THE CINEMATIC LIFE OF THE FIGURAL: MAPPING SHAPES OF TIME IN
TERRENCE MALICK’S THE NEW WORLD (2005)

Gabriella Blasi (The University of Queensland)

This article investigates Terrence Malick’s cinematic treatment of nature in *The New World* and argues that cinema, as a figural technology, disrupts the Kantian time-space division informing modernist and postmodernist conceptions of the nature/culture divide. The argument takes Robert Sinnerbrink’s and Iain Macdonald’s divergent readings of Terrence Malick’s *The New World* and shows how a figural approach can overcome the nature/culture divide informing romantic (Sinnerbrink) and nihilistic (Macdonald) approaches to Malick’s treatment of human-nature relations. In using historical and romanticised figural gestures such as Pocahontas and John Smith, Malick’s film disrupts perception, sensations and significations associated with ideological and mythic readings of the tainted legend, and opens these gestures to their cinematic life. The argument draws on applications of Peter Fenves’ work on Benjamin’s conception of the turn of time to figural experiences of films. In order to illustrate the significance of Fenves’ study in film-philosophy, the analysis will pause at Malick’s use of the map-territory relation in the title sequences of *The New World*. A figural approach to the map-territory relation will crystallise time as a Benjaminian sphere of total neutrality, a non-subjective continuity of experience able to produce a temporal reduction that does not reside in subjective intentionality. Benjamin’s shape of time illuminates a vision of nature beyond nihilism and delusional romantic ideals, it contributes to a more defined philosophical role of the figural in film-philosophy and opens the film’s figural gestures to their posthumous and, indeed, posthuman, temporal plasticity.

*Keywords*: Time, Phenomenology, Walter Benjamin, Terrence Malick, Nature-culture relations.
ON SOME POSTHUMAN MOTIFS IN WALTER BENJAMIN: MICKEY MOUSE, BARBARISM AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNERVATION

Daniel Mourenza (University of Leeds)

This article discerns some posthuman motifs in Walter Benjamin’s writings on film and analyzes them in dialogue with recent literature on posthumanism. I argue that, from his early anthropological texts, Benjamin devised what can be considered a posthuman theme: the idea of the creation of a collective body in and through technology. It is, nonetheless, in his writings on film that he sets out most fully how this technological innervation into the body of the collective should occur, in this case through a rush of energy through the body of the audience. The arena of cinema reception appears in this way as a paradigmatic space in which to adapt technology into the collective body of the audience. However, cinema reception is only a rehearsal for what could exist for real in the revolution, when the collective attempts to gain mastery over the new techno-body. In this new reconfiguration of humanity, traditional formations such as families and nations would be discarded. I thus suggest that Benjamin’s theory finds an echo in current feminist and postcolonial posthuman authors.

In this article, I will particularly focus on the period of the “destructive character” in Benjamin’s oeuvre (1931-1933), in which he develops a fierce critique of bourgeois humanism and conceives the posthuman figures of the inhuman and the positive barbarian, of which Mickey Mouse is a privileged advocate. For Benjamin, Mickey Mouse and his friends were examples of what human beings would resemble once they had merged with technology. Thus, I will argue that Benjamin’s theories around technology, the human body and cinema are useful in reconsidering our relationship with nature and technology in a (desirable, rather than actual) posthuman condition.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin; posthumanism; barbarism; Mickey Mouse; technological innervation.

HUMAN/CYBORG/ALIEN/FRIEND: POSTWAR RESENTIMENT IN JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION AND POSTHUMAN ETHICS IN KAMEN RIDER FOURZE

