On the other hand, as Judith Butler has argued, within frames of war “[a]n ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all” (2016, p. 38). How to mourn the loss of those whose lives have been deemed ungrievable within contexts where killing is the common currency? Furthermore, how monsters might help us to delve into the intricacies of these issues?

After a rival vampire gang murders her family, Atl, the Aztec vampire protagonist of Silvia Moreno-García's novel, *Certain Dark Things* (2016), flees to Mexico City, where she meets Domingo, a teenager who lives in the streets and collects garbage for a living. Atl is a descendant from a pre-Columbian line of blood drinkers called Tlahuelpocmimi, and makes Domingo her tlapalehuiani, her loyal human companion, by sharing her blood with him, a ritual that her kind calls xiuhtlahtolli, which at some point allows Domingo to share Atl's most painful and haunting memories when he touches her shoulder. Since the novel clearly engages with issues of drug cartel and state violence in Mexico, my claim is that, Atl's grieving body holds together the tensions between presence and absence that stem from the disrupted temporalities of grief, and in so doing, the novel reclaims the figure of the monster to counterweight the erasure of disposable lives within war machines.

**Bio:**

Mexitli Nayeli López Ríos is a Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Oslo's Department of Literature, Area Studies, and European Languages. Her current research project engages with the biopolitics of touch as represented in American and British literary and cultural texts stressing the risk of contagion through depictions of monsters. Her approach interweaves insights from post-colonial studies, queer theory, monster studies, feminist posthuman theory, and biopolitics, to assemble a theory of “iridescence effects” to address the ways monsters might be a promising locus to re-imagine ways of making community.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 13

**Michelle R. Martin-Baron (Hobart and William Smith Colleges, US)**

**Title:** The In-Betweenness of Earthly Existence: Anzaldúa and the Rituals of Mourning

**Abstract:**

Gloria Anzaldúa is perhaps most famous for the ways she revolutionized the fields of Chicana/o Studies, queer theory, and feminist theory with her articulation of queer Chicana subjectivity and the metaphor of the borderlands, a space both literal and physical, as well as psychological and ideological. Her work also demonstrates a methodology which challenges the divide between the personal and the theoretical, the creative and the academic. Both of these interventions, I argue, provide critical insights and methodologies for Queer Death Studies. This presentation considers Gloria Anzaldúa's oeuvre through the lens of death and memorial, a largely unstudied aspect of her work. Anzaldúa articulates encounters with death as a borderland site, accessed through the violence of social death and internal processes of creative revision, described as *nepantla* and the *Coatlique* state. Her short fiction, mostly unpublished, allows her readers to inhabit these borderlands, a site and space that depend on suspended liminality, a state pathologized in traditional psychoanalytic literature. This entails rejecting many of the norm-producing practices of funeral and burial customs, crafting memorial anew, and understanding the ways these processes represent and reflect physical and emotional remnants of the colonialism of the US/Mexico border. In this paper, I'll explore her published short story "People Shouldn't Die in June in South Texas" and an unpublished short story "The Afterburial of Sabas Q." By turning to the earth and nature, and the power of narrative, Anzaldúa provides crucial insights to the ways funerals can both reopen historical wounds and/or mark a path to healing.

**Bio:**

Michelle R. Martin-Baron is an Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY. She earned her PhD in Performance Studies from UC Berkeley with her dissertation "Queering Funerals." Her research uses queer theory and/or Chicana feminism to examine funeral ritual, public art, and performance practice in relation to national belonging. Her work has been published in *Chicana/Latina Studies*, *Women and Performance*, *Quarterly Horse*, *The International Journal of Feminist Politics*, and the collection *Queer Necropolitics* (Routledge 2015). She has an article forthcoming in *Callaloo*, and has served as a guest editor for *Feminist Teacher*.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 13

**Jessie McLaughlin (Goldsmiths University/ Tate, UK)**

**Title:** HELLO! MY NAME IS QUEER SOFT PURPLE GHOST: working with death, sex, queerness & children

**Abstract:**

what do death, sex, queerness have in common?

you are not allowed to discuss them with children.

especially children to which you have no relation, especially if you are being employed by a public institution to run a workshop for children and families. this paper proposes a discussion of heteronormative fears of queerness and some of the many things that are part of a queer experience (sex, death, violence) by examining how society treats and perceives children in relation

to these themes. as former curator of learning programme for children and families in a major art institution in the UK, i will use lived and working examples to suggest that children represent a site of extreme discomfort for heteronormative adult society, as do queers and people who are in some way close to either sex and/or death.

drawing on a variety of source material including the works and writing of audre lorde thomas page magee, bell hooks, joshua whiteread, juno roche and case studies that highlight the child's experience of and proximity to (both permitted and forbidden) sex, death and queerness i will propose children as a litmus test for social and collective anxieties around queerness and death and from there begin to deconstruct what role sex, death and queerness play in heteronormative behaviours and social norms.

**Bio:**

Jessie McLaughlin is an amateur artist, curator and wannabe footballer and boxer. They work from a soft, queer, brown (and sometimes sad) perspective, examining structures of privilege, oppression and exclusion, and searching for joy and community. They have worked with and for organisations including Tate, South London Gallery, Wellcome Collection, Live Art Development Agency, Whitechapel Gallery and delivered talks and workshops at a number of Universities including Goldsmiths College (UoL), University of Oxford, Courtauld Institute of Art, Bartlett School of Architecture (UoL), Stamps School of Art (University of Michigan), University of the Arts London. Currently they are doing a fully ARHC-funded Fine Art PhD with Goldsmiths and Tate.

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**Stream: 6, Panel: 17**

**Francis Marion Moseley Wilson (University of Glasgow, UK)**

**Title: Bodies and Boundaries in Performing Taxidermy**

**Abstract:**

Tensions of the Anthropocene have brought theorists, scientists, activists, and artists alike to engage with questions of how we re-think or re-evaluate our human relationships with non-human others. Our changing relationship with animals undoubtedly changes the context of our relationship to animal objects, in particular that of the taxidermy animal-object. In 2018, Giovanni Aloï, embracing Foucault's biopolitics and more recent philosophies like New Materialism, published *Speculative Taxidermy*, which gave an art historical context (and a name) to contemporary art of the Anthropocene working with animal bodies and skins. Recent feminist corporeal theories, such as Stacey Alaimo's 'trans-corporeality,' also consider human bodies as one part of a network of materialities that include animal bodies and body boundaries, particularly the vulnerability of bodies to one another.

As a live art practitioner and researcher, my practice-based research is primarily interested in what 'live' or 'performing' art can offer to this engagement with the taxidermy object in the Anthropocene. This includes considering the artist's body along dead animal body; the material boundaries of bodies; and the time-based nature of a live art (as opposed to sculptural) artistic experience. By focusing on materiality, multi-species collaboration, and body intimacies, my



practice attempts to reconsider ('queer,' in this context) a longstanding practice on the preservation of animal bodies historically aligned with colonialism and human dominion over animals. A 'performed-taxidermy' practice uses the process and tools of taxidermy to explore, renegotiate, and even grieve animal death in the Anthropocene. In this presentation, I will share documentation of some my work (some can be seen at <http://www.fmmw.org>), with a focus on recent experiments collaborating with Dermestid ('flesh-eating') beetles. As a performer and taxidermist, to work with an animal's body is to create a shared, liminal, intimate space for exchange that questions our pre-conceived anthropocentric ontological categorisations of animals.

