



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty of Arts

Department
of Philosophy

**ENGAGING THE
CONTEMPORARY 2023**

THE PROVOCATION OF CULTURE(S)

📅 15–17 November 2023

📍 University of Malta, Valletta Campus

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Introduction

Engaging the Contemporary 2023 is the eighth edition of a series of annual international conferences organized by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta, with the aim of promoting an interdisciplinary approach to a variety of current philosophical debates. This year's theme – The Provocation of Culture(s) – seeks to examine and bring into discussion the various issues that the question of living in a multi-cultured world brings to the fore.

The aim of the conference is to bring together various philosophical traditions into a conversation that furthers our understanding of the provocations of and by culture(s) that beset contemporary times.

Keynote Speaker



PROFESSOR JON COGBURN

Louisiana State University

Jon Cogburn is chair of the Louisiana State University Department of Philosophy. He has authored or co-authored over thirty articles in philosophical logic, metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of art, and the philosophy of mind. Whenever possible, he focuses on the intersection of analytic and continental philosophy, especially with respect to speculative realism and object-oriented ontology. He is the author (with Mark Silcox) of *Philosophy of Video Games* and single author of *Garcian Meditations: The Dialectics of Persistence in Form and Object*. He has co-translated (with Mark Ohm, Abigail RayAlexander, and Christopher RayAlexander) five books by Tristan Garcia, including Garcia's mammoth *Form and Object*, and edited (with Mark Silcox) *Dungeons and Dragons and Philosophy*. He has recently completed a book on professional wrestling and American politics with Neal Hebert and is currently working on a book on panpsychism with Niki Young, a book on H.P. Lovecraft with Mike Ardoline, and a translation of Garcia's *Laisser être et rendre puissant* with the RayAlexanders. He is an amateur watercolorist and guitarist, playing with Emily Cogburn and Robert Holden in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana based band Southern Primitives.

Conference Organisers

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CONFERENCE WEBSITE

ENGAGING THE CONTEMPORARY 2023
THE PROVOCATION OF CULTURE(S)

✦ um.edu.mt/events/etc2023

Programme

DAY 1 | Wednesday 15 November

08:30

REGISTRATION

09:00 – 10:00

KEYNOTE | CHAIR: Claude Mangion
Jon Cogburn

10:00 – 10:15

Break

10:15 – 11:45

PANEL 1 | CHAIR: Claude Mangion

Daniel Abela (independent)
Provocation in Transcultural Counselling

Matko Krce-Ivancic (Institute of Social Sciences, Croatia)
Depression beyond the Hegemony of Problem-Solving Culture

Irene Olivero (University of Genoa)
Engineering the Concept of 'Person': the Principle of Procreative Beneficence Revisited

11:45 – 13:15

Lunch Break

13:15 – 14:45

PANEL 2 | CHAIR: Neb Kujundzic

Michael Grech (University of Malta)
On why it may Make Sense (even in Democratic Terms) to Have Certain Decisions Taken by a Computer Rather than the Electorate.

Michael Briguglio (University of Malta)
Twenty Years of Malta's EU Membership: The Impact on Maltese Environmental NGOs

Diya Dana (University of Bonn)
Love and Defiance: The Cultural Manifestation of Kurdish Resistance in Mem u Zin

14:45 – 15:00

Break

15:00 – 16:30

PANEL 3 | CHAIR: Michael Grech

Junko Matsuzaki Carreira (Tokyo Keizai University)
Integrating Japanese culture into English education for global talent development: Volunteering at the library

Leila Pourzarin (Peyam Noor University)
The Qur'an and Post-modernism Dilemmas: Education Methods and Dynamic Understanding

Luke Fenech (University of Malta)
Unshackling Narratives: A Greenian Approach to Multicultural Education

Programme *(continued)*

DAY 2 | Thursday 16 November

09:00 – 10:30

PANEL 1 | CHAIR: Roberto Debono

Doug Barrett (Syracuse University)
Can Music Engage the Contemporary?

Martin E. Rosenberg (Foreign Objekt)
Jazz Performance as Contested Immanent Durational "Space" Between Culture and Cognition

Robert Falzon (University of Malta, Alumnus)
J.R.R. Tolkien's Method of Contrasts

10:30 – 10:45

Break

10:45 – 12:15

PANEL 2 | CHAIR: Niki Young

Roberto Debono (University of Malta)
Global Guardianship: A Provocation to Multi-Culturalism?

Francesco Frendo (University of Malta)
Hope, Hostility and Hospitality: An Analysis on the El Hiblu 3

Stacey Mitchell (Unitarian Universalist Association)
Philosophical Concerns of Increased Gun Violence in the United States, as Provocation within Culture and Politics.

12:15 – 13:30

Lunch Break

13:30 – 15:00

PANEL 3 | CHAIR: Francesco Frendo

Oliver Norman (Université de Poitiers)
Drag as Provocation ? Radicality and Banality on Stage and Screen

Graham Bounds (Central New Mexico Community College)
Toward a Compatibilist Theory of Aesthetic Evaluation

Michael Ardoline (Louisiana State University)
Weird Horror, The Outside, and Passive Transformative Experience: A Deleuzian Response to L.A. Paul

15:00 – 15:15

Break

15:15 – 16:45

PANEL 4 | CHAIR: Francois Zammit

Andrei Zavalij (American University of Kuwait)
The Role and the Place of Religion in Modern Society: A Reevaluation

Zuzana Svobodova (University of South Bohemia)
Dialogue and Forgiveness as Cultural Phenomena

Ali Hussein (Islamic College for Advanced Studies)
New Trends and Innovative Approaches within Shi'ah Research in Advanced Shi'ah Seminars [Hawzahs] dealing with various Cultural-Modern Human Rights Applications

Programme *(continued)*

DAY 3 | Friday 17 November

09:00 – 10:30

PANEL 1 | CHAIR: Ivan Callus

Eleonora Bolsi (University of Malta)
Cultural object, A.I. and the Artist Agency

Peter Genito (Municipality of Florence)
Contemporary culture between individual creativity, collective unconscious and artificial intelligence

Valerie Visanich (University of Malta)
Accomplishing Cultural Policy and the Use of AI in Cultural Participation

10:30 – 10:45

Break

10:45 – 12:15

PANEL 2 | CHAIR: Keith Pisani

Ivan Callus (University of Malta)
Small Contentions on Minor Literature: Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida

Aaron Aquilina (University of Malta)
'What is the end of Study?' Provoking Academics From 1594

Iulia Grad (Babes-Bolyai University)
Ethical Considerations Regarding Depictions of Care in Advertising Texts

12:15 – 13:30

Lunch Break

13:30 – 15:00

PANEL 3 | CHAIR: Claude Mangion

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci (University of Malta)
'Provocation-Interflow': A conceptual methodology making sense of contemporary madness

Neb Kujundzic (Prince Edward Island University)
Cultures as Galaxies

David Roden (Independent Researcher)
The Demon of Posthumanist Philosophy

15:00 – 15:15

Break

15:15 – 16:45

PANEL 4 | CHAIR: Robert Farrugia

Francois Zammit (University of Malta)
Social Media and the Rise of Influencers: The Voyeuristic, Sado-Masochistic, and Pornographic Socio-Economic Relations of Late Capitalism

Nataliya Atanasova (Sofia University)
A Pair of Virtual Sneakers in Everyday Life: From a Simulacrum to a Stimulus

Peter Ferguson & Richard Derrah (Kindai University)
Outsiders Within the Classroom: Cultural Literacy and Intercultural Communication in Thai and Japanese Schools



ABSTRACTS

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Provocation in Transcultural Counselling

Daniel Abela

University of Malta

provocative

/prə'vɒkətɪv/

1. causing anger or another strong reaction, especially deliberately.
2. intended or intending to arouse sexual desire or interest.

As I sit down and write I am immediately taken a back for i do not know how I should write. Despite the call being specifically trans-disciplinary, I feel compelled to approach this with a more academic demeanour. I fear that for the purpose of this context the audience would view reflective writing as barren or not fit for purpose. As I become more hesitant about my style of writing, I begin looking up words which might make this writing seem more philosophical. I begin to worry that at this point I have already lost the audience's interest and perhaps even frustrated them. For a moment, I try to remind myself how I used to write when I was still studying philosophy. This thought doesn't stay much with me, I tell myself that this is just silly and incongruent. I now experience a sense of resistance, a certain bitterness one can say. I feel angry at myself for being so concerned by standards which are not implicitly there. I'm also disappointed with my need to conform and to be accepted. After giving it some time I decide to go with this reflective piece, for I feel that in one way or another it has been provocative for me.