Se Young Kim (University of Iowa)
This essay examines the television and film series *Kamen Rider Fourze* (2011-2012), approaching it within its role in the larger mode of *tokusatsu* filmmaking in Japanese science fiction. *Tokusatsu* or “special filming” consists of live-action science fiction narratives that heavily feature special effects. Evident in the way that the first *tokusatsu* text, *Gojira* (1954, Honda Ishirō), refers to the U.S. hydrogen bomb tests at Bikini Atoll that killed twenty-three fishermen, the mode shares a deep connection with its historical context and is continually haunted by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As the bombings did nothing less than force the Japanese to reconsider the contours of their own humanity, going so far as to engender new identities such as the *hibakusha* or “bomb-affected people,” the concern with humanism becomes a core component for *tokusatsu*. In the imaginary of science fiction, an emasculated nation reactualizes national trauma, copes with the anxiety of complete disarmament following the Potsdam Declaration, and coopts the technonationalist interest in science and technology that motivated the postwar rebuilding effort. While the atomic bombs pushed Japan past the limits of humanity, *tokusatsu* dreams of the possibility of new forms of life through colorful monsters and cyborg superheroes. Actualizing the fantasy of rearmament, these new creatures embody the desire of postwar Japanese science fiction and reveal it to be a cinema of Nietzschean *ressentiment*.

This essay simultaneously reads *Kamen Rider Fourze* as a representative of this history and a radical break. Drawing on the work of Donna Haraway, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Derrida among others, this essay initially places *Kamen Rider Fourze* in this long tradition of postwar Japanese moving image culture. Like much of *tokusatsu*, *Kamen Rider Fourze* depicts a Japan under attack and details the rise of a teenage cyborg superhero. And although the hero of *Kamen Rider Fourze* decries Japanese disarmament and realizes the desire for a final weapon, the series actually moves into a radical space that hews much closer to Donna Haraway’s notion of the cyborg. Those politics are facilitated by *Fourze*’s alternative comportment to technology where technology does not merely operate as weaponry that obliterates the alien, enemy Other. Instead, technology functions as Heidegger’s *techné* and reveals the violent, binaristic, hierarchizing character of humanism. *Fourze* thus pushes past the resentful slave morality of World War II, opting instead for ethics that are framed around posthuman politics and the ethos of friendship. In the end, *Kamen Rider Fourze* points not only to a break in national trauma, but also to
nothing less than the potentiality of a different mode of cinema that reorients the
relationship between Self and Other.

Keywords: Kamen Rider, Japanese science fiction, posthumanism, Martin Heidegger, the
politics of friendship

THE HARD TECHNOLOGICAL BODIES OF ELYSIUM AND EDGE OF TOMORROW
Aaron Tucker (Ryerson University)

Susan Jefford’s work on Reagan-era action movies established the “hard body” as the
over-muscled biological spectacle that functioned as a unifying force for both “a type of
national character” and “the nation itself.” The “mastery” that the hard body represented
is echoed in the equally spectacular hard technological bodies of the exoskeleton-
enhanced protagonists of Elysium and Edge of Tomorrow. While Jeffords argued that the 80s
hard body was deeply suspicious of “technological innovation” as a possible polluter of
the hard body’s individualism, the contemporary hard technological body freely blends
its biological body with wearable and networked technologies to become an effective
military assemblage that has morphed its mastery from international and physical
conflicts to virtual and borderless ones.

Different from the all-encasing machine “suits” of Iron Man and Robocop, the combat
exoskeleton is a literal “man-in-the-middle” soldier that deliberately melds the human
and the machine so that the biological and the technological are visible simultaneously.
This paper briefly tracks representations of the exoskeleton through Aliens, The Matrix
Revolutions and Avatar, before focusing on Elysium and Edge of Tomorrow. These two latest
films showcase biological muscle combined with and augmented by a technological
apparatus which, when combined, generate an updated spectacle still deeply rooted in
the problematic 80s hard body. Such a figure is not the healthy symbiotic posthuman that
N. Katherine Hayles promotes. Instead, the hard technological body, in an attempt to
heroically reassert human exceptionalism, treats his/her computerized technologies as
tools to be conquered and then weapons to conquer with.
POSTHUMANIST PANIC CINEMA? THE FILMS OF ANDREW NICCOL

Jon Baldwin (London Metropolitan University)