**Bio:**

Francis Marion Moseley Wilson is an American performance artist currently working on her PhD in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow. After some time working as a taxidermist's apprentice, she began experimenting with intersections of taxidermy and live art, which has become the topic of her practice-based research. She has performed internationally in the USA, UK, Canada, and Germany. Using dead animal bodies and taxidermy techniques alongside her own body, her performances are primarily concerned with vulnerable boundaries between animal and human bodies, animal and object, and death and lifelikeness.

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**Stream:** 5, **Panel:** 15

**Jacqueline Moulton (IDSVA Portland, US)**

**Title:** Our Troubled Terrains—The Grief of Our Ghosts and New Narratives of Mourning Outside of Human Exceptionalism

**Abstract:**

Language, which is the discursive work of borders and boundaries—not only of politic and of geographic but of the self, performs the work of identifying who or what inherits meaning, power, and sustainability. We are living upon a troubled earth and our contemporary time, often referred to as the anthropocene, could be defined as a crisis of dwelling. For Jean-Luc Nancy, the crisis is the need to remake forms of meaning (2008). Meaning on a troubled terrain of earth and politic must be remade through a mourning-with. Donna Haraway writes, "just who is at home must permanently be in question" (2003). I believe this to be our contemporary question, the question which calls us to engage with that which is outside of the narrative of human exceptionalism and in which we learn that is not only the human who mourns. Mourning is the act of dwelling, dwelling within loss, devastation, extinction. What has been devastated, rendered extinct, no longer at home? This project argues that living upon a ruptured earth requires a mourning-with—a mourning-with that which is other. The language of mourning is the language of the spectral—ghosts as conceptual metaphors and beings of our forgetting and our violence, the mirage of that which we have rendered extinct. The spectral reveals the human in a post-human world as guest (inheritor) with our inheritance being one of grief—for Derrida writes, "as inheritors we are always in mourning" (1993). This project is a philosophical discussion on mourning of unutterable losses through the language of the spectral. Through the work of Derrida, Phelan, Haraway and ghosts,

animals, cyborgs (creatures of otherness) the argument is made as a dialogue to reimagine an ethical dwelling within our contemporary troubled terrains as a mourning-with, for there is much (together) at stake.

**Bio:**

Jacqueline Moulton is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts, studying philosophy and aesthetics. Moulton runs an art program at a non-profit called the Aurora Commons, a community center for those struggling in the experience of homelessness and drug dependancy. Moulton founded and curates a gallery space at the Aurora Commons called the Common Art Gallery which envisions that the space where art is shared is the very meeting place of philanthropy—the love of humanity. Moulton is a performance artist, poet, and very average weightlifter.

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**Stream: 1, Panel: 1**

**Judith Muehlbacher (independent researcher, AT)**

**Title: ‘Melancholic? Naturally!’ - Impulses for cultural transformations from queer-ecological activism and art**

**Abstract:**

Ecological grief is a common response to the socioecological losses caused by human induced climate changes. Within Western cultures of unsustainability, there are no shared spaces or rituals to engage with this emotionality. This is but one manifestation of the problematic way Nature has been historically conceptualized and related to as something external and subordinate to the human. With this research, I aim to amplify marginalized voices that critique this culture from within. I sought out queer-identifying eco-activists and -artists to engage with their practices of disenfranchised mourning and queer worldmaking and explore already existing, more sustainable ways of thinking and relating with Nature. To access the participants’ introspection as well as imagination, I conducted arts-based research followed up with in-depth interviews. Putting the participants’ art pieces and words in dialogue with queer-ecological theory, the following impulses emerged: ‘Nature melancholy’ as an integrative way of mourning can be a starting point to understanding interdependencies with the more-than-human world and to build communities for healing and action. The participants’ lived experiences in queer and eco-activism/-art communities serve as examples of already existing alternatives to the dominant cultural paradigms - guided by the extension of empathy for and agency to the more-than-human world, the embracing of its qualitative complexities, and a queered futurity beyond the human. Their subversive values and practices offer up spaces for cultural transitions and joint liberation accessible to all.

**Bio:**

Judith Muehlbacher is an emerging independent researcher, currently without institutional affiliation. Their main research interests lie at the intersections of arts-based research, queer ecology, and sustainability transitions. The paper they present at the conference is based on their Master’s thesis, which they published in June 2018 at the Lund University Centre for Sustainability

Studies (LUCSUS), and a consecutive article that will be published in a World Future's special issue on Queer Convivialism and Sustainability in 2019/20.

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 1

## **Milka Njoroge (Åbo Akademi University, FI)**

**Title:** Under what conditions is premature death predictable?

### **Abstract:**

Nana Ago Prah and her three children died in a fire incident in Helsinki on 9th December 2016. The source of the fire could be traced from the apartment's sauna stove that had been accidentally or intentionally activated. The report published by the Safety Investigation Authority of Finland, documenting intricate details that led up to the tragic deaths, established that none of the victims sustained burn injuries but had instead "succumbed to the toxic combustion gases" (Safety Investigation Authority of Finland, 2017).

This paper lends itself to the archival unlivability of black life often registered by permissive "phantoms of modernity's violence" (Gordon, 1997p.19), and concurrently produce Black folks as excluded from the category of the human. In what has been considered by several scholars (Sharpe, 2016; Hartman, 1997; Gordon, 1997; Yusoff, 2018; Mbembe, 2017; McKittrick, 2015) as a paradoxical space of invisibility and hypervisibility, the deaths of Nana Ago Prah and her children foment this "discursive-material terrain" (Jackson, 2018) that positions Blackness as always-already implicated in near death circumstances. Through a careful evidentiary account for how and in what manner the death of Nana Ago Prah and her children occurred, the Safety Investigation Authority of Finland (2017) forecloses the logic that predisposes Black life to premature death. The cause of death as announced in the report can neither account for the racialized and gendered scripts that position Nana Ago Prah as the embodiment and bearer of terror.

Employing a Black feminist analytic and conceptual framework, this paper examines the perverse intimacy between black life and premature death and explores the fateful pairing of anti-blackness and consequent racial and gendered violence that provide the necessary conditions for the ontological negation of Black life. The paper attends to the violent erasure of Black livingness as it simultaneously resists simplistic articulations of Black death.

### **Bio:**

Milka Njoroge is a PhD student at the Gender Studies Department in Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland. Her research examines routinized presentations of female circumcision and interrogates the scandalous visibility that has been the stranglehold of much of the visual epistemologies imported from continental Africa. Employing Black feminist theoretical standpoints, this research explores the kinds of engagements that visual representations of the Black suffering body invite.