In counselling, self-reflection and reflective writing are crucial for good practice (Wright, 2012). In helping their clients, it is useful for counsellors to draw parallels to the here-and-now (Yalom, 2002). A lot of effort is usually put into freeing the mind from judgment in order to guarantee empathic responses towards clients. In psychoanalytic theory, the redirection of feelings about a specific

person(s) onto another is referred to as transference (Racker, 1988; Solomon, 2006; Storr & Holmes, 2012). By the same token, the emotional reaction of the therapist to the client is referred to as countertransference (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). Counsellors regularly attend supervision to ensure that their own biases and differences do not distort the therapeutic process. Just as physicians ensure that the operating theater is a sterile place for physiological healing, by keeping their biases in check counsellors ensure that the therapeutic space emulates these conditions for psychological well-being. At its core this is done to ensure that practice adheres to the Rogerian tenets of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence (Rogers, 1951).

The idea of bypassing our biases is not only pertinent to the the therapeutic space but also in our day to day life. In a multi cultural society we are constantly told to see people as people and not as their race, their gender, their disability, their religion and so on. Yet this ideological bias in itself is rarely questioned. As counsellor with a different academic background I feel provoked by how the word 'trans-disciplinary' gives me permission to partake in this space. In a way I find myself either seduced to conform or angered to resist.

In this paper I would like to explore how in our attempts to show unconditional positive regard and acceptance we are provoking our clients either conform or to resist. I would also like to explore the implications of transcultural practices in therapy. I also would like to look at what role provocation plays in transference and countertransference. To do this I will draw upon research from counselling but I will also make use of contexts beyond the therapeutic space.

What is the end of Study? Provoking Academics From 1594

Aaron Aquilina

University of Malta

The intelligentsia and the philistines. The aristos and the hoi polloi. The select elites and the herd of sheep. Highbrow and lowbrow. Man and superman.

This cultural dichotomy is a not only familiar; it is prolific. It permeates most contemporary spaces, from the classroom to the art gallery to the voting hall, and its echoes can be discerned in a multitude of private and public discourses. Almost invariably, the radicle of this line of distinction – however twisted or diseased it may be – is education. Almost invariably, too, its creators and upholders often find themselves, somehow, quite advantageously positioned within it.

As academics, where do we fall – or, rather, where do we stand? We are all familiar with the reputation that academia carries with it nowadays, out there, especially when it comes to the humanities. Our continued participation – as scholars, as stakeholders in the very concept of education – thus makes an inevitable statement. What this statement amounts to – even if it is confusing, paradoxical, or, at worst, hypocritical – needs to be heard. This paper intends to investigate this cultural conflict through select literary texts, aiming to ignite a spark that is more illuminating than incendiary.

Whether we try our hardest to be on the left side of politics and the right side of history, the screw turns when we academics are named – and provoked – by claims such as Donald Trump's: in one of his campaign rallies in 2016, he claims that "experts are terrible". A year later,

Michael Gove echoes him: "I think the people of this country have had enough of experts". Nothing, perhaps, beats us over the head as much as ex-President George W. Bush's statement: "One of the great things about books is, sometimes there are some fantastic pictures". To the supervisor who encourages their doctoral student by dangling the carrot of indisputable expertise, these statements retort that it is not the level of expertise that is the problem, but its assumption in the first place.

Such sentiments germinate from various political and economic histories: from totalitarianism's obsessive relationship with knowledge to populist attitudes towards elitism and wage gaps. Exploring its history and contemporary effects by appealing to literature and presenting a paper at a conference seems an absurdly one-sided approach, and so are the cards stacked. The question becomes, then, of how one can hear the other side – if sides there indeed are – when we academics have defined speech in a manner only we can partake of.

There are, I argue, multiple paths towards some answer. One way to go about this is through reading literary works that undermine, ridicule, and nullify the man of letters, in similar ways that the presumed rabble or mob might. As such, this paper will principally examine some of the consequences of thought as presented in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, bringing in some other literary examples, but essentially asking the same question that the Shakespeare's *Berowne* asks: 'What is the end of study?'

Weird Horror, The Outside, and Passive Transformative Experience: A Deleuzian Response to L.A. Paul

Michael Ardoline

Louisiana State University

Philosophers of art, with some exceptions, define horror as a genre in terms of its unique affects. For example, in Noel Carroll's influential account, horror is the genre that uses monsters to provoke the affect of art-horror in its audiences. When looking to sub-genres then, we may expect that they are marked out by modulations on these affects or in their constraints on the type of monster that provokes them. In this paper, I will argue that this is not the case for Weird Horror. Weird is a sub-genre of horror that trades in fear of the unknown and the trope of contact with an Outside beyond the protagonist's possible understanding or experience (at least, in the beginning of the story). I contend that the essential structural feature of Weird Horror is not a unique affect, but that it explores epistemological transformation. That is, in Weird Horror, the protagonist will undergo

some radical change in their understanding of the universe and what is possible in it. This change is generally so fundamental or overwhelming that it produces a new subject, often a "mad" one (though we must be mindful of whether they appear mad only because we have not undergone the same realization). This epistemological aspect of Weird Horror should make it of particular interest to philosophers. To show this, I will analyze a canonical example of epistemological transformation in Lovecraft through L.A. Paul's concept of Transformative Experience and Gilles Deleuze's account of the Superior Exercise of the Faculties. Ultimately, I argue, the Weird dramatizes the most antagonistic aspect of the relationship between learning and the subject through contact with the Outside.

A Pair of Virtual Sneakers in Everyday Life: From a Simulacrum to a Stimulus

Nataliya Atanasova

Sofia University "St.Kliment Ohridski"

Ontologically considered, non-fungible tokens (NFTs) have been described by recent theories as references, or "pointers," to something other than themselves, where essence is preceded by existence. As a matter of fact, the digital sphere is a place where values are recast as symbols and serve as a second context for one's everyday existence and life conditions. On the other hand, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), taken as signifiers of something that exists in the digital realm, while pointing to reality, render the physically lived reality a referential one.

As will be argued, the tokenization of reality transforms values into symbols, and NFTs are the pointers to what is performable on an everyday level. In this sense, it can be examined the possibility of an NFT-induced psychogeography to encourage people to take action and approach their surroundings more consciously.

Through an intersection between Martin Heidegger's analysis of Van Gogh's "Pair of Shoes", Frederic Jameson's extension of the Heideggerian revelation of worlds through the artwork, Andy Warhol's "Dust Diamond Shoes," and its similarity to Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, it will be considered today's digital artwork, especially in the case of the "NFT sneakers".

In this sense, NFTs will be seen as both simulacra (as they are digital representations of physical objects that can be traded and valued on their terms) and a potential tool for a situationist *dérive*. As a matter of fact, the *dérive* involves walking through a city or other urban environment in a purposeful but unplanned way, allowing the environment, through external stimuli, to guide one's movement and observations. Such a technique was developed as a way to disrupt the dominant social order and create new ways of experiencing urban space. In this sense, the use of NFTs might be able to induce a psychogeographical experience as a contemporary form of the *dérive*, encouraging individuals to engage more consciously with their surroundings and to question the dominant narratives and structures that shape their everyday lives. It is also here that the question of the truth of reality loses importance, as it is evident that the task could rather become how to build one's everyday life through tools that can unveil alternative conditions of existence and question the dominant narratives and structures that shape their everyday life.

Keywords: digital culture, NFT, Situationist International, psychogeography, simulacra, commodity fetishism, life-world.

Can Music Engage the Contemporary?

G Douglas Barrett

Syracuse University

Is music capable of engaging the contemporary, understood as the coming together of multiple temporalities to create what the philosopher Peter Osborne calls an "overarching form of global crisis"? Much has been written on how contemporary art speaks to issues of globalization and transnational conflict. Artists such as Ai Weiwei, Otobong Nkanga, Walid Raad, and Chto Delat address a range of such issues. Beyond a modernist investment in the specificity of mediums like painting and sculpture, that is, these artists bring together conceptual, socially engaged, and research-based approaches to reflect on pressing geopolitical themes of the present. Meanwhile, today's art music (whether described as "new music" or "contemporary music") struggles with its status as a non-conceptual art form that inherits its identity from aesthetic modernism and the West's tradition of written musical scores. Furthermore, as opposed to contemporary art's global scale evinced in the international biennial circuit, art music's identity remains archetypically tethered to the qualifier "Western." So, how can art music engage global contemporaneity?

This paper discusses global contemporary artists who use music to reflect on the contemporary condition. Listen to Berlin-based Nigerian artist Emeka Ogboh's

"The Song of the Germans," which consists of African refugees singing the German national anthem in their first language. Imagine Allora and Calzadilla's "Clamor," a sculptural bunker in which musicians perform a collage of historical and contemporary war songs. Or consider Emily Jacir's "Entry Denied," a video documenting a concert by a Palestinian Austrian musician who was refused entry to Jerusalem for a performance. While such works have appeared throughout contemporary art institutions, studies that account for their musicality remain lacking. Disciplinary divides between music studies and art history suggest one explanation. Another is that, despite formulations of musical postmodernism that emerged during the 1990s, art music has yet to settle on a coherent concept of itself after modernism. "Musical contemporary art" is my attempt to redress this lacuna. The term refers to practices that use music as site, subject, or form while incorporating the above-mentioned conceptual, socially engaged, and research-based approaches of contemporary art. These practices challenge the formal boundaries of music while producing discursive meaning that impinges on social life, institutions, and any number of non-musical fields. Ultimately, such music, I argue, is capable of genuinely engaging the contemporary.

