

# London Conference in Critical Thought (LCCT) Friday & Saturday 5-6 July 2019 Goldsmiths, University of London

## Call for Papers

The Call for Papers is now open for the 9<sup>th</sup> annual London Conference in Critical Thought (LCCT), hosted and supported by the Centre for Invention and Social Progress (CISP) at the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The LCCT is a free, inter-institutional, interdisciplinary conference in critical thought that takes place annually in different institutions across London. LCCT follows a non-hierarchical, decentralised model of organisation that undoes conventional academic distinctions between plenary lectures and break-out sessions, aiming instead to create opportunities for intellectual critical exchange regardless of participants' disciplinary field, institutional affiliation, or seniority. LCCT has no overarching or predetermined theme. The conference's intellectual content and academic tone are set anew each year, stemming from thematic streams that are conceived, proposed and curated by a group of stream organisers. The streams for #LCCT2019 are:

- Art MANIFESTOS: The future of an evolving form
- Automating inequality: AI, smart devices and the reproduction of the social
- The Cold War Then and Now: Theories and legacies
- Culture/Politics of trauma
- Difference, evolution and biology
- Gendered technologies, gender as technology
- Immanence, conflict and institution: Within and beyond Italian Theory
- Multiplying Citizenship: Beyond the subject of rights
- Radical Ventriloquism: Acts of speaking through and speaking for
- Rethinking new materialisms: Ethics, politics and aesthetics
- Thinking critically with care

Please send abstracts for papers and presentations proposals to [paper-sub@londoncritical.org](mailto:paper-sub@londoncritical.org) with the relevant stream title indicated in the subject line. Abstracts should be **no more than 250 words** and must be received by **Monday, 25 March 2019**. We aim to make the LCCT open and accessible to all. For any queries about accessibility requirements, please get in touch with us at: [access@londoncritical.org](mailto:access@londoncritical.org).

*LCCT is free to all speakers and attendees but registration is required.*



## Art MANIFESTOS: The future of an evolving form

Stream Organisers: Evangelos Chrysagis and Panos Kompatsiaris

At a time when many regard the manifesto as a thing of the past, a defunct format, others see a resurgence in the production of manifestos cross-culturally: artists and activists still passionately pen and perform manifesto-type declarations. These can take militant forms in the spirit of avant-garde/nihilistic negation or more reconciliatory forms in the spirit of today's creative industries and moderate politics. The manifestos of today can range from artist and curatorial statements to press releases and declarations describing political groups or counter-hegemonic actions.

By focusing on manifestos as a multimodal form, this stream explores the ways in which manifestos project a matrix of values pertinent to work in the cultural industries, underscore the ambivalent relationship between intention and outcome in politically-loaded statements, while conveying an underlying quest for ethical integrity in grassroots creative economies (Chrysagis 2019). Because manifestos, both written and performed, delineate forms of conduct, we aim to stress their function: *what* do these statements do, and *how*? To this effect, we examine the form and content of past and present manifestos, and how these elements allow us to place them in their cultural context and the history of the genre.