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**Stream:** 2, **Panel:** 7

## **Andria Nyberg Forschage (independent researcher, SE)**

**Title:** The Death and Limit of the Excessive Object

**Abstract:**

Understanding 'trans women', an unstable category of colonial modernity cut through by difference, as that excessive object whose constitutive self-erasure continually labours to void and re-establish capitalist and colonial systems of gender through transgression and re-capture of and as its own limit, this paper seeks to elaborate an aesthetic theory of the resistance of the object.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, in the face of racialised trans necropolitics and afterlives as aesthetic regimes where the spectacular and academic celebration of trans lives and circulation of trans death converge and overlap, how might a resistance of the object pertain to trans women?<sup>1,2</sup> For theorist and poet Fred Moten, writing about the philosopher and performance artist Adrian Piper, the resistance of the object in what Moten terms the Black radical tradition consists in a re-materialisation of visibility through an active becoming-object of the artist in and as art, where the collapsing of the identification of subjecthood and personhood as well as the collapsing of art, artist, work, frame and body in Piper's work marks a break with Deleuze and Guattari's positing of Dr. Schreiber's transsexuality and penetrability as the paradigmatic Body without Organs.<sup>3</sup> Where the self-absorptive constitution of the gendered and racialised subject at the point of its limit-transgression requires the violent disposal of an excessive object along the lines of the Kantian sublime, how might this labour of the excessive object be rethought in confrontation with a transcendental aesthetics of beauty as the resistance of the object? Challenging the prioritisation of ethics over aesthetics, the death and limit of the excessive object counters and exceeds the self-mutilation of the feminine sublime precisely where contemporary modes of racial necropolitical gender and capital continually transgress and reconstitute themselves.

**References:**

<sup>1</sup> See: Andria Nyberg Forschage, *Sublimity and the Excessive Object in Trans Women's Contemporary Writing*, MA Thesis in Aesthetics, Södertörn University, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, "Trans Necropolitics. A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife". In Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> micha cárdenas, "Dark Shimmers. The Rhythm of Necropolitical Affect in Digital Media". In *Tourmaline*, Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley and Johanna Burton (eds.), *Trap Door. Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*. MIT Press, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Moten, *In the Break. The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. The University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

**Bio:**

Andria Nyberg Forschage is a writer, poet and theorist based in Stockholm. Andria is part of the editorial board for *Paletten*, journal for contemporary art, and works at the Public Art Agency Sweden with the project Knowledge Hub for Public Art. She holds an MA in Aesthetics and has presented papers on contemporary philosophy and aesthetics at conferences for trans studies and

queer death studies at the University of Arizona, Linköping University, and Karlstad University, while working with poetry, most recently published in *Datableed*, lecture performances, and noise.

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**Stream:** 4, **Panel:** 4

## **Rose-Marie Peake (Tampere University, FI)**

**Title:** The Sadomasochistic Nun: Queering 17th-century French Ursuline Necrologies

### **Abstract:**

The approaching moment of death gave Jeanne de la Garde, an Ursuline nun in seventeenth-century Abbeville, France, powerful visions. Her necrology narrates the visions as follows:

— The Divine Archer Jesus Christ had shot an arrow of love in her heart (to, in a way, renew and prolong spiritually the corporal martyrdom of saint Ursula in this honourable Ursuline). The arrow was piercing and lethal. But that wound, as much as it pleased her soul, was so painful that she could not prevent cries of pain, especially toward the end. At this point a nun, hearing her wail, asked what caused her pain. She replied that it hurt only in the middle of her heart. It was surprising that she could localise the centre of the heart. But Christ, who had given her the blow of death with his hand, made her feel the pain of His own pain in its core part [in the heart].

In the vision, the relationship of the nun to her heavenly spouse, Christ, is depicted in violent terms. Christ is the active, dominant partner whose violent expressions of love are at the same time pleasing and painful for his beloved. The violence of love is extreme as it is described as causing the death of the nun as Christ shoots an arrow in the nun's heart.

In my paper, I will use the highly queer necrology collection of seventeenth-century French nuns to discuss the methodology of queering death. I will argue that sadomasochism and same-sex desire were important means used to create spiritual authority for the deceased and the Order in general.

### **Bio:**

PhD Rose-Marie Peake (b. 1983) is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX), Tampere University, Finland. She is working on transgressive sexuality and the queer in Catholic Reformation France (c. 1619-1715). She is the author of the forthcoming monograph *The Power of Religious Societies in Shaping Early Modern Society and Identities* (Amsterdam University Press). More information: <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/persons/rose-marie-peake>

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**Stream:** 6, **Panel:** 17

**Anne Bettina Pedersen (Aalborg University, DK)**

**Title:** Disobedient Daughters and Ungrievable Mothers: An Exploration of Child Neglect, Parentification, and the Death of an Estranged Parent

**Abstract:**

This paper explores how child neglect and parentification complicate the process of grief following the death of an estranged parent. Through the use of autophenomenography, I draw on my own experiences – my decision not to reconnect with my mother after she was diagnosed with terminal cancer, as well as my decision not to attend her funeral after she died (in March 2019) – to examine the consequences of dismissing heteronormative ideas of mother- and daughterhood, such as when daughters refuse to care for their mothers, in order to practice self-care. In *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (2018), Jacqueline Rose explains that mothers are viewed as natural caregivers who "are expected to pour undiluted love and devotion into their child" (77). I explain that when mothers neglect their children, they leave a void (or 'mother wound'), which is made even more painful because of the expectations placed on mothers. Since I have internalized and bought into the heteronormative idea that my mother was supposed to be "a mother and nothing else" (Rose 78), I am unsure what I have lost. I know that I am supposed to mourn my mother, but her neglect causes me to see her as, in a sense, ungrievable. Since parentification (when the child becomes the caregiver) was a part of the neglect, the grief process is further complicated, because the role-reversal caused me to feel the absence of a nurturing mother many years before her death. My critique of the idealization of motherhood, my refusal to be an 'obedient' daughter, and my openness concerning the taboo of family estrangement are grounded in queer theory and a desire to counter normative scripts related to grief and mourning. This paper is also an attempt to open up for further research on how family estrangement complicates grief processes.

**Bio:**

Anne Bettina Pedersen is a PhD fellow at Aalborg University in Denmark. The title of her dissertation is "(Un)Making Sylvia Likens." She has an MA in American Studies from University of Southern Denmark, where she worked as an assistant lecturer from 2013 to 2017. She has taught courses on Creative Writing, American Horror, American Literature before 1922, American Cultural Studies, Contemporary British Studies, and more. She does research on representations of dead girls and women in popular culture, (toxic) motherhood, trauma, horror, and feminism.

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**Stream:** 7, **Panel:** 18

**Jesse Peterson (KTH Royal Institute of Technology Stockholm, SE)**

**Title:** Can Water Die?: Dead Zones and Artificial Respiration in the Baltic Sea

**Abstract:**

Cultural eutrophication, which deoxygenates water and spurs the growth of algal blooms, is a form of agro-industrial landscape or wasteland ecology often referred to as a "dead zone." Exteriorized

and externalized from its sources—fertilizer plants, crop lands, and animals farms—this wastescape has emerged within the last 80 years or so, having merged and altered preexisting environments, often in very detrimental ways. As dead zones have formed, human relationships to these places as well as human perceptions of these places have also changed. Starting from dead zones in the Baltic Sea (which cover an area the size of Denmark), this paper assesses how imaginaries of these places contribute to the making of a water-situated wasteland and queries whether water can die, not metaphorically but literally. For instance, lingering notions about a sea-based metabolism that rids water of all human wastes and toxins lives on. Harry Nilsson once sang, “Now, everybody knows/that when a body decomposes/the basic elements/are given back to the ocean/and the sea does what it ought'ta.” While, in *Bloom*, a poetry book specifically about algae blooms, author Janine Wong writes “With bloom comes bust/The bloom is haphazardly munched on/by the minuscule, it is engulfed by whales/it is presented to you as the Catch of the Day.” The detritus of the sea, whether a body decomposing or snackalicious algae, disappears; except, in Wong’s verse, algae come back to land, to confront humans, in a marketable food-based form. As such, when texts point to watery interrelationships that do not deny material and more-than-human agencies, representations of algae and dead zones can trouble the notion of water as purifying and detoxifying agent. By using cultural texts, histories of sea-based pollution in the Baltic, the theoretical insights of Vittoria Di Palma’s book *Wasteland: a History*, and insights from pumping projects that seek to re-oxygenize the Baltic Sea this paper attempts to tease out possible shifts in human perceptions to test whether the Baltic Sea (or parts of it) represents a wasteland or not. Doing so ought to shed further light on changing human-water relationships in relation to the sea and the number of growing wasteland ecologies within it.