Cultural object, Ai and the artist agency

Eleonora Bolsi

University of Malta

According to Aristotle, we can define a practice as "poesis" within a productive context or as "praxis" if the agent behind it is part of a transformative and subjective process of meaning-making through his or her practising. On the opposite side, Griswold (1994) has called "cultural object" a shared significance embodied in form.

Starting from these definitions, this paper explores the issues in the new dimension of making culture through AI-based programs, such as MidJourney for images and Soundraw for music. These generative AI programs are indeed supposed to assist humans in the making of cultural objects. But the belief that generative AI programs simply give help to an art creator seems misleading at least for two reasons.

The first issue relies on the agency of a cultural object, that is to say, whether it is the art creator the exclusive author of such works or, on the contrary, the final product is a match between the intentionality behind the idea of the artwork and the unintentional but massive contribute to its generation offered by the AI. With generative AI art programs, it is hard to split into parts the art-making process, and, on the contrary, the final artwork extends itself to a multiplicity of different agents. The starting agent should be the one with an idea to be developed, but, as a user, he or she is the final committee of the artwork, starting from raw material, like a text, a previous picture or a sound. The second agent, the Ai, is an unconventional agent of its own: not only it produces the artwork offering pre-modelled styles and thus taking part

in making the cultural object within algorithmic framing, but it also suggests new texts that suit better the process of art-making, rewriting the intentions of the starting agent. In addition, the use of sample or pre-models that mimic famous artist works, reducing them in scripts, like a Beethoven-style symphony or a Cubist picture, suggests a hidden agency behind the modelling, i.e., the original protagonists of the Cubist movement or the musician Beethoven.

This multiple agency casts shadows on identifying the agent as a subject or a group of subjects, because the definition of subjects as "who" is impossible, and the object of art seems shared as a cultural object with no chance of property.

The second issue is the lack of context and contingency that takes part in the meaning-making of the cultural object itself. There is no physical space and no history behind the "poesis", so we can see the object of culture as defaced transferable knowledge. Making art in the dimension of the infosphere (Floridi, 2020) creates objects with no history, and thus objects in which the sense-meaning is multifaceted with no boundary of a society or an underground culture.

This is in contrast with the idea of multiculturalism as the point of contact of multiple cultures and perspectives, giving birth to a new dimension of culture as an infinite virtual sharing activity.

Toward a Compatibilist Theory of Aesthetic Evaluation

Graham Bounds

Central New Mexico Community College

In this paper, I argue that a canonical articulation of moderate moralism (MM) in the philosophy of art is consistent with a version of moderate autonomism, yielding the possibility of a compatibilist account of the relationship between the moral features of an artwork and aesthetic evaluations of it. I begin by reviewing and clarifying salient elements of the standard MM position, as specified by Noel Carroll, and resolve some ambiguities in ways sensitive to moralist intuitions. With the clarified explication of MM in mind, I then identify an existing candidate for compatibilism that emerges amid Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson's criticism of what they call "the moralistic fallacy." I show that their view, once understood in terms of a simple act-content distinction, issues in a moderate moralism with respect to acts of aesthetic evaluation. However, I argue that this form of MM ultimately remains too strongly moralistic and fails to live up to the autonomist inclinations that motivate it.

In its place, I propose a novel alternative. Applying a further, type-token distinction, the logical space allows for a weaker moderate moralism with respect to act-tokens of aesthetic evaluation. I argue that D'Arms' and Jacobson's position can be modified along these lines to avoid the criticisms levied against it and shore up its autonomist bona fides, all while maintaining consistency with the idea that the moral qualities of artworks can have bearing on their aesthetic evaluations. Further, I make the case that the resulting picture has a great deal of explanatory value with regard to immoral art and accounting for morally problematic cases of aesthetic response. Finally, I conclude with a brief exploration of what these results can teach us about the practice of assessing the normative status of tokens of evaluation or judgment generally, and what this says about the state of the contemporary discourse around not only the arts, but politics and culture at large.

Twenty Years of Malta's EU Membership: The Impact on Maltese Environmental NGOs

Michael Briguglio

University of Malta

In this study, the researcher analyses the impact of EU accession on Maltese Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOS), twenty years after Malta, the smallest EU-member state, joined the Union in 2004.

In the run-up to EU accession, the environment was often seen as an area which would benefit from Malta's EU membership, especially since Malta had a lack of environmental legislation and enforcement. Not surprisingly, Environmental NGOs (ENGOS) supported Malta's EU accession.

ENGOS are major protagonists in environmental politics in Malta. Their activism covers different areas, though some issues – most notably land development, and hunting of birds – are more visible and contentious in the public sphere. Environmental protest is also one of the most common types of protest in Malta (Briguglio, 2022).

Some environmental issues which concern ENGOS have a dimension which are at once international and European – the hunting of birds is a case in point. It is covered by comprehensive European legislation, particularly the birds and habitats directive, but is also very much influenced by antagonisms in Malta's polity, which, also included a referendum in 2015.

Some other environmental issues involving Maltese ENGOS are characterised by contention which is more visible at an EU level, such as climate change, which, though gaining increased visibility in Maltese society, has not been a prominent contentious issue at national level.

On the other hand, environmental issues related to the development of land are highly visible in Malta's public sphere – even because of Malta's small geographic land area – and are mostly sparred in the arena of national politics.

There are also other issues which though important from an environmental perspective and also covered by EU legislation, are less characterised by contention of the environmental movement. These include waste and water management.

In this paper, the researcher investigates the impacts of Malta's European Union (EU) accession on Environmental NGOs (ENGOS) through a sociological perspective, following two decades of Malta's accession.

For this purpose, the activism of ENGOS in relation to Malta's EU accession was analysed, through political process theory (Edwards, 2014; Johnston, 2014), and a social constructionist approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Hannigan, 2014), which engaged with the interpretations of the same ENGOS on the issue under analysis. For this purpose, primary data was collected through elite interviews with representatives from Malta's major ENGOS.

The main research question of this study is "how do ENGOS interpret the impacts of the EU, 20 years after Malta's accession?"

The study is a follow-up of a similar study by the same author following ten years of Malta's EU membership (Briguglio, 2015).

Reference:

Briguglio, M., 2015. Ten Years of Malta's EU Membership – The Impact on Maltese Environmental NGOs. Reflections of a Decade of EU Membership: Expectations, Achievements, Disappointments and the Future, Occasional Papers, Institute for European Studies (Malta), Volume 7.

Small Contentions on Minor Literature: Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida

Ivan Callus

University of Malta

In June 1921, Franz Kafka wrote a letter to Max Brod, with reflections on what he described as a minor literature and on what attributes such a literature might have. The letter prompts Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's book, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975). This paper discusses Kafka's letter and Deleuze and Guattari's book, arguing that the perspectives that emerge across both texts are deeply problematic in the context of contemporary

critique. The argument reads Deleuze and Guattari's book against Derrida's *The Monolingualism of the Other* (1996) and other related Derridean texts. Reference is also made to literary criticism on so-called small and minor literatures. In the process, some reflections – or provocations – are offered on certain assumptions at the heart of philosophy's and critique's centres, and on the cultures of commentary in those centres.

Love and Defiance: The Cultural Manifestation of Kurdish Resistance in Mem u Zin

Diya Dana

Rhenish Friedrich Wilhelm University of Bonn

A tale of love, adversity, and sacrifice that has resonated with Kurdish generations for ages comes from the depths of Kurdish history and culture. In addition to being a tragic love story, the Kurdish literary classic Mem u Zin also serves as a compelling emblem for the Kurds' fight for cultural recognition and self-determination. This timeless narrative illustrates the endurance and perseverance of people who have endured centuries of oppression and have managed to maintain their cultural uniqueness in the face of assimilation. The objective is to examine the significance of Mem u Zin's story to the contemporary Kurdish population as well as its themes of love and resistance.

The story's themes of tyranny, defiance and sacrifice are reminiscent of the Kurds fight for their political, linguistic, and cultural rights. The narrative illustrates the way in which the Kurdish people have adapted and maintained their cultural identity over time, despite centuries of outside influence and the deliberate effort to eliminate the Kurdish identity and culture.

