

More-than-human heroisms: Visualizations of a Phenomenon

(SFB 948 "Heroes-Heroisations-Heroisms", S4: "Aesthetics of Affect", Lecture Hall of the University Library and hybrid, 12-13.4.2023)

The embodiment of the more-than-human bears great fascination and, at the same time, a sense of unease. However, attempts to remove the human from the centre of our worldview are bound to human conventions of representation and perception in the way they communicate. In their visual mediation, posthuman figures are located in a field of tension between human heroism and the critique of tendencies towards identity, subjectification and naturalization. Thus, the use of humanoid figures simultaneously serves to overcome these conventions. The workshop examines posthuman heroizations in art, activism and pop culture through textual discussions and case studies.

Heroic figures attract attention. They have an affirming or even overwhelming and radicalizing effect - often through sensory effects. They change social contexts. Heroic figures constitute their audiences and are themselves constituted by them. Categories such as gender, race and class play crucial roles, as does the space in which they are situated. The intensification of social and environmental challenges and their medial negotiation give more-than-human figures increased agency and/or social power. They respond to the challenges of the present, but at the same time act in a contingent space between fact, fiction and visions of the future. In their fluidity and variability, they take on entropic forms far removed from any binarization.

What possibilities does the theory of posthuman heroism offer in visual communication, and what modes of knowledge and action are generated? How do more-than-human figures open up spaces for negotiation and imagination? What influence do these embodied representations have on our perception of social, intersectional and ecological issues?

Abstracts:

KEYNOTE

Comics on Ice: Circumpolar Heroes and New Arctic Cartographies

Johannes Riquet (Keynote)

In this talk, I will draw on collaborative work conducted in the context of the Mediated Arctic Geographies project to explore the comic book cartographies in a number of twenty-first-century comics and graphic novels from and about the circumpolar world. Recent scholarship at the intersection of comics studies and geography has drawn attention to the connections between cartography and comics (Dittmer 2014; Peterle 2017, 2019). The last two decades have seen a remarkable number of comic books by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists that draw on the spatial properties of the medium to transform Arctic imaginaries. I will pay special attention to how these works transform heroic narratives of Arctic exploration. My two main examples will be the alternative comics *Far Arden* (2009) and *Crater XV* (2013) by Minneapolis-based artist Kevin Cannon and the graphic novel series *Oqaluttuat* (2009-2018) by Greenlandic artist Nuka K. Godtfredsen, in collaboration with a team of Danish archaeologists. As I will show, Cannon's comic books deconstruct the supposed heroism of Southern explorers but still construct the Arctic as a black-and-white map that all but erases Indigenous presence, while the *Oqaluttuat* graphic novels centre the early Inuit histories of Greenland to reframe Arctic heroism through an Inuit lens, constructing multilayered geographies and reorienting Greenland away from Europe and towards the circumpolar world.

***TRANSATLANTICA* Dance Water and Degrees of Change (Artist-Talk)**

Caroline Alves

Caroline Alves talks about her performance *TRANSATLANTICA* which stages an encounter between the human body and ice. Through an autobiographical reappraisal of the choreographer's family history, the solo performance delves into the voids between Brazil and Europe, between past and present. It is one among many family histories that are marked by settler colonialism in Brazil: Histories based on the erasure of indigenous ancestors, carrying colonial continuities into the present. Following the traces of *Senhorinha*, the indigenous great-great-grandmother of whom only the colonial name remains, Alves explores the violent nexus of patriarchy and colonialism.

TRANSATLANTICA interweaves dance and storytelling, atmospherically oscillating between the elements of the stage set: the crystalline cold of a block of ice and the spreading, reflecting water that connects the continents. With tenderness and rage, Alves confronts her ancestral history and present, searching in the voids of the "official narrative" for the place from which to speak with her own words and movements that may break with the vast silence.