**Bio:**

Jesse D. Peterson is a PhD candidate at the Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, 11428 Sweden. Email: [jessep@kth.se](mailto:jessep@kth.se). He has an MSc in Environmental Humanities (U of U 2013) and an MFA in Creative Writing (UNLV 2010). He is part of ENHANCE, the [KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory](#), the [Posthumanities Hub](#) and helped found the literary arts journal [saltfront](#). His research interests include exploring socio-natures of waste, ecology and culture as well as practicing methods of creative scholarship. His publications include both academic and creative outputs and may be found in *Green Letters*, *The Discourses of Environmental Collapse*, *Geohumanities*, *Terrain.org*, and elsewhere. Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0634-8839>

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**Stream:** 1, **Panel:** 16

**Mattia Petricola (University of Bologna, IT)**

**Title:** *The Living, the Dead, the Living Dead, and All the Others: Queer Taxonomy and the Residual Undead*

**Abstract:**

The cultural construction of the category ‘living dead’ does not usually account for a particularly interesting area of Western literary and artistic productions from the mid-18th century to the

present day. This area is inhabited by characters, worlds, and narratives that not only destabilize a binary opposition crucial to human identity by blurring the border between life and death; they also do so outside the traditional taxonomy that frames living-dead identities themselves—ghosts, vampires, zombies, mummies, ghouls and a very few others. Literary works from E.A. Poe's *Valdemar* to F. Kafka's *The Hunter Gracchus*, from P.K. Dick's *Ubik* to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and the *Chamber of Secrets*, as well as films from *Jacob's Ladder* (A. Lyne, 1990) to *Swiss Army Man* (D. Kwan, 2016) are members of a peripheral category of the thanatological imagination which forces us to reconsider how intermediate states between life and death can be represented in fiction: the residual undead. This paper aims to show how such a category can be constructed by intersecting category theory and queer hermeneutics. The emergence of the residual undead will be first formalized by applying two approaches to categorization, both developed in the field of cognitive sciences as elaborations of Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance: Eleanor Rosch's prototype theory and George Lakoff's discussion of classification strategies in the Dyirbal language. I will then try to analyze the epistemological implications deriving from restructuring the taxonomy of the living dead in the light of the notion of 'nonce taxonomy', described by Eve Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and recently reconsidered by Carmen Dell'Aversano. I will conclude by intersecting the approaches to categorization deriving from cognitive sciences with those deriving from queer theory, showing how the field of thanatology could be queered through the systematic use of prototype-based and nonce-taxonomic categorization.

**Bio:**

Mattia Petricola has recently completed a Ph.D. in comparative literature and cultural studies at the University of Bologna, focusing on the representation of the residual undead in literature and film. His research interests lie at the intersection of thanatology, speculative fiction, and category theory. He is a member of the international network for queer studies CIRQUE ([cirque.unipi.it/en](http://cirque.unipi.it/en)) and has published articles on Philip K. Dick, Peter Greenaway, and queer hermeneutics.

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**Stream:** 5, **Panel:** 5

**Margherita Pevere (Aalto University, FI)**

**Title:** Life and death of a biotech chimera: *Semina Aeternitatis*

**Abstract:**

The bioart piece *Semina Aeternitatis* (2015-2019) looks at how life and death of a biotech chimera unveils possible queer readings of materiality of death and transience. The piece assembles in a non/living entity the possibility of storing digital data on DNA, performativity and leakiness of organic and biotechnological matter, and the evanescence of individual memory. It tackles the promises of long-term DNA data storage as well as the Christian idea of eternity: its Latin title evokes Christian terminology meaning "seeds of eternity" or "people of eternity".

For the piece, an old woman's childhood memory recollection has been converted to genetic code through a custom algorithm created by Prof. Mirela Alistar. The code has been manufactured into a plasmid - a circular DNA strand. The plasmid has been inserted into *Komagataeibacter rhaeticus*



bacteria cells via a special procedure called electroporation. By doing so, chimeric bacterial bodies carry trace of the woman's transient memory as plasmid fragments.

K. produces a biofilm which resembles body matter. Bacterial colonies created in the laboratory for *Semina Aeternitatis* have been cultured to obtain the biofilm for the installation exhibited in Germany. In compliance to European regulation on genetically modified organisms, biofilm has been sterilized before the exhibition: international law frames life and death of the non/living chimera in *Semina Aeternitatis*. The artwork materializes in the bacteria growing in the laboratory and becomes an installation in the exhibition space after sterilization.

The paper draws from a feminist reading of the ecology of art practice in biological laboratories and takes into account materials and subjects – human and a-human - involved in the project. It scrutinizes how the bodies involved in the piece are not “only” inherently leaky and monstrous, but rather are inscribed within an ecological framework. By so doing, the discussion points at how bodies are, besides *social constructs*, emerging *ecological constructs*. Furthermore, it attempts to extend such reading for a critical understanding of human-nature entanglements in times of environmental fracture.

#### **Bio:**

With a visceral fascination for biological matter, Margherita Pevere (DE) is an artist and researcher. Bacteria, animals and plants are her allies in the exploration of the underlying theme of ecological complexity, which she pursues with sophisticated bodily aesthetics. Created both in the studio and in biological laboratories, Pevere's installations and performances are chimeras intertwining poetics and controversy, critique and desire. Pevere is PhD Candidate in Artistic Research at Aalto University, Helsinki (FI), supported by the Finnish National Agency for Education (2017–2018) and the Kone Foundation (2019–2020). She is member of the Finnish Bioart Society, the Eco- and Bioart Research Network, and the Posthumanities Hub. [www.margheritapevere.com](http://www.margheritapevere.com)

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**Stream:** 5, **Panel:** 5

### **Marius Presterud (independent artist, NO/DE)**

**Title:** *The Artist as Undertaker* – Queering mourning and attuning to extinction

#### **Abstract:**

"The thinking of interconnectedness has a dark side embodied not in hippie aesthetics of life over death, or in sadistic-sentimental Bambification of sentient beings, but in a 'goth' assertion of the contingent and necessarily queer idea that we want to stay with a dying world: dark ecology" Timothy Morton (*Ecology Without Nature*, 2007:185)

Through the individuation of (the good Christian's) death, the Middle Ages brought an end to millenia of undramatic dying. With moralized mortality, death became a matter for the individual, quickly followed by the appearance of a (projective?) personification of Death itself, a morbid segregationist to best be kept away from the kids.<sup>1</sup>

Today, we deal with death through denial, as it goes against Liberal Humanism's happiness doctrine.<sup>2</sup> The result, a populace faced with multi-species extinction, but with a modern culture which does not know what to do with grief<sup>3</sup> and which can only offer hyper-individualistic solutions. We deal in life-prolonging creams and injections, worshipping virility on the cost of experience, aim for fame and deathlessness, and in general distractions that keep offensive dying at bay - and our negative affect tolerance, low.