In the contemporary context of the Kurdish struggle for political legitimacy and self-determination, Mem u Zin's tale is still pertinent. The folklore still serves as an inspiration for the Kurds despite their continued political and cultural marginalization in many parts of the Middle East. Mem u Zin is a powerful example of Kurdish tenacity

and endurance in the face of hardship, and generations of Kurds today still value it tremendously. Additionally, the Kurdish diaspora, comprising millions of Kurds who were forced to flee their native homeland because of persecution, conflict, and instability, has been crucial in propelling the Kurdish cause forward and assisting Kurdish political movements.

In Mem u Zin, Ahmed Khani's notion of Kurdish liberation acknowledges Kurdish cultural and moral independence, with cultural recognition as the key to freedom, rather than national political freedom, which he sees as unlikely. The prominent poet advocates for the end of what he labels as the Kurdish people's cultural and political subjugation, which he views as two interconnected manifestations of helplessness. He implores for spiritual guidance, emphasizing that cultural autonomy is tantamount to political sovereignty as it is rooted in a spiritual presence. This highlights the concept of love as a self-sufficient and enduring power that enables us to acknowledge Mem and Zin as being awakened and motivated by love. The narrative of Mem u Zin also lends itself to interpretation as an allegory of both human and divine love or can be seen as a metaphorical and literal tale of love. In the end, Mem u Zin transcends being a mere tale and stands as a testimony to the resilience of the human soul and the timeless influence of love.

Global Guardianship: A Provocation to Multi-Culturalism?

Roberto Debono

University of Malta

The urgency to address the global ecological crisis arguably requires the existence of a global guardian – a constitutionally limited legitimate coercive global authority – capable of enforcing binding global agreements. The idea of a coercive global authority evokes the fear of a global Leviathan – ‘a soulless despotism’ according to Immanuel Kant or, in Hans Morgenthau's words, ‘a totalitarian monster resting on feet of clay’. Multi-culturalism provokes or challenges the idea of global guardianship. There is the fear that the global guardian will be a world state of sorts, imposing uniformity of political and economic thought, and interfering excessively and

illegitimately in peoples' ways of life. There is a perceived tension between the need for urgent, coordinated and global collective action to avert ecological catastrophe and multi-cultural values including the right for national self-determination. This paper argues that the world is already characterized by global homogenizing tendencies that erode multi-culturalism. Rather than stifle, the idea of global guardianship can ‘provoke’ – ‘urge’ or ‘call forth’ – states worldwide into calling for more effective and democratic forms of leadership which protect multi-cultural values and global pluralism.

Outsiders Within the Classroom: Cultural Literacy and Intercultural Communication in Thai and Japanese Schools

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Teaching is a culturally laden activity. In many schools systems around the world teachers are products of the same system within which they teach. This gives them an insider's perspective on the culture of schooling. They have knowledge of roles, rules, customs, language use, traditions, and values which an average member of their schools would understand. With the rise of globalization and the popularity of foreign language instruction, the number of teachers traveling to foreign countries has increased. Within education in Asia in particular, native speakers of foreign languages are used as language "experts" to improve foreign language instruction. These teachers are often not products

of the educational system within which they teach leading to issues related to cultural literacy and intercultural communication.

Using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), as developed by Milton Bennett, this research investigated issues related to cultural literacy and intercultural communication for foreign teachers in two countries within Asia: Thailand and Japan. This presentation will detail the results of interviews, illustrate similarities and differences between the two groups, and offer suggestions on possible ways to address problems.

J.R.R. Tolkien's Method of Contrasts

Robert Falzon

University of Malta Alumni

Is a multi-cultural society necessarily a fragmented society? If J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973) were alive today, he would probably reply in the negative.

The functioning multi-cultural reality within Tolkien's artistic creation stems from an appreciation of all languages and the belief that a language influences the world view of its speakers. For Tolkien, the stories were meant to sustain his invented languages, and the languages developed with the development of the stories. Different points of view in his mythological corpus point to different languages and hence, different values.

Tolkien's view of culture is a pluralist one that shuns domination and hoarding. He was described by his biographer as a man of contrasts. One such contrast is in his predilection for pagan literature and his firm Catholic faith. His works allow us to see how such contrasts were integrated harmoniously. In an ever-changing Europe, Tolkien's method can help us in living contrasting cultures harmoniously rather than in fragments.

Unshackling Narratives: A Greenean Approach to Multicultural Education

Luke Fenech

University of Malta

This paper explores Maxine Greene's view on multicultural education, concerning multicultural narratives in educational contexts often located at the periphery, at times due to their 'provoking' nature. Such representation of narratives is in line with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's plea to oppose the Single Story; to 'unshackle' stories from socio-political bigotries, and ultimately, to be able to imagine the other. By examining Greene's work on multicultural education and social justice, this paper highlights the importance of cultural diversity and the role of the arts in fostering empathy and understanding across cultural boundaries.

At the heart of Greene's approach was the idea that education should be a transformative experience that enables individuals to develop their imagination, question traditions, and become active participants in creating more just societies. She believed that education should not simply transmit knowledge

from one generation to the next; it should instead engage students in a process of critical reflection and dialogue that encourages them to question their assumptions and to engage with others who hold different perspectives. Greene argued that aesthetic experiences, such as reading literature, viewing art, or listening to music, can help individuals to transcend their perspectives and to empathise with others. By engaging with diverse cultural traditions and perspectives, individuals can develop a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the narratives around them. Greene also emphasised the importance of critical reflection and dialogue in education. She believed that educators should encourage students to question prejudices and to engage in open dialogue with the other. For Greene, by engaging in this kind of critical reflection and dialogue, by 'unshackling' the restraints placed on narratives, students are at a better chance of becoming effective agents of social change.

Hope, Hostility and Hospitality: An Analysis on the El Hiblu 3

Francesco Frendo

University of Malta

This paper reflects on the El Hiblu 3 case to explore the provocative encounter between the migrant as a newcomer within the social and legal system of the respective hosting state. In effect, it examines the symbiotic and dialectical relationship between, on the one hand, the ontological formation of migrant subjectivity and, on the other hand, the forces of the socio-political structure. Adopting Derrida's analysis on the irrevocable tension between the binary terms 'hospitality' and 'hostility', it will be shown how hostility serves as a necessary condition for hospitality. Hospitality is inextricably related to hostility since it is contingent upon the selective access and demands of the hosting state upon the newcomer.

Accordingly, reflections on the El Hiblu 3 demonstrate how hospitality of the state serves as a tool of hostile exclusion, domination and conformity to grant any form of desired 'status' by the Other.

However, while Derrida maintains that there is an inherent impossibility between the hospitality and the hostile forces of the state, I argue that it is this very impossibility that

places hope as the protagonist towards the negotiation, reconstruction and navigation of subjective processes. Legal uncertainty inflected by the hostile state produces a sense of vulnerability that is crystalized by hope towards an open future. Uncertainty is dynamic, externally forced and mechanically orchestrated. Simultaneously, the indefinite waiting characterises a narrative of hope based on a collective imaginary and possible new future. Consequently, it will be argued that the case of the El Hiblu 3 exposes how the newcomer reveals the legal conditions and hostile forces of the state, but, simultaneously discloses a radical and collective relatability by means of the narrative of hope. Therefore, rather than focusing on a philosophy of 'difference', this paper advances an ethics of 'sameness' through the phenomena of hope. The narrative of hope is thus to be conceptualised as a social and collective consciousness that that transgresses state borders and the potentialityof the uncertain future.

Contemporary culture between individual creativity, collective unconscious and artificial intelligence

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Municipality of Florence

In today's information society, the centrality of the "certainties" of a "strong" thought has now given way to a gnoseological pulverization and a dramatic existential precariousness. The liquid society (Bauman) and the cognitive horizon made up of electrical signals and 24/24-hour connection cause fragility, inconsistency, pallor in contemporary man. Humanity is experiencing a period of strong epistemological, ethical and spiritual disarray. It is important to refocus culture and education on reading in order to structure strong individual identities, otherwise digital natives will get lost among videogames, tablets, touchscreens and the thousands of tertiary sensory devices. Their knowledge comes more and more from the web as a fluid space, less and less from "paper" books. New forms of socialization create loneliness, anxiety and emptiness in young people. The web is a threat to the mneme. A philosophical approach to knowledge is urgent today. Cultural heritage is transformed into a digital ecosystem based on relationships. The digital transition is irreversibly changing the ways and worlds of information, communication and culture. The transition from the alphabetic to the digital infosphere marked a passage from a conjunctive cognitive model to a connective model, transforming social behavior and individual psychological expectations. Today's dilemma is between "strong" thinking and "weak" thinking. Recalling the absolute and its presumed "necessity" today are reactionary tendencies, "theocon" movements and fundamentalisms of various kinds. New digital content is created at an unprecedented rate, re-created, remixed by Artificial Intelligence, can be shared and distributed worldwide

in a nanosecond, all of which have repercussions on the concept of data ownership and ownership. The gap between contemporaneity, as a horizontal/synchronic dimension of the web, and history, as a vertical/diachronic dimension, is becoming ever wider. The exponential and unstoppable development of clouds seriously threatens individuals' ability to memorize. To avert this risk, it is necessary to return to the classical paideia. As a librarian and sensitive intellectual, I am inclined towards a cultural relativism that opposes and wards off any "strong" digital thought, underlying a culture and a technique "without identity" and without paideia. I'm rather resistant to definitive choices.