SPEAKERS

More-than-human heroic stories for the Anthropocene? On the Interweaving of Symbiosis, Race, and Species in Donna Haraway's Speculative Fable

Joseph Barla

Climate change, the sixth great mass extinction, and more frequent natural disasters are placing the Earth at the center of our thinking in novel ways, and as fundamentally endangered. Against this backdrop, the talk will address feminist science theorist Donna Haraway's call for better narratives, which she sees as "continuation stories" to the Anthropocene and as a declaration of war on the dictates of anthropos and capital.

As will be elaborated in the lecture, Haraway's symchthonic stories open up the space not only for an understanding of interspecies interdependence, but also for a renegotiation of subjectivity, agency, and personhood against the backdrop of existential threats. Accompanying them is a radical rejection of the Lockean subject as self, which is itself because it disposes of itself, and thus stands in demarcation from the affable (racialized and gendered) Other, which is constructed as externally determined (by nature, the environment, or one's genes). The lecture will simultaneously show that even Haraway's designs and narratives are not without risks and carry their own voids. For example, Haraway's recourse to Lynn Marguli's notion of symbiosis and symbiogenesis runs the risk of adopting racist imaginaries in the form of the image of a forbidden "miscegenation" of cells, thus leaving not only the historical connection of "race" and species in her narrative untouched, but also her own admonition that what narratives we use to tell other narratives matters.

Finally, by lacing the arguments together, the talk will show that Haraway's characters and stories emerging from the crack of the Anthropocene, while providing important insights into radical interdependence with a more-than-human co-world, are ultimately unable to fully break with myths of the origin of "Western culture." Rather, the ominous interweaving of nature, "race" species, and reproduction is found buried beneath the narratives.

Oracles with a Tipping Figure: Productive Heroizations of the Demonic in Agnieszka Polska's *The Demon's Brain*

Michael Klipphahn-Karge

The 2018 multi-channel video installation *The Demon's Brain* by artist Agnieszka Polska (*1985, PL) turns traditional notions of heroism on their head and addresses resource scarcity as a beacon of the immediate present: in its exhibition version from 2018 (Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin), the work consists, among other things, of four large projection screens on which four parts of a video are played. Its plot is embedded in the visual fairway of semi-fictional historical narratives: In a mixture of real and animated film, Polska's parable is devoted to the fictional story of a messenger on horseback who, in the mid-fifteenth century, is supposed to deliver documents to a financier that address the proto-capitalist working conditions in a Kraków salt mine. The viewer accompanies this messenger on his way through a thickening forest landscape, in which he loses his horse and gets lost. In the forest he has an unexpected encounter with a demon, which can be interpreted as an escapist hallucination and

synonymously as an authorial narrative figure. In keeping with the etymological origin of the word "demon," this demon appears to the messenger as a spirit of the departed and a hortatory force of fate that requests the destruction of the documents he carries with him.

Polska's oracular demon is conceived as a tipping figure. On the one hand conceived as an angel of purification - in a reversal of Christian argumentative practice towards the demonic - and conceived as a warning metaphor for the future, intended to bring the messenger as a representative of humanity to rue, he is on the other hand himself digitally animated, i.e. a data body and in parallel a popular generic conception of evil. Based on the examination of this examination, the lecture will pursue the question of what derivations this (re)staging of a demon as a heroes allows.

Skeletons, Ghosts, and Goddesses. Decolonial-Feminist Perspectives on the Heroic in the Ciudad de México

Vera Marstaller

Decolonial feminists from *Abya Yala* (that's the Americas) are united in their struggle against thinking in binarisms that hierarchize humanity. With the theories of María Lugones or Ochy Curiel, for example, heroines and heroes can also be understood as part of a polarizing and thus colonial, patriarchal, and capitalistic way of thinking. This is countered by collective heroisms expressed, for example, in visualizations of *Coatlicue* (a snake-goddess of the *mexicas* who stands for ambivalence). Likewise, they are placed in a genealogy to *la Llorona* (a white woman who goes out at midnight to search for her children who she drowned, symbolizing the ambivalence of motherhood in colonial societies). Decolonial collective heroisms are also characterized by *la Catrina* (a skeleton in ostentatious clothing with an exuberant hat, whose visual representations served to mock the European-oriented wealthy upper classes during the period of the Mexican Revolution and National Movement).