Behind the idea that grief has to be avoided, lies the assumption that it has only negative and no positive aspects. However, by developmental theories, emotional pain is a core mechanism driving the development of social skills, establishing and securing inter-human attachment. The threat of loss forms an underlying premise to our whole sociality.

Most writings on the climate crisis seem to focus on physical adaptation to climate change, rather than considering a wider perspective on psychological resilience. In psychology, resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of significant stressors<sup>4</sup>. One of the most noticeable qualities of the climate crisis is a sense of 'loss', making the first stage of adaptation, 'grief'.<sup>5</sup>

With this as a starting point, our post-sustainable moment invites the artist to enter into a long line of characters who have traditionally been in charge of dealing with the dead and helping them transition; shamen, priests, mourners, grave diggers, pathologists, undertakers, executioners.

Through performance, installations, workshops and death cafés, the art practice Oslo Apiary & Aviary clears the way for despair, mourning and grief.

#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Phillippe, A., (1976) *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*

<sup>2</sup> Harari, Y., N., (2018) *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*

<sup>3</sup> Morton, T., (2007) *Ecology Without Nature*

<sup>4</sup> Bendell, J., (2018) *Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy*

<sup>5</sup> *Mental Health and Our Climate Change: Impacts, Implications and Guidance*, a report by American Psychology Association & Co.

#### **Bio:**

Marius Presterud (born 1980, Drammen) is a Norwegian artist and psychologist based in Oslo and Berlin. He works across a variety of media, including performance, poetry, sculpture and ecoventions. He has toured Europe as a poet, as well as performed in established galleries, such as Henie Onstad Art Center, Norway, and Hamburger Bahnhof, Germany. In 2018 he was a debutant at Norway's 131. National Art Exhibition. In his career, he has also co-designed a line of funeral equipment used in such prestigious funerals as Gunnar 'Kjakan' Sønsteby, at Oslo Domkirke, and Terje Brofos / Pushwagner, at Kunstneres Hus, Oslo.

**Oslo Apiary & Aviary** is a dark-ecological tools, goods and service provider - Feeding birds, growing worms, keeping bees, tending trees. Through our embedded practice we try to get a sense of the city's ontology, how the post-sustainable city is constituted and can, or can't, be reconstituted. Currently, 'can't' is in the lead, gothifying our practice. Drawing on strategies traditionally associated with the double-rolled artist, we find ourselves simultaneously planting trees, as well as branching out into grave digging, wakes, death masks and last oils; Identifying with the problem

and with downcast gaze, shovelling dirt in search of a human-decentralized understanding of the world. An entrepreneurial doomsday cult for hire, toiling in the ruins of humanism.

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**Stream:** 5, **Panel:** 10

## **Jessica Rodríguez Colón (IDSVA Portland, US)**

**Title:** From the Baquiné to the Streets: Performances of Grief

**Abstract:**

This paper will explore collective mourning performances in Puerto Rico as queering mourning. It will contrast the performativity of the baquiné with some performances during the massive protests in Puerto Rico. The main question is, can one find room for mourning within the anger of unjust deaths through performances that provide visibility to our dead and our pain? While focusing the discussion on the tradition of baquiné and how that laid the ground for the current mourning performances of 4,645 deaths from Hurricane Maria. The baquiné is a Caribbean mourning tradition inherited from Nigeria; it is usually defined as a joyful religious festivity to mourn an infant; it includes music, dance, jokes, and stories. The analysis in this paper will originate from the painting of Francisco Oller, *El Velorio*; and will be extended to the archival images from the summer 2019 protests in Puerto Rico which lead to the resignation of the governor, to draw parallels between both. Series of situations prompted the protests, which demanded the governor of Puerto Rico to resign, among these, the 4,645 death from the aftermath of the hurricane. Mainly, due to evidence that proves the majority of those deaths were a result of the institutional failure of the government of Puerto Rico, its corruption, and its colonial status, during and after Hurricane Maria – a category five hurricane that hit the Island on September 20th, 2017. I will conclude that queering mourning as a collective performance is a form of liberation against the institutional normative prescription of mourning and grief; as a result, it turns the loss of a loved one into a political act.

**Bio:**

Jessica Rodríguez Colón is a Puerto Rican artist and scholar living in New York City. She is currently a doctoral candidate in philosophy, aesthetics and art theory at IDSVA (Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts). Her research focuses on maternal politics and performances in the Americas. In her work, she questions societal prescriptions and the influence of aesthetic representations into daily performances. She also has a creative practice that ranges from performance arts and video to installations. As an educator, she has taught dance, performance and Art History. She is currently a Hemispheric Institute Fellow.

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**Stream:** 2, **Panel:** 2

## **Seroconversion (queer noise project, SE)**

**Title: “Silence Equals Death”: a queer noise performance and reading**

**Abstract:**

For the conference we would like to present “Silence = Death”, a queer noise performance together with a reading of a passage from our “A Queer Noise Manifesto” named “The Death of The Subject Constitutes a Queer Moment”. In the political spirit of ACT UP’s activism on how silence equals death we will explore queerness (and its historical relationship to death) from a sonic perspective. The performance is made directly from the performers bodies by utilizing contact microphones and amplifiers, using audio effects and amplified feedback. In this way the performance literally comes out of a bodily experience where queer bodies perform and are being amplified. In the performance we will use noise as a medium to enact the violence against queer bodies breaking social norms as well as the queer resistance against these norms. In this way, "queer noise" is being used as an artistic medium of counter violence - sonically bashing back - while also providing a way to perform a mourning of the violence enacted upon queer bodies – both as a personal and collective practice. To physically act out queer experiences of both living, sickness, dying and mourning by highlighting HIV/AIDS-activism as a noisy politics of life. The passage from the manifesto that we will read during the performance deals with the subject of queerness as a form of ghost that keeps haunting normative heterosexuality. It points to how queerness is the social and bodily noise produced by straight society in its continuing (but always failing) attempts to produce straight subjects. And as such, non-normative desires and practices constitute noisy spectres that haunt the very phallogocentric economies which have spawned them by creating glitches, dissonances and interference in the heterosexual matrix and thus reminding this matrix of its own mortality. The death of the (straight) Subject is the birth and potential flourishing of its (queer) Others.

**Bio:**

Seroconversion is a queer noise project formed in 2013 by Birt Berglund and Johan Sundell in Stockholm. By defining "queer" as unwanted desire and "noise" as unwanted sound and we aim to explore what happens when one combines these two forms of unwantedness and turn them into (un)musical and artistic practices. We have worked in several formats such as performance, sound installation, theoretical writing, lecture and audiowalk. Examples of different themes that we have explored are: queer bodies as queer noises, glory holes as graves, public bathrooms as queer spaces and quarantine procedures as ideological production.