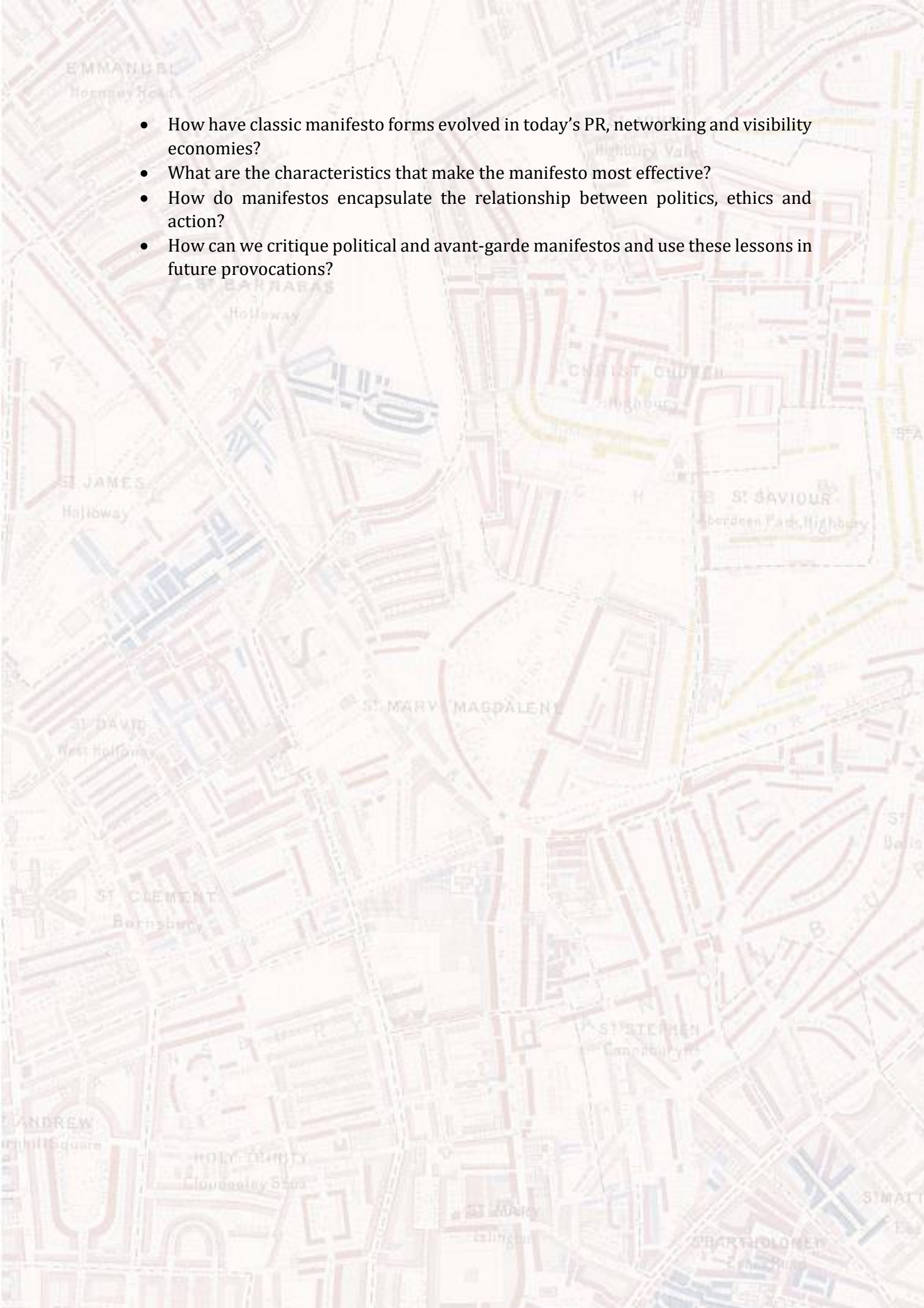
The manifesto, Luca Somigli notes, 'remains a privileged way for dissenting or marginalized voices to speak out, to affirm their presence, to reach out to like-minded individuals and invite them to band together for a common cause' (2003). According to Janet Lyon, 'to write a manifesto is to participate symbolically in a history of struggle against dominant forces' (1999). Yet, contrary to the association of manifestos with revolutionary politics and subversion, the history of the genre demonstrates that the manifesto constitutes 'an extremely plural and open form' (Yanoshevsky 2009).

Despite its open-ended and ever-changing form, it is possible to highlight specific formal characteristics of the manifesto and how it exerts its force and authority. In this regard, manifestos from different cultural traditions (e.g. curatorial statements in art biennials) can be understood as genres of writing sharing common vocabularies, preoccupations and themes (Kompatsiaris 2019). For Martin Puchner (2005) manifestos exhibit a tension between what he calls 'performativity' and 'theatricality', while a rupture with the past, a focus on *now* and a sense of urgency in embracing the new can be traced in the evolution of the genre – though, as Laura Winkiel points out, such a break reflects a linear 'Eurocentric notion of history' (2008), which has been very different from the perception of historical time in postcolonial contexts.