Our adventure as human beings (living, thinking, and conscious) is born and organized first on the skin. The "I-skin" is an absolutely permeable envelope (in parallel with the transparent society). It is in this metaphorical "skin-ego" that the vital organs of contemporary knowledge are contained: for those who believe, there is also the soul there. The skin as a place of passage and encounter, a filter but also a barrier, an impregnable or welcoming frontier, a receptacle of sensations, an area of received/given pleasure/pain, a gateway to reality. If C.G. Jung theorizes collective memory, De Kerckhove, Mc Luhan's follower, introduces the concept of the digital unconscious, where Knowledge, as a product of the consumer society, becomes a new process of global participation in knowledge. But the skin, in nature, transforms, crumbles, ages, dies. Like humans, like civilizations.

Ethical considerations regarding depictions of care in advertising texts

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Care is a fundamental experience in human life that is constantly present and shape-shifting throughout every person's life. Nonetheless, care is a concept with a long, but very discrete presence in the philosophical history. Even though care is an essential experience for human beings, it has traditionally occupied a secondary role in the history of conceptual investigation.

The starting point for my paper is the fact that care is a value that is nowadays efficiently used in advertising. The complex archetypal image of the caregiver sets a framework that is appealing for the various advertising messages that revolve around the concept of care. The assumption underlying my investigation is the idea that, as Douglas Kellner states, the advertisements can be read as social texts that answer to the development lines specific for the period in which they are created. (Douglas Kellner, *Cultura media*, 2001) Thus, the paper proposes an investigation of the different representations of care in advertising, which can vary from the care for oneself, to the care for the others or for the entire world. In order to better grasp their meaning and also their impact, I will focus in the first part of the paper on the different layers of the concept of care. To that end, I will describe the

major directions that mark the philosophical approaches of care, focusing particularly on the addresses coming from the ethics of care, with a special attention for the perspective proposed by Carol Gilligan (Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 2003), Nel Noddings (Nel Noddings, *Starting at home*, 2002) or Daryl Koehn (Daryl Koehn, *Rethinking Feminist Ethics*, 2001). I will emphasize that the significance of care as the core concept of a relational and contextual ethics described by the authors mentioned above is of particular relevance for the usage of care in advertising texts. Another defining aspect of the approach I propose is the inherent duality of the concept of care that comes from the fact that care is understood, on the one hand as a burden, and on the other hand as solicitude.

The interest of advertising towards the value of care receives a special connotation in the context of the development of a new trend which consists in the embedding of activist messages in advertisements. In this framework, my investigation will concentrate on the multiples usages of care both as a tool that enforces the traditional gender stereotypes, and as a central point of a more progressive direction present in advertising, that questions and even attacks the gender stereotypes.

On why it may make sense (even in democratic terms) to have certain decisions taken by a computer rather than the electorate

Michael Grech

University of Malta

One feature of modern liberal democracies since the 1990s has been the process whereby the procedure of democratically electing one's government involves choosing between parties that are fundamentally identical in relation to ideology and major issues. The paper argues that in a situation where: (i) A system of voter registration is in place. (ii) One can establish that different political parties representing at least 60% of the electorate or more share fundamentally the same political programs, world view and contents. it makes more sense to have the electoral outcome determined by a computer, rather than by staging an actual election. The two (or more) parties that are alike in relation to their vision and proposals, and which represent 60% or more of the electors registered, would present a list of candidates – including the would-be Prime Minister and Ministers – to a computer. In light of the criteria on how the run the country the parties would share, and the desirable characteristics candidates should possess to implement these policies, the machine would

decide the electoral team that would run the country. This system has the following advantages over staging an actual election: (a) A computer is not susceptible to be bribed or corrupted. (b) The computer would also not take into considerations irrelevant or positively harmful features like rhetoric, appearance, or popularity. (c) It would not suffer psychological pressure nor be susceptible to demagoguery or charisma without content. It would focus only on content and character. (d) It would provide an incentive to political parties to field the best candidates, not the most popular one. (e) It will still be democratic because the computer decision would only take place if two or more ideologically-similar parties are representative of preferences and values of a significant majority of the electorate; preferences, choices and values expressed in their registering with one of a number of parties that share a particular view of the world and endorse policies that are fundamentally similar. The demos would still be ruling.

New Trends and Innovative Approaches within Shi'ah Research in Advanced Shi'ah Seminaries [Hawzahs] dealing with various Cultural-Modern Human Rights Applications

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Shi'ah Muslims were not as quick as Sunnis to accommodate independent reasoning and methodical research within Islamic jurisprudence. Not so far is the discussion of having a modern and accommodating jurisprudence that should provide the feasible options for the post-modernism problems faced by mankind. Whether in the form of modern interpretation of the sacred texts, or in ways as how to form a social and logical pattern for the approach of twenty first century, one is inclined to summarize the new trends and innovative approaches that are ongoing within the Shi'ah Advanced Seminaries in both Iran and Iraq.

Generally speaking there are three approaches in consideration of the approaches: 1) Stagnated Approach, 2) Assimilating approach with Western values, 3) Moderation approach.

One has no doubt that the first two approaches are doomed to failure. One has also no doubt that the third approach is the inevitable option that ought to be espoused; whether it is related to a current issue, a social issue, or a legal issue, a political matter or a case pertaining to modern art, one has to be flexible and present more workable and humane solutions. Let us consider two profound innovated approaches that I've presented in two International conferences: A) The Linguistic and B) the legal! One is now inclined to add the holistic approach that may accommodate the entire modification and modernization of the corpus of the Shari'ah rulings.

Within the first example (A): Linguistically one has adopted the Intonation rules and indications as signs to point at the direct reading of the sacred text (Presented in Mofid University Conference for Human Rights in Qum, 2005). The theory is already developing and we're expecting the results and fruits.

On (B) one may refer to my moderating theory that was demonstrated during the Oslo University, Faculty of Law, entitled: The International Conference on 'Law and Society in the 21st Century- The functions of Law in a Global Society- Oslo, 2014'. One has highlighted the fundamental relationship between Islamic Shari'ah Law and the Universal Human Rights declaration. There are differences observed amongst the Shi'ah scholars. Their differences lie in the methodological approach of Human Rights and its relationship to Islamic Shar'iah Law and can be summarized in three positions. They are as follows:

- The Traditionalists: are represented as those particularly zealous or doctrinaire supporters of a classical but also literal ideological interpretation of sacred texts, like the late S. Abu 'Ala al-Mawdudi, amongst the Sunnis, and the contemporary scholar amongst Shi'ahs, namely Shaikh Muhammad Jawad F. Lankarani, who aims at rejecting the fundamental principles of UDHR.
- The Western influenced thinkers: are represented by many figures of the Islamic World, who adopt the Western view on UDHR, but also alter the Islamic sacred text to become fully compliant with the UDHR.
- The moderate accommodating Group: This approach is espoused and modified by the author of this article, albeit it has been narrated from the late -martyr of Iraq during S. Hussain's reign- S. Muhammad Baqir As-Sadr. My aim and research plan was to accommodate a modern and Islamic Shari'ah interpretation that can be demonstrated with feasible options for the Twenty-first Century at the same time that can be justified through the technical terms and the applied principles and relevant methodology implemented amongst high rank scholars.

Depression beyond the Hegemony of Problem-Solving Culture

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Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar

In his 'Anathemas and Admirations', Emil Cioran has left us what is maybe the most sublime account of depression: 'There exists, I grant you, a clinical depression, upon which certain remedies occasionally have an effect; but there exists another kind, a melancholy underlying our very outbursts of gaiety and accompanying us everywhere, without leaving us alone for a single moment. And there is nothing that can rid us of this lethal omnipresence: the self forever confronting itself.'