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## **Mariam Shalvashili (Free University of Tbilisi, GE)**

**Title: Living with the Dead: “Transgressive” Mortuary Practices in Samegrelo, Georgia**

**Abstract:**

In Samegrelo, Georgia, mourning relatives are challenging the boundaries between the dead and the living. Families share houses, food and a lasting relationship with their dead relatives, actively including them in everyday lives and refusing the idea of the deceased belonging to the past; the understanding of where the dead belong is materialized and tangible in everyday mundane activities, by elimination of divided spaces and inclusion of the dead as active family members. This ethnography, accompanied by visual materials, is about almost complete elimination of boundaries by parents in case of the tragic death of their children, especially sons. Since in the Georgian society this behavior is understood as transgressive, this paper will try to explain how these transgressions happen and how these transgressions are, in fact, informed and influenced by the existent social order. This ethnography will also try to describe how these perceived transgressions are coupled with and rooted in the understanding of Megrelian culture and people as different and problematic to Georgianness. This research is about studying what appears to be strange in order to learn about the rules: in the moments of tragedy, concepts of parenthood, familial ties and generational expectations come in tension with the reality of death and help create liminal spaces between life and death. In other words, I will argue that Megrelian “transgressive” acts are facilitated by existent social norms and institutions, simultaneously challenging and exposing the organizational structure of social norms, and strengthening ideas about gender order, gender hierarchy and kinship relations.

**Bio:**

I am a 26-year-old cultural anthropologist from Georgia. I am an adjunct lecturer, Junior thesis supervisor and a teaching assistant at Free University of Tbilisi, where I have been working for more than three years. I teach courses on undergraduate and graduate level. I am also a researcher at Georgian NGO EMC – Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center where I work with religious and ethnic minorities. I have a master’s degree from Central European University in Sociology and Social Anthropology and bachelor’s degree in Social Sciences from Free University of Tbilisi.

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**Stream:** 3, **Panel:** 3

**Margrit Shildrick (Stockholm University, SE)**

**Title:** Should we care about human extinction?

**Abstract:**

‘No fact in the long history of the world is so startling as the wide and repeated extermination of its inhabitants’ wrote Charles Darwin, somewhat ironically as he prepared to launch the seminal evolutionary theory that cemented the pinnacle position of human beings in the life of the world. The evidence of past extinctions that he collected during the voyage of the *The Beagle* was mostly from ancient geological time, though he was also fully aware of the exterminations of indigenous peoples by the actions of human colonisers. What would it mean then at a time of growing ecological awareness to think the extinction of the human species in its totality, not in its parts? The continuity of any species and its extinction are in a constant dance of hope, fear and expectation, though finally extinction is always a certainty. Of all the species that have ever existed, it is calculated that at least 99% have disappeared for good. The time for human beings will

undoubtedly come, most probably hastened by our own deadly behaviours, and my question is: should we care? One response would be to explore every possibility of extending the time of our species – whether through ecologically aware activism such as Extinction Rebellion or the fantasy of technological solutions such as colonising other worlds; or alternatively we could care by embracing antinatalism, for example, to speed up our demise as is advocated by thinkers as diverse as David Benatar and Patricia MacCormack. Both approaches acknowledge that life and death exist on the same plane, but neither seems to problematize the privileging of the binaries of presence/absence and existence/extinction. Perhaps it is a function of thinking in terms of whole bodies, and I suggest that an enquiry into the persistence of microbial and microchimeric life opens up a very different perspective.

**Bio:**

Margrit Shildrick is Guest Professor of Gender and Knowledge Production at Stockholm University, and Adjunct Professor of Critical Disability Studies at York University, Toronto. Her research covers postmodern feminist and cultural theory, bioethics, critical disability studies and body theory. Books include *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, (Bio)ethics and Postmodernism* (1997), *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (2002) and *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Sexuality and Subjectivity* (2009), as well as edited collections and many journal articles. Most recently, she has been addressing the socio-political and embodied conjunction of microchimerism, immunology and corporeal anomaly.

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**Stream:** 5, **Panel:** 5

**Vanessa Sinclair (independent psychoanalyst and researcher, US/SE)**

**Title:** Psychoanalysis and Necromancy

**Abstract:**

I will discuss the application of psychoanalytic theory to the work of necromancy, through my own personal practices, as well as looking at traditions such as Brazilian Quimbanda. We can explore ways of working with the dead, our ancestors - both blood and adopted - through a psychoanalytic and post-modern conceptualization. If contemporary theory has posited our self or ego is an identification with a fantasy of what we imagine others imagine or perceive us to be, which evolves over time as we internalize and integrate identifications with and through others throughout our lives, then we can also formulate that once a sense of a cohesive fantasy or identity has formed, it can surpass us, living on longer than we do. Through others' reciprocal identifications and projections in relating to us, we can live on longer than our bodies or even perhaps our sense of selves. Therefore once we exist, we remain, and others may continue to work with and relate to us well past our physical time on this Earth. Through our writing, music, art and language, as well as through their fantasies of us. No physical remnants need remain, but they are useful.

Many artists and writers have discussed their necromantic practices, often without putting them in those exact terms. Patti Smith, for example, writes about carrying stones around in her pocket for decades from Saint-Laurent du Maroni, the penal colony in French Guiana, feeling compelled to

make the pilgrimage to Jean Genet's gravesite to unite him with the land from whence they came. Many great artists and writers have engaged the dead in such ways. William Burroughs cut-up the writing of his favorite authors, like Arthur Rimbaud, rearranging the words, explaining that in this way Rimbaud could speak again, anew.

**Bio:**

Vanessa Sinclair, Psy.D. is a psychoanalyst in private practice who sees clients internationally, specializing in online and remote treatment. Her books include: *Scansion in Psychoanalysis and Art: the Cut in Creation* (Routledge 2020), *Rendering Unconscious: Psychoanalytic Perspectives, Politics & Poetry* (Trapart Books, 2019), *On Psychoanalysis and Violence: Contemporary Lacanian Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018) with Manya Steinkoler, and *Switching Mirrors* (Trapart, 2016). She hosts *Rendering Unconscious Podcast*, speaking with psychoanalysts, psychologists, philosophers, creative arts therapists, writers, poets and artists about their work and the state of the world. Dr Sinclair is a founding member of *Das Unbehagen: A Free Association for Psychoanalysis* and facilitates events and conferences internationally.