We invite responses, written or otherwise, from academics, artists and activists to the following questions:

- What is the purpose of writing a manifesto – a relic of modernism – today?



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- How have classic manifesto forms evolved in today's PR, networking and visibility economies?
  - What are the characteristics that make the manifesto most effective?
  - How do manifestos encapsulate the relationship between politics, ethics and action?
  - How can we critique political and avant-garde manifestos and use these lessons in future provocations?



# Automating inequality: AI, smart devices and the reproduction of the social

Stream Organisers: Juljan Krause and Matthias Benzer

Ubiquitous smart technologies are now intimately involved in the reproduction of the everyday, oftentimes to immediate effect. An emerging interdisciplinary body of work attests to deep patterns of discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, age and location in systems design and machine learning applications: AI-supported predictive sentencing is often found racially biased, shift scheduling algorithms cause havoc for single working mothers with child care responsibilities and teachers get fired because an intelligent system rates their performance unsatisfactory. For half of the global population, being connected on a range of portable smart devices is now part and parcel of everyday life. Today, much human experience and practice is in some way enabled, mediated and reconfigured by the internet – at least for those of us who can plug in and log on. Traditional conceptual distinctions between online and offline worlds are losing their explanatory grip.

The growing pervasiveness of AI and machine learning, the ubiquity of smart devices, the increasing application of social worlds and the Internet of Things pose unique challenges for philosophy, social theory and cultural criticism. If inequality is increasingly being automated so that discriminatory practices are now routinely performed by machines, who – or what – is the object of critique? Today, neural networks make independent decisions that are not derivable from observable starting conditions, leading to a 'black-boxing' of AI decision-making that complicates notions of the relationship between knowledge and power. How should philosophy and the social sciences approach the algorithmic age in which culpability and liability for discrimination are now distributed in neural networks? Is the imminent wave of AI-induced automation the next logical step in the evolution of capitalism or can ubiquitous AI provide openings for intervention and subversion?