In my presentation, I will introduce theories of decolonial feminisms, first by outlining the ways in which not only heroes but also heroines confirm and reinforce patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist relations of exploitation and violence. Second, using visual representations of the social movement "Ni una menos" in the public space of Ciudad de México, I will show that in the representation of collective heroisms, their liminality is emphasized, that is, that they are part of the dominant order and oppose it at the same time. Third, through an analysis of the visualizations of Coatlicue, Llorona, and Catrina, I will argue the importance of non-human figures for feminist protest movements in Mexico.

Playing the Hero Just Once - Reflections on the Transmediality of Exorbitance and its Immersion Potential

Florian Nieser

With regard to a posthuman dimension of heroic figures, their exorbitance, understood as an exceptionality in terms of action potential and often also in terms of physical constitution, is a central feature with a high degree of constancy across time and media boundaries. The contribution proposed here focuses on the transmediality of exorbitance representations and thematizations, while at the same time taking a look at possible borderlines and different dimensions of exceptionality in the two medial forms of representation of medieval heroic

epic and the digital game. Specifically, it will be a question of the extent to which there are transmedial differences and commonalities in the exorbitance depicted, whether these are related to immersion mechanisms in literature and games, and thus whether it is possible for exorbitant heroic figures to offer identification to the recipients. The background of the considerations is the thesis that mechanisms of the active co-construction of fragile narrative worlds in literature and digital games can be exemplified with regard to heroic figures. Their extraordinary characteristics are interrupted to the same extent as the immersion cycle by moments of irritation that throw the recipients back on themselves. The latter would have the effect of a possible moment of identification that could be strengthened via further conventions of representation. These aspects will be explored in depth in the proposed paper, using various examples from Middle High German heroic epics (*Willehalm*, *Dietrichepik*, *Nibelungenlied*) as well as the courtly novel (*Wigalois*) and a selection of games from the action-adventure genre (*God of War*, *Death Stranding*, *Plague Tale*) – as well as the horror-survival genre (*Signalis*, *The Last of Us*).

Greta Thunberg: Heroism and Climate Disaster

Dorna Safaian

Greta Thunberg is the "face" of the climate movement *Fridays for Future*. She is revered as a hero by her followers and parts of the media, and compared to extraordinary figures from politics, religion and art. The threat of climate catastrophe is the affective point of reference from whose perspective she is figuratively portrayed in the media as a vulnerable and sovereign warner, admonisher, and seer. Greta Thunberg's visual representation of herself and others is linked to motifs and discourses that portray her as vulnerable and at the same time eminently effective. The article discusses the ambivalent heroization of Greta Thunberg, which fluctuates between notions of agency and vulnerability, using examples of images (including those from social networks). Media references to Thunberg are included, which, among other things, stage animals as actors in the climate protest.

Representing Nature - Forms of Subjectification, Constellations of Figures and Moral Charges in the *Rights of Nature* Debate

Tobias Schlechtriemen and Doris Schweitzer

At the very latest when Ecuador granted the status of legal subjectivity to nature as *Pachamama* in its new 2008 constitution, there has been public discussion in many places about whether and to what extent nature or certain natural entities can and should be granted the status of legal subject. In the context of these initiatives, the relationship between humans and nature is being renegotiated by shifting the focus away from humans and towards other natural entities. The highly normative charge of the discussion, as well as the esteem in which nature is held by many participants in the process, raises the question of whether the register of the heroic is being resorted to in the public negotiations, and if so, in what form. For it is part of the core of heroic forms of representation that heroes are portrayed as *human* - mostly male - figures. Accordingly, traditional forms of heroization would be challenged.