To prevent any misunderstandings, this paper does not claim that mental illness does not exist. Neither have the most productive of anti-psychiatrists made such a naïve claim. For example, reflecting on his critique of positivist psychiatry, Franco Basaglia made it perfectly clear that 'this does not mean, as is sometimes misunderstood, that mental illness does not exist and that psychiatry or medicine should not take fundamental human processes into account. It means that illness, as a sign of a human contradiction, can be used within a system of exploitation and privilege.' Bearing this in mind, the paper claims that a human contradiction can never be resolved as the self is indeed forever confronting itself, bringing about the depression that is underlying our entire existence, thus always being there for us. This is the depression of a sort that cannot be cured but it might be expressed as a part of our culture and this very expression of a condition that is underlying our existence might as well have a certain therapeutic quality. There are no guarantees

though, however the ultimate aim of social sciences and humanities, as the paper argues, is at any rate to express rather than resolve our existence. Expressing our existence is unfortunately largely foreign to contemporary academia as universities are nowadays all about formulating those research questions that will eventually result in policy recommendations and, despite its obvious falseness, yet another promise of progress via science. Rather than expressing our existence, universities are busy celebrating the problem-solving culture. Or, to put it more precisely, as they are amusingly unsuccessful in this 'management' business, universities in contemporary society serve as nothing but a fig leaf to cover the ideology of the Enlightenment. It is instructive to learn, even if only from the footnote by the editor of Basaglia's writings, that 'during the years of Basaglia's anti-institutional work, few psychiatrists who trained with him and other democratic psychiatrists returned to teach in the universities. The lessons from their alternative practices have not been incorporated into university training, creating the problem of passing on knowledge'. Elevating this remark above the status of a footnote and to the level of a social phenomenon that it indicates, the paper explores the following question: what is it not only in contemporary academia but also our culture that makes it as incapable of understanding depression as anything but a problem standing in the way of our progress and thus about to be measured, managed and resolved?

Cultures as Galaxies

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In order to explore the intersectionality of human embodiment, touch, and culture it may be useful to conceptualize cultures as galaxies. The former method of conceptualization is essentially an allegory. Let me hint at some of the fundamental constituents of the allegory of culture as a galaxy. There are billions on human beings on our planet; each human being may be seen as a solar system. Those solar systems form clusters of families or their immediate communities, and out of the former emerge galaxies. Therefore, the universe of our planet consists of myriads of cultural galaxies.

Several themes emerge within the aforementioned allegory: I propose to explore especially the proximity and distance as well as the renewed focus on human embodiment, utilizing the narrative used by the natural sciences (in particular, biology and astrophysics.)

Integrating Japanese culture into English education for global talent development: Volunteering at the library

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This study focuses on the integration of Japanese culture into English education as a means to foster global talent. The tea ceremony has the educational effect of fostering intellectual and moral sentiments. At the same time, the tea ceremony can be used as Total Physical Response (TPR) materials because it involves movement. Also, it can be used as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) materials if the focus is on the content of the tea ceremony. The tea ceremony is also an excellent subject matter from the perspective of "a means of cultivating Japanese identity" in a global society. Origami is another traditional Japanese culture that is ideal as a TPR because it allows students to learn English while moving. Thus, this study aimed to create YouTube videos on Japanese culture (tea ceremony and origami) in English, incorporate them into English classes at universities, and see how the students felt about it. A total of 312 university students from four private universities in the Tokyo metropolitan area participated. The teachers gave the assignments (learning Japanese culture using videos). Students were required to write at least 200 Japanese characters and submit their impressions of what they had learned before the next class. Learner evaluation using the ARCS motivational model proposed by Keller (1983) was conducted to test whether English activities incorporating Japanese culture would motivate students to learn. For the free-text analysis (impressions of each assignment and the questionnaire survey conducted at the end of each session), KH Coder, a quantitative text analysis

software was used. More than 70% of the participants felt that learning English through Japanese culture was fun, rewarding, satisfying, and confidence-building. In the free-writing responses, many positive expressions such as "fun," "interesting," "happy," and "fresh" were frequently used. The results suggest that the "Japanese Culture in English" YouTube videos created in this study were educational materials that stimulated the students' spirit of inquiry.

Furthermore, as part of this study, some of the students who participated in this program conducted volunteer activities at libraries in Japan, where they showcased their achievements by teaching Japanese children about Japanese culture in English. Through these volunteer activities, the students not only gained valuable teaching experience but also developed their communication and leadership skills. They learned to adapt their language use to effectively convey cultural concepts. Additionally, the Japanese children had the opportunity to learn about their own culture from an international perspective, promoting a sense of cultural pride and understanding. This experience of volunteering at Japanese libraries proved to be a significant and impactful way for the students to showcase their achievements in the program and contribute to the local community. It reinforced their language proficiency and cultural competence while fostering meaningful connections between the students and the children.

Philosophical Concerns of Increased Gun Violence in the United States, as Provocation within Culture and Politics.

Stacey Mitchell

Unitarian Universalist Association

In my paper and presentation, I will reflect if increased gun ownership is more compatible with nationalism than democracy in the United States. With nationalistic sentiments on the rise, including the United States, I will analyze the dominant nature of gun rights in the United States, the statistics of increased gun violence in the United States, and the reluctance of politicians to legislate gun ownership. Within this analysis, I will present cultural influences within the United States that have contributed to certain statistics currently observed in the United States, such as almost 200 mass shootings by the end of April for year 2023 and having one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world.

As a liberal religious minister in the United States, I will not only look at the rise of nationalism, but Christian nationalism, and how this is defined relative to liberal Christianity, particularly liberation theology (whether Christian, Buddhist, or Unitarian). Liberation theology, in general, is the idea that one cannot be free, until all are free, particularly the most marginalized in society.

I will assess the spiritual underpinnings of the United States at the beginning of the nation, yet with a focus on recent evolution in the last 25 years. How is the violence within gun ownership a snapshot of a bigger issue within American culture? What changed since the 1990s to give

nationalistic philosophies a larger platform by 2016? I will look at some of the philosophical views of nationalism and how they contrast to certain philosophical views of democracy, and how the rise of gun ownership can be a contributing influence, with gun ownership being allowed to expand in recent years due to the 2nd Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.

I will review certain philosophical and religious thinkers of America over the centuries such as John Dewey and A. Powell Davies. John Dewey stated that democracy involves "a consultation and a discussion which uncovers social needs and troubles." A. Powell Davies, a Unitarian Theologian who was influential during WWII and integrated philosophies of democracy with liberal religion, stated "For the faith upon which democracy is based is the victory of truth over superstition, of liberty over servitude, of the universal over the provincial, of love over fear." I will share conclusions of how these ideals of Dewey and Davies are at odds with increased gun violence.

My paper and presentation will focus on the spiritual undertones of political culture in the United States, with growing nationalistic sentiments that have been on the rise in the last three decades. I will share conclusions of what could be results and threats of the provocation of nationalism and fear through increased gun violence.

Drag as Provocation? Radicality and Banality on Stage and Screen

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Université de Poitiers

Nowadays it may seem that drag culture is omnipresent in Anglo-Saxon cultural popular culture, hardly a month goes by without a series of RuPaul's Drag Race or one of its spin offs. While drag is being accepted into the mainstream, winning prestigious television awards such as the Emmys, we are also witnessing a rise in anti-drag rhetoric and violence across the UK, US and France. Drag queen Storytime has been targeted by right wing political groups in all countries and laws have been passed limiting the access of children to drag events.

Such a reception of drag seems to portray it as fundamental provocative. Drag is a provocation that calls into questions the norms of a given society that has founded itself upon a strict and exclusive gender binary. But are things so, or is it merely that the horizon of expectations (Iser: 1976, Jauss: 1978, Starobinski: 1978) of the modern societies in which we live have changed compared to previous iterations of cross-dressing on stage and screen (boy actors in Shakespearian times, pantomime dames in 20th century England, comedians on television in the 70s and 80s...)?

Drawing upon the work of Judith Butler, I will attempt to set the framework for a reading of drag as provocation through a transcendental analysis. *Id est*, I will attempt to analyse the conditions of possibility of drag appearing as a provocative art form and question the validity of such a blanket statement in today's society.

For Butler (*Gender Trouble & Bodies That Matter*), drag is not only deconstructive, putting forward the frailty and

artificiality of gender norms. Rather it always navigates in an in-between, an ambiguity which allows it to deconstruct but also reinforce:

At best, it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one that reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes. (*Bodies that Matter*, p. 384)

How then is drag a provocation? It is seen as such from a double angle, both in its parodic and imitative nature. As a parody, drag calls into question norms that we do not wish to see in society, unconscious rules of how a « woman » should be and behave (whether this is sufficient to destroy said norms is not necessary for us to consider a provocation here). As a pastiche, or imitation, drag also presents norms without questioning them, provoking certain AFAB individuals to consider it a form of misogyny (bell hooks: 1992; Hobson: 2013).

However, the representation of drag, on stage and screen, also seems provocative in another sense, provocative regarding the culture from which it stems and the groups that compose it. The representation of drag is overwhelmingly that of white cis drag queens. Kings, creatures, aliens, trans performers, POC performers... are vastly outnumbered on screen. Is this not also a provocation of those who wish to render drag mainstream against its own culture? Wherever we turn, drag is provocation.