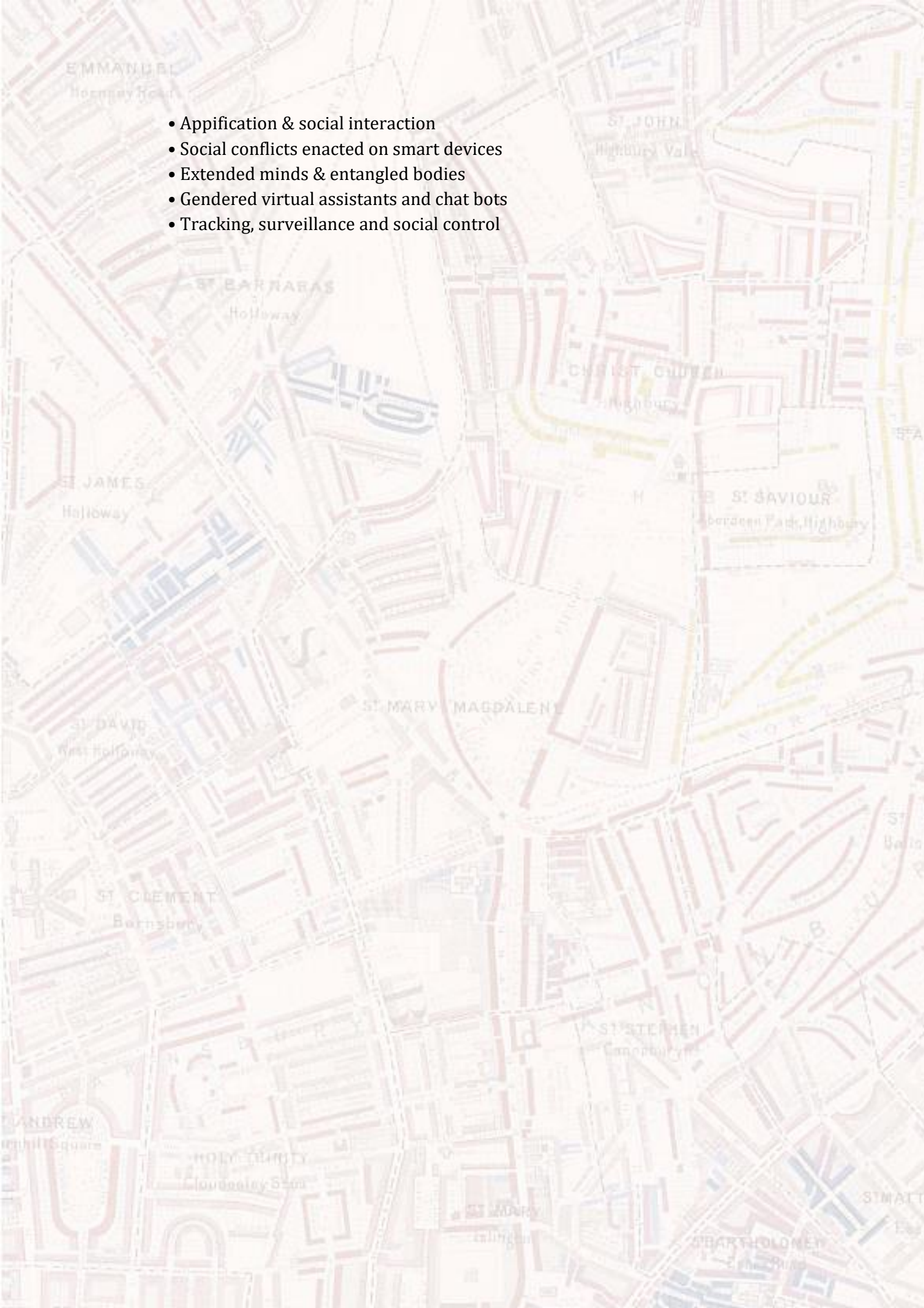
This stream invites submissions that reflect on the complex relationships between contemporary smart technologies of radical connectivity and the reproduction of social life, whether in terms of major structural shifts or in our personal experiences and encounters, perhaps in the overlooked and marginal at the fringes of big debates. How do AI and smart devices reconfigure the social? What are the manifestations of disruptive technologies in everyday life, routines, the mundane and the ostensibly banal? What's the status of Critical Theory in the age of AI? And what are the opportunities for interdisciplinary research projects to trace some of these developments?

Suggested topics may include (but are not restricted to):

- Machine agency and critical thought
- Automation, power and knowledge
- The Internet of Things in everyday practices



- Appification & social interaction
- Social conflicts enacted on smart devices
- Extended minds & entangled bodies
- Gendered virtual assistants and chat bots
- Tracking, surveillance and social control





## The Cold War then and now: Theories and legacies

Stream Organisers: Maria Christou

In his seminal study *No Accident, Comrade* (2011), Steven Belletto draws a distinction between fictions which are *about* the Cold War and fictions that are *of* the Cold War. What is meant by the former is clear enough: these are fictions which are written or set during the Cold War period and which engage thematically with it. The latter, however, is a more fluid category whose implications can be theorized further. Papers in this stream will seek to do precisely this – namely, to think through what this ‘of’ might signal in relation to literature, film, art, politics, news reporting, or society more broadly. What kind of preoccupations, narratives, theories, or ideologies might be described as being *of* the Cold War? And how do these inform the present? Does the end of the Cold War mark the end of what might be thought of as Cold War attitudes? Questions of individual freedom and of state control, of being spied on or of being paranoid are, for example, as pertinent to the Cold War era as they are to today’s digital societies, as the Edward Snowden revelations have shown. Similarly, campaigns of large-scale disinformation continue apace, as does the open-ended proliferation of nuclear warheads. To what extent, then, does our own era mark either a continuation or transformation of Cold War attitudes, and how might we theorize these? What theoretical weapons from the Cold War era proper might we appropriate for our own historical-intellectual juncture and to what end?