We devote our contribution to the *rights of nature* debate. We are interested in both the legal and the public forms of negotiation. We want to illuminate these with the help of the central dimensions of heroization processes and critically question them: What potentials are

attributed to the rights of nature? Who or what is heroized? Which roles are distributed and to whom is which agency attributed? Which boundaries are crossed? Which understanding of subjectivity is operated with - and is it really an understanding of the subject that undermines the epistemes of "modernity"? What constellation of figures is found in the discourses? Which - possibly polar opposite - positions and followings are there?

Bio-Notes

Caroline Alves is a Berlin-based dancer and choreographer. With over 20 years of dance experience, she has danced for Brazil's most important choreographers, including the state company Cia de Dança Palácio das Artes. While still in Brazil, she completed her degree in psychology and conducted research on creative processes in dance. Since 2013 she has been a dancer and member of the dance collective Grupo Oito (Berlin) and since 2016 she has been working with Natalie Riedelsheimer on the performative research *Machine to become-Woman*. Supported by NPN-STEPPING OUT and FondsDaku, Caroline is currently developing a *Machine to become* -trilogy on complex concepts together with Nora Haakh and Natalie Riedelsheimer. Taking the same approach of the first *Machine to become-Woman* experience, they apply the theme of "critical whiteness" to the figure of the witch. The second part of the trilogy "Machine to become-which witch?" will premiere in February 2023 at Acker Stadt Palast (Berlin). Her solo piece TRANSATLANTICA premiered in 2022 at the English Theatre Berlin | International Performing Arts Center.

Josef Barla is a research associate at the Institute for Sociology at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. He studied philosophy and sociology at the University of Vienna, and has completed research stays at the Science and Justice Research Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz and at the Posthumanities Hub at Linköping University. He is the author of *The Techno-Apparatus of Bodily Production: A New Materialist Theory of Technology and the Body* (transcript, 2019) and of *Biocapital: Contributions to the Critique of the Political Economy of Life* (co-authored with Vicky Kluzik and Thomas Lemke, Campus, 2022). His research focuses on the intersection of biopolitics, technology, ecology, and feminist epistemology.

Vera Marstaller has been working as a contemporary historian at the SFB 948 "Heroes - Heroisierungen - Heroismen" in Freiburg since 2016, with a focus on image and gender studies. She studied history, Romance languages and literature (with a focus on Spanish) and German studies and completed her traineeship for teaching at secondary schools with the second state examination. Her dissertation *Heldengesten. Front und Heimat in national socialist war photographs 1939-1945* will be published by Wallstein in March 2023. She analyzes ideology-critically the Nazi regime's visual war reporting as well as the effects of the heroization of the Wehrmacht on the representation of gender in German illustrated magazines at the time of World War II. Her current research interests include the history of gender-based violence prevention, Latin American history, and Latin American cultural transfer to Western countries in a decolonial feminist perspective. She is the author of: *In the Suit. The illustrated "Er. Die Zeitschrift für den Herrn" (1950/51)*, In: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History, Online Edition*, 18 (2021), H. 3, pp. 603-619.

She was nominated for the Zeitgeschichte digital Prize 2022 for the portal "Contemporary History Research." She also authored *Samurai and Kamikaze. Von der allmählichen Übernahme fotografischer Gesten aus Japan in deutschen Illustrierten zwischen 1940 und 1945*, In: Visual History, 07.06.2021 (nominated for the Zeitgeschichte digital-Preis 2022 for the portal "Visual History").