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**Stream: 8, Panel: 19**

**Eliza Steinbock (Leiden University, NL)**

**Title: Death-worlds: Cherishing and Perishing in Transgender Portraiture**

**Abstract:**

The concept of "trans necropolitics" coined by Jin Haritaworn and C. Riley Snorton (2013) points to the ways trans persons face and transition to death. Trans bodies/lives of color become valued only in their death through circulating stories and images of their demise in two ways: as warnings to not be trans, and by mainly white trans advocates to sound the alarm and raise money for ostensible trans rights organizations that neglect how systemic racism and whorephobia contributes to early or slow ways of dying. I see that the 'gendercide' crisis is endemic to social life, not a confined epidemic, and thus, available to grasp via Raymond Williams' (1977) analytical tool of a structure of feeling. These soft, pliable structures are composed of clusters of affect diluted in the "solution" of ordinary affective life that condition a people's experience and historical existence. The transsexual recognition ushered in by Christine Jorgensen's display of public sexual intimacy has brought with it a cloaking of invisibles, disposables, and excluded, a specifically white "white screen" (Stryker 2009) in the age of homonationalism. Quantitative socio-political studies that track violence are important responses to signaling the extent of the problem, however, they fail to account for the embodied, aesthetic experience of practical conditions in trans\* death-worlds. Hence I investigate the social experiences of death-worlds converted to the form of trans portraiture, in other words, I treat art works primarily as a diagnostic tool for the environment from which they emerge. This presentation from my manuscript-in-development, *Cherishing and Perishing in Transgender Portraiture*, seeks to delineate the enfoldments of the bio- and necropolitical, in which certain trans subjects are folded into life or into death, by showing where, how, and why perishing touches cherishing in trans artistic productions from Syrus Marcus Ware (Canada) and Zanele Muholi (South Africa).

**Bio:**

Eliza Steinbock, Assistant Professor of Cultural Analysis at Leiden University's Centre for the Arts in Society. Broadly curious about how visual culture shapes social understandings of bodily difference, Eliza specializes in trans\* cultural production, porn/sexualities and contemporary mediascapes. They recently published *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment and the Aesthetics of Change* (Duke UP, 2019), and are currently writing on contemporary transgender (self) portraiture in the wider field of visual activism in Toronto, Berlin, Cape Town/Johannesburg. Eliza is co-editor with Susan Stryker of the recently launched book series, *ASTERISK: Gender, Trans-, and All That Comes After* (Duke UP). [www.elizasteinbock.com](http://www.elizasteinbock.com)

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**Stream:** 4, **Panel:** 4

**SJ Thiessen (York University, CA)**

**Title:** Death as the Alternative? Medication Assistance in Dying for Mental Illness

**Abstract:**

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) for people with mental illness is a controversial topic that elicits polarizing positions from diverse groups including health professionals, academics, and activists. The divisive nature of MAID for mental illness is unsurprising given the discursive and material implications that MAID has for people's lives and deaths, as well as the contested understandings of mental illness. In Canada, MAID for mental illness is not explicitly forbidden by legislation, however it is functionally excluded through various eligibility criteria. This paper examines legislation and statements from various preeminent Canadian mental health institutions such as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the Canadian Mental Health Association, in order to reveal certain discursive characteristics that exist within MAID. It uses the concepts of biopower and necropolitics to explicate and analyze discursive assumptions such as the value of a life, recovery, and paternalism. From there, it will draw connections to the materiality of MAID for mental illness. Material considerations such as access to care, the social determinants of health, and consent and capacity will be explored using both a psychiatric survivor lens, and a disability justice perspective. Through these explorations, the intersections of systemic and structural oppressions such as ableism, and sanism are elucidated. This further complicates the landscape of MAID for mental illness debates, raising questions about the broader socio-political changes necessary to justify MAID for mental illness policies.

**Bio:**

SJ Thiessen is a white queer, non-binary trans settler from Tkaronto. Their research interests are in queer theory, critical approaches to mental health, and death and dying. In the past they facilitated psycho-educational groups with youth on their experiences of mental health and illness. Currently, they are working towards their Masters in Social work at York University with hopes of working in end of life care.

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**Stream: 3, Panel: 8**

## **Francisco Trento (UniArts Helsinki, FI)**

**Title: Neuro-queering the ghosts of typicality**

**Abstract:**

The philosopher Fabián Ludueña is developing a treatise on Spectrology in the three-volume oeuvre *The Community of The Spectres*, *Anthropotechnique* (2010), *Spectrology* (2016) and *Arcana Imperii* (2018). Before biopolitics, Rome and Greece put in motion the zoopolitics of an Anthropotechnical machine. Spectral entities that defied binary cuts were erased from history or reassembled in the *oikonomia* of the Western onto-epistemologies. Successful processes of stratification culminated in the figure of the normative human - read as the neurotypical cis-heterosexual male. The practice of *expositio* is the foundational zoopolitical human gesture: it consisted of exposing newborn children on street markets to be sold as slaves, or in the nature, left to survive (or die) subject to the fluctuations of the weather and hungry animals – “the zoopolitical practice from the ancient city, whereby the biosocial destiny of the newborn subjects was decided” (Ludueña, 2010, p. 47). The spectres of those body-minds still haunt our onto-epistemological worldviews: we must look back to the broken chains of the production of able bodies. Ludueña’s genealogical work investigates how and why the figure of the spectre gradually disappeared from the discursive milieu, and why we should bring it back to spotlight. Its potential resides in existence between binary categories like God and human, man and animal, male and female. It queers, defying epistemological boundaries, what it means to be dead or alive. It cuts preprogrammed gestures and modes of perception, manifesting through a continuous otherness that resists taxonomy. The autistic scholar Melanie Yergeau employs the term “neuroqueer” to talk about the non-neurotypical and queer subjectivities that are a continuum of indiscernibility and are violently displaced into binary categories. We argue for an operationalisation of the concept of the spectre to help us short-circuit the neurotypical and heteronormative futurism, by looking back to the ghosts of the exposed children.

**Bio:**

Francisco Trento is a Postdoctoral Fellow at CERADA, UniArts Helsinki. They participate in the Senselab, laboratory for thought in motion. Their research interests range from artistic research, film, spectrality, radical pedagogies, and neurodiversity. Recently, they focused on producing multimodal propositions in artistic research, gestated as texts, video and other materialities. Their current project, *The Pedagogy of The Anarchive* (<http://www.thepedagogyoftheanarchive.com>), aims to emphasise neuroqueer perception and techniques of building non-neurotypical pedagogical frameworks. They are drafting the project of an experimental film around Svalbard’s Seed Vault’s non-human materialities, against what Rose Braidotti calls anthropocentric exceptionalism.

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**Stream: 5, Panel: 10**

**Sofia Varino (Humboldt University of Berlin, DE)**

**Title: Ecopathologies: Queering the Vital & Deadly Transitionings of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity**

**Abstract:**

In this paper, I mobilize the work of Mel Chen (2012) to queer the toxic animacies of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), an idiopathic environmental illness with chronically debilitating symptoms. For MCS patients, exposure to chemical substances interrupts a linear, sequential progression of chronological time to produce disjointed, fragmented, errant temporal transitionings that encapsulate both vital and deadly material intra-actions (Barad 2007). Informed by material feminist and phenomenological perspectives on illness and disability and by authors like Annemarie Mol (2002), Margrit Shildrick (2009), and Lisa Diedrich (2007), I comparatively examine two queer MCS narratives: Mel Chen in *Animacies* (2012) and Peggy Munson in *Pathogenesis* (2008). I show how the toxic entanglements of living and dying in these narratives enact a queerly embodied performative experience of time as rich, heavy, and dense, rather than as immaterial or incorporeal. Interrupting, pausing, slowing down, alongside quickening, speeding up, rushing, all encapsulate the MCS ecologically bound pathogenic mechanisms the two authors describe in their work. These liminal, excessive body states emerge in response to exposure to a variety of common chemical substances, from formaldehyde to bleach, although the vestigial quantities cannot scientifically explain the onset of unexpected neurological, psychological and physical symptoms. Throughout, I place MCS within queer contexts of care and community, and of abandonment and isolation as slow violence (Nixon 2011), shifting the condition from strictly clinical to ecoclinical and ecosocial contexts. Instead of maintaining that MCS can be causally explained, I propose instead that the condition may provide a model for a foundational queering of environmental exposure where self and non-self, vital and deadly, harmful and safe no longer remain distinguishable but are rather contingent on a momentary, passing, fugitive, transitional corporeality.