Papers submitted to this stream could address any of the topics in the following (non-exhaustive) list:

- Algorithmic Culture
- The Cold War ‘Spirit’
- Legacies of the Cold War
- Cultures of Prevention
- Nuclear Weapons
- Digital Technologies
- Data Harvesting
- Discourses of the End
- Edward Snowden / Wikileaks / Transparency
- Surveillance / Subjectification
- Societies of Control
- Disinformation
- Game Theory
- Conspiracy Narratives
- Propaganda / Ideology



## Culture/Politics of trauma

Stream Organisers: Simon Lee-Price

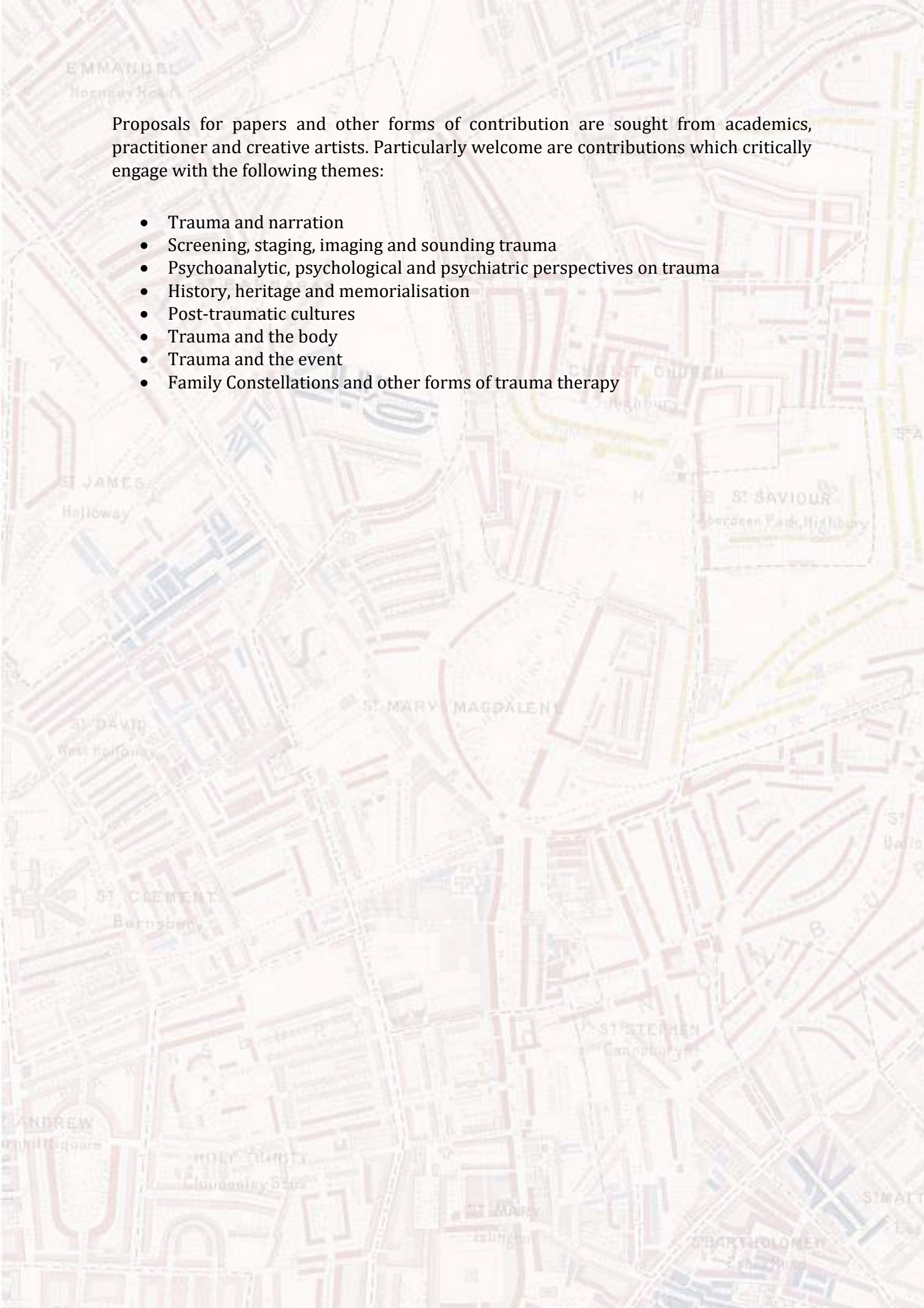
The concept of trauma provides a 'critical framework for interpretation' in multiple disciplines (Caruth, 2016, p. 116.). Trauma theory has been deployed in readings of Anglo-Saxon literature (Morrisey, 2013) and the exegesis of biblical texts (Groenewald, 2018). For the political scientist and historian Herfried Münkler (2017), German militarism in the first half of the twentieth century can be understood as a response to the traumatic memory of the Thirty Years' War three centuries earlier. In business and management studies, the term 'brand trauma' is used to describe stakeholder responses to organisations damaged by scandal and negative publicity (Tafoya, 2018). The concept of trauma has found productive application in postcolonial studies and, at the same time, faced critique for its apparent Eurocentric perspective and limited capacity to take account of healing and post-traumatic growth (Andermahr, 2016).