Anne Hemkendreis works as an art historian at SFB 948 "Helden - Heroisierungen - Heroismen" at the Albert-Ludwigs-University in Freiburg. She is an Associate Senior Lecturer at the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University in Canberra and a member of the Junge Akademie (of the National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the Berlin Brandenburg Academy). Previously, she worked as a Fellow at the Alfred Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg in Greifswald and as a research associate at Leuphana University in Lüneburg. She has taught at various universities, including the University of the Arts in Berlin (UDK), and performed as an artist in the field of physical theater and aerial arts. In her current research project, Anne explores artistic investigations of heroizations in the Arctic, their relevance to ecological crises, and the importance of indigenous knowledge. Anne is the author of *Die monochromen Interieurbilder Vilhelm Hammershøi* (Fink, ed. by AH, 2015); *Climate Heroism* (co-authored with Stefanie Lethbridge, e-journal *helden. heroes. héros*, 2022) and *Who Owns the Arctic? Polar Heroism and Climate Change in Mariele Neudecker's "Cook and Peary,"* In: 21: Inquiries into Art, History and the Visual 4 (2022).

Anita Hosseini is Senior Scientist in the Department of Art History at the University of Applied Arts (Vienna). She studied art history, social psychology/anthropology and gender studies. Her PhD in art history examined the relationship between art, knowledge and science in the 18th century and was published under the title *Die Experimentalkultur in einer Seifenblase. Das epistemische Potenzial in Chardins Malerei* by Wilhelm Fink Verlag. In her research, she addresses questions of the history of knowledge, and transcultural and transhistorical issues across epochs. She interrogates the structures and practices of epistemologies and historiographies. Her current research project with the working title *Rooted in Politics. Artistic Revisions of the History of the Rose* deals with the history of imperial botany and the engagement with it through artistic works and artistic research. The breadth of her research interests is also reflected in her recent publications:

Freiheit und Diversitätskompetenz! Für bessere Arbeitsbedingungen in der (Kunst)Wissenschaft, In: Kunstgeschichte kommunizieren. Kritische Berichte 1.2023, pp. 20-25; *Sehnsucht nach der DeepTime. Dinosaurier und Klimawandel im Anthropozän*, In: Timo Skrandies und Romina Dümler (eds.), *Kunst im Anthropozän* (forthcoming 2023); *Bridging Borders*, In: Beate Söntgen and Julia Voss (eds.), *Why Art Criticism? A Reader*. Berlin 2022, pp. 344-345; *Die Stadt als Organismus. Atelier van Lieshouts Slave City zwischen Nachhaltigkeitsdiktum und künstlerischer Selbstbefragung*, In: Ina Jessen and Isabella Augert (eds.), *Metabolismen. Lebensmittel in der Kunst*. Hamburg 2019, pp. 100-114.

Michael Klippbahn-Karge is an art scholar, fellow of the Schaufler Lab@TU Dresden, and also works as an editor of the peer-reviewed online journal w/k - Between Science and Art. In his PhD project, he investigates the intertwining of AI and magic in the art of the 2010s. His research interests include modern and contemporary art, its mediation, and the connection between art and science. His focus is on image cultures of technical and digital systems, artificial intelligence, constructions of gender, sex, and queerness, and theories of animisms, magic, and ritual. His recent publications include the anthology *Queer AI. On Coming Out of*

Smart Machines, which he co-edited with Ann-Kathrin Koster and Sara Morais dos Santos Bruss (transcript, 2022), and the volume *Queer Reflections on AI: Uncertain Intelligences* (Routledge, 2023).

Florian Nieser is currently the executive director of the Heidelberg Center for Digital Humanities at Heidelberg University. He completed his first state examination in theology and German studies at the University of Tübingen, where he received his PhD in German Medieval Studies in 2018 with a thesis on the semiotics of heroic figures. In addition to his interest in research methods in the Digital Humanities, he is particularly concerned with bridging concepts between German Medieval Studies and Game Studies in the field of digitality. He is pursuing these topics, among others, as a visiting scholar at SFB 948 "Heroes - Heroisierungen - Heroismen" (2022/23) and as an editor of PADIA - the journal for scientific computer game research since 2018. He is the author of: *Videospielheld*, In: *Compendium heroicum*, Ronald G. Asch, Achim Aurnhammer, Georg Feitscher, and Anna Schreurs-Morét (eds.), 2022; and: *Immersion, Virtuality, and Affliction in Medieval Literature and Digital Play*, In: *Paidia - Zeitschrift für Computerspielforschung* (12/2021); and: *Is everything different, boy? - Reflections on the humanization of a heroic hero figure in God of War (IV)*, In: *helden. heroes. héros.* 7.1 (2019), pp. 19-29. DOI: 10.6094/heroes.heros.