This article discusses the posthuman imagery in Niccol’s films with reference to Baudrillard’s reading of the posthuman condition. It begins with a discussion and uncoupling of the notions of posthumanism and the posthuman. Focus turns to the films of Niccol. It is proposed that each of the films under consideration stages a posthuman problem, which is subsequently met with a humanist remedy. The films foreground posthuman issues such as media surveillance and simulation (The Truman Show, 1998), cloning and genetic engineering (Gattaca, 1997), virtual reality and digital media (S1m0ne, 2002), biometrics and neoliberalism (In Time, 2011), and mediated war and unmanned aerial vehicles (Good Kill, 2014). Variants of the humanist solution to these issues include an authentic real, an outside of media ecology (The Truman Show); a human spirit that is not reducible to materiality (Gattaca); an authentic identity, and actual rather than virtual reality (S1m0ne); an innate sense of justice and outside to the flow of neoliberal finance (In Time); and face-to-face rather than screen-to-screen relationality, and a real war in comparison to a virtual war (Good Kill). Baudrillard’s work can be seen to complicate these humanist solutions by suggesting that the apparent space they point to is always already compromised and colonised by the posthuman condition. Niccol’s films can be seen to fit into the proposed genre of ‘posthumanist panic cinema.’ However, the conclusion suggests that the construction of this genre needs reconsideration in terms of the identification and function of such a genre.

Keywords: posthumanist panic cinema, Andrew Niccol, genre, surveillance, virtual reality, drone, Baudrillard.

POSTHUMANISM IN MATTHEW BARNEY’S CREMASTER CYCLE: AUTOPOIESIS AND THE “HERMETIC STATE”

Irina Chkhaidze (University College London)
This article analyses Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster* cycle (1994-2002) as a film series including its accompanying multimedia works, arguing for the posthumanist orientation of the cycle on structural and thematic levels of the narrative, as well as the use of material. As an interdisciplinary critique in the humanities and social sciences, posthumanism is set against the anthropocentric discourse of humanism and its speciesist structures that reproduce the normative human subject through the dichotomy of humanity/animality. Looking at how the cycle represents nonhuman and human beings, and environments from a specific perspective is pertinent for situating the work in the context of recent posthumanist theories, particularly as articulated in Cary Wolfe’s writing. Furthermore, in my discussion of a multifaceted self-referential system of the cycle and a recurrent theme of the “hermetic state”, I rely on the concepts developed by German second-order systems theorist Niklas Luhmann who introduced a radically posthumanist view into social theory, especially his notion of autopoietic systems combining operational closure and structural openness. Drawing on this theoretical framework I argue that the *Cremaster* cycle embodies a complex self-referential narrative in tension between differentiation and undifferentiation, where ideas of biological development as well as conventional species boundaries are disrupted through a radically nonanthropocentric depiction. Through the analysis of Barney’s project, I observe how these theoretical paradigms destabilising humanist notion of subjectivity have been taken up in contemporary art and how, by directly engaging our perception, these works are contributing to the wider posthumanist debate.

*Keywords:* Posthumanism, contemporary art, second-order systems theory, autopoiesis, Matthew Barney, Niklas Luhmann, Cary Wolfe, Bruce Clarke.

**REDISCOVERING OUR HUMANITY: HOW THE POSTHUMAN NOIR ANIME DARKER THAN BLACK SUBVERTS THE TROVES OF FILM NOIR TO REAFFIRM A HUMANIST AGENDA**

Maxine Gee (University of York)

There is an inherent contradiction at the heart of *posthuman noir* in Anglo-American film and Japanese anime; this sub-genre focuses on science fictional futures where characters
have moved beyond the traditional boundaries of what is considered human; however, the emphasis is often on more typically human traits of emotion and irrationality and their awakening/re-awakening in these posthuman characters. This hints that the sub-genre is not in fact positing a truly posthumanist standpoint but reaffirming an older humanist one, assuaging fears that what is traditionally considered human still has a place in these technologically advanced worlds.