Engineering the Concept of 'Person': the Principle of Procreative Beneficence Revisited

Irene Olivero

University of Genoa, Italy

When Hilary Putnam (1975) and Saul Kripke (1980) formulated their metasemantic theory, they suggested that terms such as 'person' apply in a certain way. In their view, 'person' applies to whatever has the same "nature" as what we have paradigmatically dubbed by that term. By claiming so, Kripke and Putnam implicitly endorse that all persons share an essence (a genetic makeup), that such essence has somehow natural boundaries, and that these boundaries define what a person is. These are descriptivist metaphysical and semantic accounts. By contrast, a recent trend in philosophy, i.e., conceptual ethics or conceptual engineering, claims that our terms and concepts, especially those with social, legal, and ethical implications, such as the one of "person," should be "engineered." That is, they should be normatively improved (cf. Plunkett 2013, 2015; Capellen et al. 2020) and applied according to rules customized ad hoc for these concepts can serve a better function for our society (cf. Haslanger 2012). What counts is not how the term is applied but how it should be applied. In bioethics, some prominent discussions on abortion may be classified and divided analogously between descriptivists and normativists accounts. The former views hold that what matters is whether the fetus is or not a person, basing their claims about the moral permissibility of abortion on the

scientific community's findings. By contrast, normativists ground their ethical claims on abortion based on considerations about what we should do even when the fetus is to be considered a person. Along similar lines, here I aim to defend a metanormativist position. What should matter in debates concerning the moral permissibility of abortion is not whether the fetus is a person or should be considered one, but what we should do considering the person that fetus would become, and the life it would live were it to be born. What should count is how we ought to act based on what possible life that fetus might live, given the information we have available at the beginning of the pregnancy. Adapting Julian Savulescu's (2001) principle of procreative beneficence, I argue accordingly that couples (or single reproducers) should not be deemed immoral if they were to decide to procure an abortion if they expect their future child to have a painful, terrible life (evaluated on several factors), based on the relevant, available information they have at that time. To this extent, I claim that in the absence of some other pressing reason for action, a person who has, to the mentioned relevant extent, a good reason not to have a child is not morally blameworthy for not bringing that (potential) child into existence.

The Qur'an and Post-modernism Dilemmas: Education Methods and Dynamic Understanding

Leila Pourzarrin

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The modern age despite its vast variety of communications, different Cultural interactions and technological tools, the rapid approach of life incidents that ought to form a variety of welfare and prosperity equipment have unfortunately caused more problems.

The post-modern age, with all its equipment, has not been able to meet the needs of spiritual and psychological well-being for the younger generations. In today's world one observes the problems and remains paralysed about how to resolve them once the younger generation encounter them. These problems are sometimes so vast and epidemic that regardless of borders, colour, prosperity or poverty of classes, their destructive effects, negative developments and decreasing progress is contrastingly massive. Here, issues and topics are discussed, such as pessimistic futures and encountering gloomy destiny, effecting mental schizophrenia, mental disorder, anxiety, fear and/or facing empty lives or lacking tranquillity and peace and so on etc. The Holy Qur'an's claims of being able to demonstrate complete guidance and eternal happy life-styles, are unfortunately often neglected while its resolving techniques that pave the way for thoroughly solving post-modernist dilemmas, are ignored.

In this type of Qur'anic workshop, the attempt is to resolve some of the modern issues and concerns, related to youth problems, and to review them through a dynamic understanding considering the Qur'anic teachings and its suggested approaches. In this method, the workshops: interpretation, the exegetic information, linguistic analysis and sporadic field-work data are accommodated. The result is that the Holy Qur'an -as an immortal book, that

with its feasible solutions to be implemented in any era- would be revived shaping new educational methods, to solve the needs and provide answers for issues of the world today. This form of workshop has some distinctive features that enable the participants to be convinced through rational arguments, far from prejudice, and bias, while simultaneously implementing scientific and neutral premises.

In this method, after stating the issue, highlighting the diversity and different opinions, a couple of relevantly selected verses of the Qur'an, applicable to post-modern issues and challenging topics especially captivating for youths are presented. A concise comprehensive elaboration and exegesis of the verse are, then, discussed. Sporadically, one would be inclined to refer to related historical examples, which have been mentioned in one of the stories of the prophets (as), concerning communities involved with the matter where the issues were dealt with! There are dozens of verses that have been highlighted and thoroughly discussed in the Qur'an dealing with the subject of 'destiny' or "changing the fate and living conditions". The materials of the workshops are presented through interpreting the verses, referring to other quotes and theories from related challenging groups. Their opinions are reviewed and re-examined without considering their contents, leading the participants to reach neutral results. Continuing with opposing and disagreeing comments from celebrities and famous people about those topics, shall elevate the workshop to a global perspective while rethinking post-modernism world dilemmas in order to reach the final humane conclusions.

The Demon of Posthumanist Philosophy

David Roden

Independent

Taking my cue from Eugene Thacker's *Horror of Philosophy* Trilogy, I want to consider whether there is a non-generic horror, perversion, or transgression intrinsic to posthumanism and speculative philosophy more generally: the horror being the iterative derangement of the philosophizing subject, not only as a theoretical posit but practically, as an agent capable of shaping and articulating its desires. This horror, I will argue, is also erotic or pornographic because it is xenophilic, expressing an impersonal need for derangement or extinction that, like Cronenberg's venereal parasites, proliferates under the skin, and under Human 'person suit'. It is an avatar of the death drive without, it seems, a plausible path to ethical or political redemption. I will consider here some contrasts and affinities with Bataille's notions of transgression, sovereignty, and eroticism, arguing that xenophilia is not transgressive per se and cannot be assimilated within a biological or psychoanalytic conception of the libido. Transgression implies a human conscious subject and a normativity that is confirmed even in its ecstatic or sovereign cancellation. Xenophilia, on the other hand, operates in a biomorphic field in which

the instrumental elimination of the norm, of the subject is conceivable through the figure of the hyperagent, in which agency is augmented beyond the point that the agent is interpretable or intelligible as agent.

In the second part of this talk, I want to consider how adopting the shamanic perspective of the Demon itself can help us read an exemplary work of horror cinema. In this case Julia Ducournau's *Titane* (2021). I will argue that we should see this movie not as art but as a kind of pornographic sorcery: an invocation of the Demon's catastrophic-xenophilic lines of flight. This movement that, as in the film, implies a fluid, non-subjective violence and intimacy that is indifferent to transgression or to structures of sexual difference. I will finish by discussing whether this repossesses the demon for Philosophy in a way that vitiates it, or whether it invokes an intimacy with xenophilic processes without a plausible case for exorcism. I will argue that the only workable strategy for exorcism here is a counter-demonic repudiation of modernity, and that, whatever the alienness of the vectors it implies, we have good reason to eschew that path.

Jazz Performance as Contested Immanent Durational "Space" Between Culture and Cognition

Martin E. Rosenberg

FOREIGN OBJEKT

In past work I have addressed the cultural differences in the cognition of time between classical music and jazz performance, as well as the complicit interactions between these musical cultures that are visible even in music notation. Furthermore, I have suggested how the processes of cognitive bifurcation that exemplify jazz improvisation offer a form of "neuro-resistance" to dominant global networks identified with what some now call "cognitive capitalism." Jazz performance seems to embody several principles exemplifying the sciences of "emergence" or self-organization: irreversibility, immanence, bifurcation and feedback. These attributes distinguish this practice from forms of cognition associated with Western European culture, and align that practice with cognitive processes associated more with Third World cultures. Yet it has also embraced all the complexities of theory and practice associated with

classical music, so that the question emerges: how do jazz musicians create spontaneously, seemingly without forethought, while engaged with highly complex, sophisticated conceptual content. In my further analysis of the embodied and enactive cognitive processes involved in jazz improvisation, distinguishing between practice and performance, I have located points where three coexisting forms of time cognition come into contact in such a way as to interfere with negatively or amplify positively jazz performance, with "getting lost" a significant symptom of the former. In this paper, I would like to foreground the irreversible, immanent (and yet heterogenous) field of jazz performance as a contested cognitive realm, which remains unstable, vulnerable to cultural interferences, and yet, strives to reach a point of cross-cultural integration worthy of emulating in other domains of artistic, not to mention philosophical practice.

'Provocation-Interflow': A conceptual methodology making sense of contemporary madness

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This paper discusses how the Provocation-Interflow method of analysis, which forms part of an aesthetic-geo-historical bracket, instigates a reverse geo-chrono-topic evaluation.

Appropriating Bakhtinian-Adornian terminology, the paper introduces a vertical-diagonal chronotopic-durée methodology. Provocation manifests the vaccine-syndrome, injecting the negative to combat the negative. This was the role that de-philosophised façade Modernism played in subverting Modernism. The counter-perspective is the reaction against this vaccine. I will be engaging with methods of class provocation directed at sustaining hegemony by introducing a cultural vaccine to make the culture of the 'other' immune to itself. This is made up of two components: the spatial dimension which studies the relationship art has with the multi-level spatial flow, and the temporal dimension accentuating its Bergsonian-Proustian 'durée' dimension.

