

15th SLSAeu Conference “Literary and Aesthetic Posthumanism”

Bergen, Norway, March 4-7, 2021

New submissions deadline: 1 October

The 2005 Chicago meeting of the **International Society for Literature, Science and the Arts** was notable, in the first instance, for its addition of the ‘Arts’ into the organization’s ongoing conversations. Equally notable, on this occasion incoming scholars Stefan Herbrechter, Ivan Callus, Manuela Rossini, and Neil Badmington offered an influential panel on Critical Posthumanism, which started the transatlantic dialogue of the posthuman condition and posthumanist theory between the SLSA and what is now the **SLSAeu, the European sister organization** (founded in 2010, with its first meeting being held in Riga, in 2012 on the topic of “textures”).

Bearing in mind these literary and aesthetic roots, our upcoming meeting in Bergen calls for papers that revisit concepts and consiliences in literature, science, and aesthetics. While we welcome approaches that recognize the literal, material changes in literature and arts in a digital age, we hope also to continue and advance discussions of inherent uncertainties, along with possibilities that are more cognitive than instrumental. We will be featuring, in both our panels and an accompanying art exhibit, enactments of complex human-technical assemblages in which cognition and decision-making powers are distributed in both aesthetic and literary systems – what N. Katherine Hayles would call “cognitive assemblages” and what Laura Shackelford and Louise Economides call “surreal entanglements.” Shackelford and Economides have been focusing, of late, on the work of Jeff Vandermeer; Hayles, most recently on Tom McCarthy, Peter Watts, and Colson Whitehead. But there are many other emerging authors, artists, and cross-disciplinary practitioners who embed the self in a determinedly object oriented, multiply mediated yet nonetheless cognitive environment.

One outcome of the **2021 SLSAeu** gathering might be the identification of an emerging aesthetic and literary practice: one that is not so much newly experimental, avant, generic, or innovative, but part of an emerging, environmental and systems framework that is not containable by these essentially Humanist dispositions. While continuing the general integration of literary studies with science and the arts, we will also welcome critical artistic interventions. Among the **questions and topics** we hope to address in multiple, themed panels (and gallery exhibits) are these:

- the potentiality of artistic works as critical interventions.
- is it possible, after so many ‘posts,’ to redefine the range and sequencing of literary and cultural periods? Is posthumanism, as such, more consistent with epic than the modern novel? Is orality making a comeback in born digital performances, moving literature away from the Humanist print paradigm and Gutenberg parenthesis?
- does the concatenation of image, sound, and text within constructed, and variously constrained digital environments offer a more performative literary experience?
- given the marginality of print literature among current media (for example, the high-bandwidth illusionism of the audiovisual, or the economization of unequally shared data), is literature still a place for critical thought and reflection? A place

where our media can be brought to consciousness and our critical blind spots brought to light?

- along with a critical posthumanism, can we identify the critical ecologies of our own time – in all senses of the word ‘critical’? In this conference, we hope to extend the long-running interest in ecosystems that now combine technological media and biological life forms.
- how do our notions of authorship and audience change when literary and aesthetic works are circulating in networks? when authors are collaborating, and at times thinking with inhuman, programmable operators?
- can born-digital, electronic literature be more conducive than print to an emergent, literary posthumanism? Can the stability of print, its slowness and seriality that once could support critical conversations over the long term, be carried over into the more labile, electronic media environment? Or is e-lit at present caught within the unreflectively communicative uses to which high-bandwidth, hyperreal media are generally put?

The present conference seeks also to impart some contours to what is by now a widespread posthumanist practice in contemporary literary arts – whether we end up regarding such work as a genre (one among many) or something more like a generalizable, posthumanist condition. And if it turns out, that the ‘posthuman’ is already a dominant strain in contemporary literature, would ‘we’ be able to know that?

Submission Guidelines

Proposals: **abstracts up to 500 words** should be sent by email to Bruno Ministro (brunosantos4[at]gmail.com). Please include “SLSAeu21” in the email subject line. We are requesting these by ~~4 August~~ **1 October [deadline extended]**.

Venue

The conference will be held in Bergen, Norway.

Organization

Co-hosts: University of Bergen and University of Basel

Conference chair: Joseph Tabbi (U. of Bergen)

SLSAeu is the sister organization of the international, USA-based **Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts**. It welcomes colleagues in the humanities, the social sciences, the arts, all fields of science, medicine, engineering, computer sciences as well as independent scholars, artists and scientists. <https://www.slsa-eu.org/>