Posthuman noir is concerned with the fears and possibilities afforded by the modification of the humanity and how human nature is preserved or perpetuated through these changes. These concerns are presented through adopting elements found in the traditional film noir corpus—spanning from *The Maltese Falcon* (J. Huston, 1941) to *A Touch of Evil* (O. Wells, 1958)—and adapting or subverting them.

This article will examine, through a case study of Tensai Okamura’s *Darker Than Black*, two specific areas where the anthropocentric agenda of posthuman noir is particularly evident—narrative structure and characterisation. To examine these ideas three areas of critical debate are initially explored; the sub-genre of posthuman noir is introduced and defined; pertinent philosophical and ontological questions of what it means to be posthuman, transhuman and posthumanist are identified; and finally, relevant issues relating to the contested genre of film noir are raised. These theories are applied to *Darker Than Black* to demonstrate how posthuman noir validates the continuing status of the human at the centre of focus in science fictional posthuman futures.

*Keywords*: anime, posthuman, film noir, anthropocentric, Tensai Okamura

---

**ZOMBIE CINEMA AND THE ANTHROPOCENE: POSTHUMAN AGENCY AND EMBODIMENT AT THE END OF THE WORLD**

Phillip McReynolds (UNC Charlotte)

The Anthropocene, the name for our current geological epoch proposed by Crützen and Stoermer, poses significant challenges to traditional humanistic conceptions of human agency and embodiment. The claim that these and other scientists make is that human beings as a species have, beginning with the industrial revolution, made impacts upon the biosphere on a planetary scale equivalent in magnitude and duration to those of (other)
natural forces such as glaciation, plate tectonics, and asteroid strikes. The implication of this discovery is that these human effects are of such a scale that they are no more subject to human control, intelligence, and agency than are other forces of nature. On this view human beings aren’t so much actors as actants, producing far ranging effects in concert with other non-human actants. Thus, ironically the Anthropocene, literally the epoch of the human, is the first posthuman epoch.

In this paper I argue that the cinematic trope I will refer to as “the fast zombie” of recent zombie cinema serves as a figure for the posthuman in the age of the Anthropocene. I trace the lineage of the cinematic zombie, the first movie monster without precedent in non-cinematic art forms, from the “voodoo zombie” of the thirties and forties, through the “slow zombie” of George Romero and Romero-inspired films, to the fast zombie of the post millennial era. Despite the differences among these monsters I claim that they share a common lineage, common features, and collectively provide a fictional analogue to social and economic forces that have led to our current environmental crisis.

In brief, the voodoo zombie of the early zombie movies such as White Zombie (1932) and I Walked with a Zombie (1943) serves as a signifier for slavery and colonization. The trope of the voodoo zombie, whether reanimated or merely drugged, stands in place of the slave, deprived of agency and doomed to a life (or death) of alienated labor in service of a master, the voodoo priest. The slow zombie of the Romero films – Night of the Living Dead (1968), Dawn of the Dead (1978), and Day of the Dead (1985) – also signifies alienated labor deprived of agency and subjectivity yet now presented as a shambling force under the control of no human intellect. This zombie represents a threat to the civilized order en masse as well as a fear of contamination. The work of the slow zombie is to reproduce itself through consumption. The figure of the fast zombie found in post millennial cinema in films such as 28 Days Later (2002), World War Z (2013) and the remake of Day of the Dead (2008) signify a fear of contagion occurring under deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari), abject masses swarming over borders and laying waste to the countryside by sheer force of numbers.

What these different types of zombies share is an excess of embodiment. In this way they represent an antidote to the disembodied, technophilic posthumanism of the cyborg cinema of the 1990s and early 2000s. Whereas the latter represent the intellect dematerialized (Hayles), the former represent embodiment run amok. In addition, insofar
as colonization and slavery provided the capital for the industrial revolution, which in turn is the direct cause of anthropogenic climate change, the evolution of the cinematic zombie marks a fictional trace of the human and posthuman forces that have brought about the Anthropocene.

*Keywords:* Posthumanism, Zombies, Anthropocene, Agency, Cinema