The paper discusses contemporary art theoretical methodologies: Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Keith Moxey, Jean-Michel Rabate, Edward Lucie-Smith, Elizabeth Prettejohn, Gabriel Josipovici, and Yve-Alain Bois. The idea of multiple modernities imposes the European Modern onto all non-European alternatives. Whilst it proclaims the need to pluralise experiences, due to different socio-geographic realities, it consolidates the European concept of modernity. The Action-Response Flow, despite its Poundian-Bakhtinian inter-connectedness, evades the Gramscian hegemonic aspect by-passing the fact that Modernism is a European class-concoction.

The paper confronts these with the North African anti-European provocation encapsulating the praxes of 'de-skilling-unlearning' that which had been imposed.

This evolved into Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, interpreted as Cézannesque-Picassian destructions. These echoed the Communist Constructivist beginnings in negating art which preceded the Russian Revolution, establishing an unlearning process from bourgeois culture deemed unfit for the new utopian homo sapiens.

The spectre of Modernism haunting Europe found itself besieged not only from 'internal' positions but also from 'without', through provocateur strategies. The role of the provocateur as one who purposely entices an action to abort rebellion, was previously taken up by artists from colonised territories who appropriated the culture of the colonising power to delete their own. European hegemonic 'civilising' expansion into non-European territories needed provocateurs for its programme exporting cultural conservatism.

Provocateur programming, however, provokes an anti-provocateur struggle. Anti-provocateurs, Baudelaire's 'flâneur' and Duchamp's 'embrayeur', which with the 'un-skilling-unlearning-retour aux sources' endeavour to bring method into contemporary madness engendered the twentieth-century Shakespearean cauldron fragmentation of Mediterranean interconnectedness. Intersecting the Heideggerian authenticity with that of Eliade's 'eternal return', and Bakhtinian utterance, the Megalithic-Vernacular-Calligraphic constellation ultimately established a Mediterranean 'Provocation-Interflow' re-connecting alternative.

This debate is entrenched with the ideas of 'aesthetic nomadism', 'characterlessness', 'narrativelessness's pollination', the 'interpenetration of iconographic sources', 'co-presence', 'polyphonic voices', 'extraterritoriality', and 'movement-time image'.

Dialogue and Forgiveness as Cultural Phenomena

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This conference paper will analyze a specific event in which an individual publicly spoke out and asked for forgiveness at the largest demonstration during the turning and turbulent events of 1989 in the former Czechoslovakia. This forgiveness event was later described by the philosopher and rector of Charles University, Radim Palouš, as the beginning of a new epoch. The experience of forgiveness was seen as absolutely crucial, and essential for the possibility of a new democratic culture.

In addition to the above analysis, the conference paper will follow the analysis of forgiveness made

by the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch to reflect on how it is possible to act in society so that forgiveness can happen.

Questions will be asked during the conference paper, such as: What is forgiveness? What is needed for forgiveness? How are forgiveness and culture related? How can one prepare oneself to be able to forgive? How can the ability to forgive help shape society and community? The paper will seek to answer these questions, using in particular phenomenological works on forgiveness.

Accomplishing Cultural Policy and the Use of AI in Cultural Participation

Valerie Visanich

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Accomplishing cultural policy is an activity-oriented way of encapsulating the long series of intertwined actions, stretching from the policy formulation process and popular engagement with the cultural and artistic products, events, services, to its intersections with science and technology. The lens here is on how some artistic productions as well as cultural participation are informed and enabled by the social, political, economic and technological parameters.

Drawing from my recent publication entitled *Accomplishing Cultural Policy* (co-edited with Christopher Mathieu) as well as my research on the use of Artificial Intelligence devices to measure cultural participation, this paper presentation aims at examining the intersections of the two. It builds an understanding of the accomplishing nature of cultural policy by focusing on the series of intertwined actions and the incorporation of technological devices in understanding cultural non-visitation by using AI-driven devices for monitoring visitors flow at the National Centre for Creativity in Malta.

This examination is couched in studies on audience development in relation to making sense of motivation and barriers for visitation. With the use of AI, the flow of persons around Spazju Kreattiv was charted and examined in relation to a survey spread over a period of five months. Thus, complementing the technological markers, strategically places to give a clear indication of the footfall of persons around the building, a sociological research based on a survey study was designed targeted

for persons within the same location. This study analysed responses from the surveyed population to understand reasons for visitation or non-visitation and in relation to whether respondents were residing in or visiting Malta. Respondents who were not residing in Malta and therefore considered as visitors to the Islands were subdivided in two categories: those who claimed that the visit to Malta was motivated by at least culture and those who claimed that the visit was not motivated by culture.

The scope of adopting a five-month period study was to outline any differences across different groups in perceptions and behaviour in summer as opposed to shoulder tourist seasons and winter. One of the main aims of this study was to obtain information on the propensity to visit Spazju Kreattiv.

Sociologically speaking, the motivations and barriers for visitation are multi-factorial for those who maintained that they visited, those who highly considered visiting, as well as those who claimed they had no intention to visit. This paper presentation aims at giving an overview of the salient findings of this research and explore how these findings and the research process itself sits in the discussion on the formulation of cultural policy, as an accomplishing and ongoing process. This AI research is a clear example of how policy has to be conceptualized and conceived in line with multiple levels across the arts and cultural landscape, including the constant input from various fields such as that of science and technology.

Social Media and the Rise of Influencers: The Voyeuristic, Sado-Masochistic, and Pornographic Socio-Economic Relations of Late Capitalism

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The point of origin of this paper is to attempt to read and comprehend the interdependent relationship of social media influencers and their followers. Albeit, being an economic relation, which revolves around the provision of services and monetary transactions; the influencer-follower relation is formulated and narrated as a personal and social relationship, shaped around authentic and human interactions. Without this narrative the very essence of the figure of the influencer becomes meaningless and empty, and loses all value.

I will argue that the relationship between influencers and followers has to be read in terms of the Hegelian dialectic of recognition. To further explicate the nature of the influencer-follower relation, I will utilise the work of authors like Georges Bataille and Gilles Deleuze. This paper will attempt to show that the essence of this dialectic is libidinal and built on forms of relations of power and

dominance of the other. I will contend that platforms like 'OnlyFans' are the explicit version of these qualities, and that in actual fact, all social media platforms are designed around voyeurism, sado-masochism, and pornography.

As a further development to this exposition, I will propose that the outline of this dialectic is the blueprint of the commodification of human relations under late capitalism. With reference to Fredric Jameson's logic of late capitalism, this paper will show that influencer-follower relations are the epitome of this logic through the commodification of desire and the human necessity of connectedness to others, and recognition by others. From here, I will try to explore what are the socio-political implications of this state of affairs, such as the development of radicalised categories like Incels or Men Going Their Own Way.

The Role and the Place of Religion in Modern Society: A Reevaluation

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Ever since the publication of Wilson's seminal work "Religion in Secular Society" in 1966, there continues to rage a heated debate on the fate of religious worldview in the setting of a modern secular state. Wilson brilliantly documented the ever-increasing secularization process in the 20th century Western societies, but stopped short from projecting these tendencies into the distant future, and, contrary to a common misunderstanding, never predicted the disappearance of religion altogether. In fact, he observed that the completely secularized society had not yet existed, and it remained to be seen whether social cohesion and public order could be maintained in a state devoid of any religious underpinnings. At the same time, the connection between modernization, political liberalism and secularization was taken by Wilson for granted. Almost sixty years after Wilson's work, we may want to reevaluate some of his claims and to take a second look at the assumption that, what we might call, a religious culture, and a secular culture make uneasy bedfellows, and that the latter is destined to erode and supersede the former.

I will attempt to make several points in this paper. First, I would like to expand the scope of Wilson's original focus, and to comment on the coexistence of secular cultures and religion in non-Western societies, in particular, in the Middle Eastern Muslim countries. Secondly, I would like

to address and explore the question of conflict. It is often assumed that secularism and a religious worldview are destined to clash, and a variety of historical anecdotes are cited to illustrate the intensity of the alleged conflict. I will attempt to show that the two worldviews need not be conceived as the two trains set on a collision course. Instead, it will be fruitful to describe secularism as an alternative cultural attitude which might exist, as it were, on a separate plane, alongside the religious worldview. The 'thickness' of these two cultural layers may indeed vary with a historical epoch and with a geographical locale, but both can make essential contributions to social cohesion and stability. Secondly, I will consider the phenomenon of the resurgence of religiosity – the reversal of secularization – the process which requires both a sociological explanation and a philosophical analysis. It will be argued that pure secularism is unable to fulfill a deeply ingrained human yearning for stable meaning and objective value, and for this reason the existence of a religion – even in the form of a vaguely acknowledged shared normative background with transcendental aspirations – is inevitable. In the end, Wilson's historical observation that a completely secularized society had not yet existed should be supplied by a philosophical affirmation that, barring some radical changes in human nature, such a society will never exist in the future.



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