Johannes Riquet is Professor of English Literature at Tampere University. He is the author of *The Aesthetics of Island Space: Perception, Ideology, Geopoetics* (OUP, 2019) and the co-editor of *Spatial Modernities: Geography, Narrative, Imaginaries* (Routledge, 2018) as well as *Imaging Identity: Text, Mediality and Contemporary Visual Culture* (Palgrave, 2019). His research interests include spatiality, literary geography, visual culture, travel writing, diaspora, and mobility. He is the Principal Investigator of the collaborative project *Mediated Arctic Geographies* (Academy of Finland, 2019-2023). He is also working on a monograph on interrupted railway journeys in fiction and visual culture.

Dorna Safaian is an image and media scholar. She studied art history, media theory, philosophy/aesthetics, and media art in Heidelberg and Karlsruhe. She is a research associate in the SFB 948 "Heroes - Heroizations - Heroisms" at the University of Freiburg, where she conducts research on the visualization of political authority figures in social networks. Previously, she worked in the DFG project "Images of Outrage" (TU Berlin/Uni Siegen) on amateur practices of visualizing protest. Most recently, she published the essay *Greta Thunberg and the Ambivalence of Heroic Vulnerability* (e-journal *helden. heroes. héros.*) and *Mourning as Resistance. On a Symbol of the Revolutionary Movement 'Woman Life Freedom'*, a reflection on the resistance movement in Iran published by "Geschichte der Gegenwart". She is co-editor of the "Mittelweg 36" issue *Strong Men - Figures of Disruptive Politics in Transnational Perspective*, to be published May 2023.

Tobias Schlechtriemen is a habilitated cultural sociologist at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Freiburg. In the SFB 948 "Heroes - Heroizations - Heroisms" he leads - together with other colleagues - the synthesis subproject "Aesthetics of Affect". His research focuses on sociological theories, the history of sociology and sociological methods (image and discourse analysis as well as ethnographic methods) as well as sustainability research, cultures of digitalization and sociology of literature. His publications include: T. Schlechtriemen, *History of Ideas and Knowledge*, in Ursula Kluwick and Evi Zemanek (eds.), *Nachhaltigkeit interdisziplinär. Concepts, Discourses, Practices*, Böhlau, Cologne:

UTB 2019, pp. 27-50. See also: T. Schlechtriemen and S. J. Moser, *Social figures - between social experience and sociological diagnosis*, In: *Journal of Sociology* 47.3 (2018), pp. 164-180.

T. Schlechtriemen, *Images of the social. The network in sociological theory*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink 2014.

Doris Schweitzer, Dr. phil., Ass. jur., has been Professor of Sociology with a focus on sociological theory and history of theory at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main since October 2021. Her research interests include epistemology and genealogy of sociological analyses of society, post-structuralism/structuralism, materialisms (historical and new), and the analysis of transformations of legal phenomena from a social and socio-theoretical perspective. Her publications include: *Juridical Sociologies. Law and Society from 1814 to the 1920s*, Baden-Baden: Nomos 2021; *'Rights of Things': A Posthumanist Approach to Law?*, In: *Nature and Culture. Special Issue: Posthuman? New Perspectives on Nature/Culture*, 16.1 (2021), pp. 28-46; *Anthropocene, 'Rights of Nature' and Nature Contract: On the Actuality of Michel Serres*, In: Reinhold Clausjürgens and Kurt Röttgers (eds.), *Michel Serres. Das vielfältige Denken*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink 2020, pp. 213-230.