**Bio:**

Sofia Varino is a Guest Researcher and Lecturer at the Center for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies at Humboldt University in Berlin. Her research focuses on bodies and technologies, encompassing body theory, technoscience studies, critical medical studies, political ecology, continental philosophy, and feminist and queer methodologies. Her work has been published in the peer-reviewed journals *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Feral Feminisms*, and is forthcoming in *Somatechnics*. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies with a certificate in Art & Philosophy from Stony Brook State University of New York, and is currently working on ecoclinical models of health and illness across genealogies of Western ecology. In conjunction with her research and teaching, she works on interdisciplinary projects across performance, multimedia, poetry, and the digital humanities.

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**Stream: 4, Panel: 9**

## **Zafire Vrba (independent artist, SE)**

**Title: DEATH IS MY PRONOUN**

**Abstract:**

Death is part of being trans. We learn early that folk like us don't have the right to live. We face hatred and violence on a daily basis and, much more often than other communities, we must face the grief of mourning our siblings. A third of Sweden's transpersons have considered killing themselves during the last year. If you are a trans teenager that number doubles (2015). Being trans in Sweden is a matter of life and death.

I was a trans activist for many years, but then found that doing service for my communities is a better way to stay alive. Service is different from activism. I now focus on reaching into the communities rather than reaching out to change the external world that we must live within. I serve to take part, to nurture what I need, and I pass on the courage of those who have lived and died before me.

I serve our communities with Death Cafes and guided meditations to connect with our ancestors who, with a modern and Western understanding, could have been queer and trans. The art I am making can be seen as contemporary archaeology: transferring knowledge and experience from past to future communities, inviting us to challenge and unlearn, and create images of what is not yet imaginable or possible.

New communities have been formed in the last few years. We have gained some more rights, a little more recognition, health care etc and all of this is thanks to successful activism. But we still die way too early.

I offer a poetic, performative and visual paper about all of the above. It might even be a love letter to the trans communities and the magic we bring to this world.

**Bio:**

Zafire Vrba is an artist who works with performance, video and digital media around the topics of trans visibility, accessibility and anti-racism. They are based in Stockholm where they organize Trans Film Fest Stockholm together with a diverse trans collective. Zafire has been part of running The Unstraight Museum and the legendary Göteborgs Queerinstitut. Together with their family they have opened The Center for Radical Sexuality, a venue for the queer and trans communities who want to explore the intersections of spirituality, BDSM and radical body politics.

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**Stream: 4, Panel: 4**

## **Annie Werner (University of Wollongong, AU)**

**Title: Queer death, vulnerability and rage: Renegade cancer stories and the promise of ontological resistance in the face of terminal cancer.**

**Abstract:**

In 2014, at the age of 35, I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. Treatment involved a double mastectomy and several months of chemotherapy, and prompted me to consider the various cultural narratives surrounding breast cancer and its treatments. As others, such as S. Lochlann Jain, have also discussed, narratives of cancer treatment are relentlessly preoccupied with the maintenance/renewal of strictly binarised gender identities, despite (or perhaps because of), the deeply queering nature of cancer treatment.

In December 2018 I learned that the cancer had metastasised to my liver and bones. In living with cancer, my intellectual, emotional and ontological concern remains with the ways in which narratives shape experience, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which queering hegemonic narratives – in this case by telling a “renegade cancer story” (Segal) - is a fruitful mode of resistance to the cancer industrial complex.

Drawing on Judith Butler’s recent work on vulnerability and resistance (2016), Eli Clare’s work on exile (2015) and Brittney Cooper’s work on rage (2018), and speaking from a queer, terminally ill standpoint, I will interrogate the ways in which vulnerability and rage have the potential to disrupt and reorganise – i.e. to queer - cultural narratives and approaches to dying and death from cancer in general and breast cancer in particular. Ultimately, this paper argues that renegade cancer stories that mobilise rage and/or vulnerability have the potential to transform the ontological experience of death from cancer, thereby queering the terminal cancer experience.

**Bio:**

Dr Annie Werner is based at the University of Wollongong's Bega campus, where she teaches sociology and English Literature. She is a two time recipient of the Vice Chancellor's award for outstanding contributions to teaching and learning. In 2017 Annie was an invited speaker at The University of Sydney's Hacking the Anthropocene symposium. Annie's current research focuses on cultural narratives of breast cancer and its treatments, and utilises queer, crip and auto-theoretical approaches.

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**Stream:** 4, **Panel:** 9

**Devin West (Queens University, CA)**

**Title:** Unmapping Heteronormativity: Queering Death through Art Practice

**Abstract:**

Life or death. Rich or poor. Male or female. Right or left. Theory or practice. Light or dark. Humanity, capitalism, gender, politics, education, and religion are just a few of the cultural mechanisms which reinforce the binary in our everyday lives and language. This inert dichotomy serves to create a division in our lives to reflect who lives in cohesion and who lives on the margins. Queer Artists are often believed to come from the margins and are often expected to be a unified voice of those margins. How do we consider the complex ways in which Queer Artists reflect their marginalized experiences through their art? As a “marginalized” genderfluid, queer, feminist, rural, poor class

settler, artist-scholar from “the bush” of Northern Central Canada, my art practice is deeply informed by the western cultural and social identities I embody and disembody. In my installation art practice, I work with common objects and materials which have “died” through colonial abandonment (bone), neglect (wood), or rejection (gendered objects such as fishnet stockings) and have been reclaimed to evoke multiple meanings and affect for the viewer. Using reclaimed everyday objects of gendered suspension, tension, and disruption, I am dedicated to actively challenging the binary of life and death by consistently working with bone. I use bone to amplify the grotesqueness and morbidity of heteronormativity, destabilizing notions of femininity and masculinity as stable signals of binary bodies. I believe art can create a powerful dialogue from which to challenge dichotomous patterns of being by creating a liminal space to disrupt those very patterns of being. I would like the opportunity to present an artist talk and visual art show exploring queering death through queer genderfluid conceptual installation art practice.

**Bio:**

Devin West is a genderfluid, queer, feminist, settler artist-scholar from North Central Canada. Holding a Master of Arts in Gender Studies and being a doctoral student in Cultural Studies at Queens University, Canada, Devin’s research resides in genderfluid resilience and the social constructs of heteronormativity. Devin’s art practice is deeply informed by cultural and social identities and actively works with structural themes of tension, suspension and disruption to advance conversations of genderfluidity and queer feminism. Devin’s conceptual installations actively challenge and destabilize notions of femininity and masculinity as stable signals of binary bodies.

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**Stream:** 5, **Panel:** 15

The First International Queer Death Studies Conference  
*Death Matters, Queer(ing) Mourning, Attuning to Transitionings*  
4-5 November 2019, Karlstad University, Sweden.

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