For Fassim and Rechtman (2009), the 1980s mark a turning point in socio-cultural attitudes to trauma, paving the way for our current 'politics of trauma', which is premised on the belief that every individual is a potential trauma victim through exposure to a trauma-generating situation or event. In the West, and perhaps globally, the concept of trauma has become a means of framing and interpreting experience. In a recent study across 24 countries, over 70% of respondents indicated they had experienced at least 1 of the 29 listed traumatic event types, ranging from the unexpected death of a loved one to being a civilian in a war zone (Benjet *et al.* 2016). It has been estimated that 9% of the population of the USA will experience PTSD at some point in their life (Kessler *et al.*, 2005). References to trauma abound in the daily media discourse on Brexit (Guardian, 2018) and Donald Trump's presidential victory in 2016 (Durkin, 2018).

In some sense, trauma appears an inescapable fact of human existence. For Otto Rank (1924), trauma begins with the experience of birth. For researchers in the field of epigenetics, trauma can be transmitted through the genes (Costa *et al.*, 2018). Trauma is not just the experience of individuals but regarded as the collective inheritance of populations who have been victims of war, genocide, forced migration, natural disasters or other calamities. Trauma can result from a direct or mediated experience of a traumatic event and can be transgenerational, affecting children and grandchildren of the traumatised (Sachs, 2013).

This stream encourages critical discussion and exploration of the concept of trauma from multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, practitioner and artistic perspectives. To what extent is the traumatic turn a symptom of late modernity? Might the growing acceptance of psychic trauma and the increasing use of trauma frameworks in the disciplines be at the expense of other possible interpretive schemes? How can the non-representability of trauma figure in creative work?





Proposals for papers and other forms of contribution are sought from academics, practitioner and creative artists. Particularly welcome are contributions which critically engage with the following themes:

- Trauma and narration
- Screening, staging, imaging and sounding trauma
- Psychoanalytic, psychological and psychiatric perspectives on trauma
- History, heritage and memorialisation
- Post-traumatic cultures
- Trauma and the body
- Trauma and the event
- Family Constellations and other forms of trauma therapy



## Difference, evolution and biology

Stream Organisers: Niall Sreenan

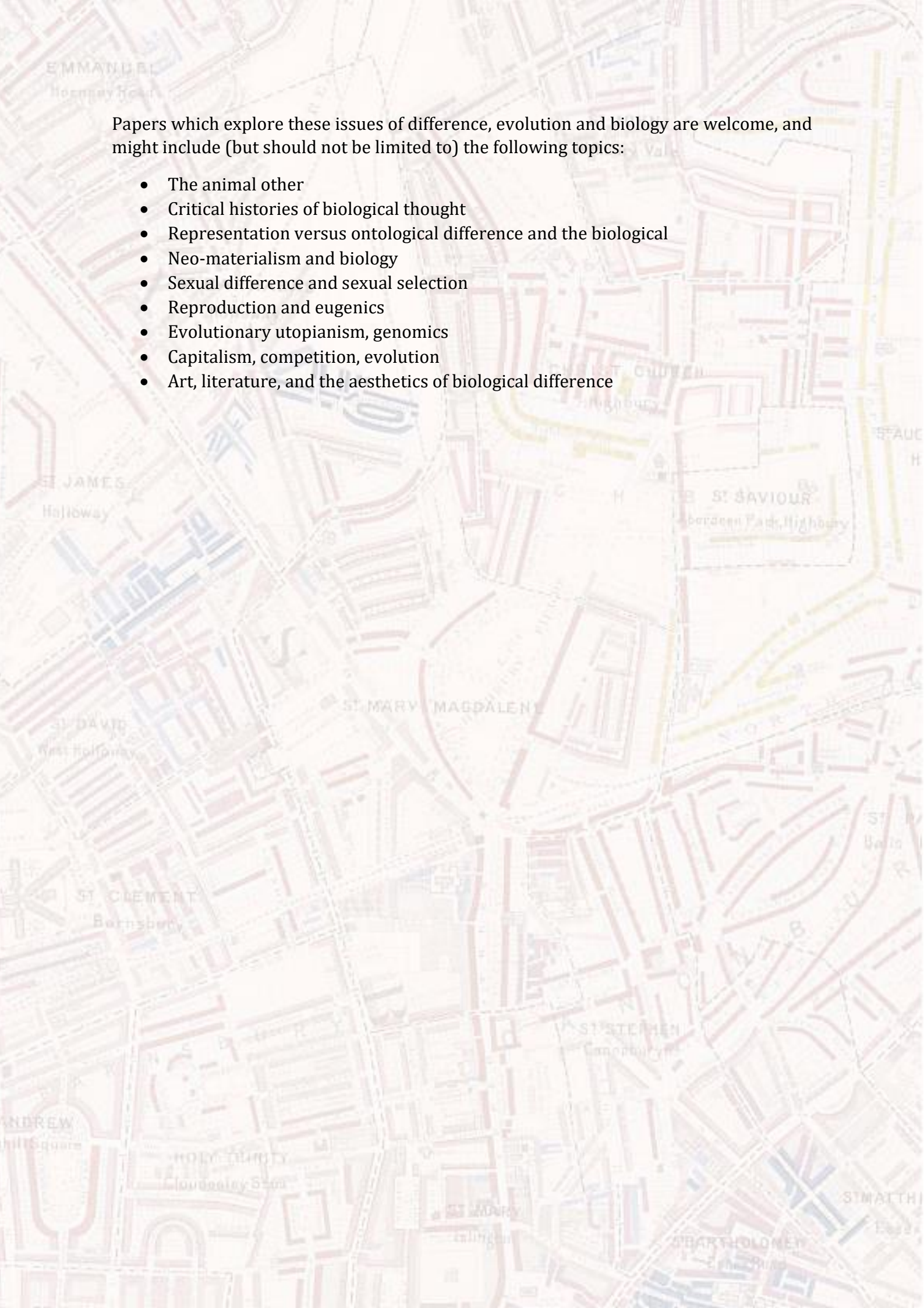
The concept of difference is fundamental to the way in which critical thought engages with biological discourse and theory. According to Sigmund Freud, Darwinian evolutionary theory represented a radical shift in human thought by insisting on the 'ineradicable animality' of the human, thus collapsing any clear difference between human and animal. Such a distinction, Julia Kristeva argues, rests on the abjection of the animal, through which the human marks out an 'area of [its] culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals'. Indeed, for Elizabeth Grosz, the human-animal distinction acts as a primordial form of difference through which the human constitutes itself as rational, reflexive, and ethical, and from which all further oppressive distinctions of identity flow.

By contrast, while Jacques Derrida recognizes the Freudian reading of the significance of evolutionary biology, in his effort to attend to both difference and differences, he repudiates any 'homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal'. While for Gilles Deleuze, the development of evolutionary thought – in its Darwinian and Weismannian forms – inaugurates a theory of difference as a productive ontological force, troubling the very possibility of understanding biological difference either as a form of transcendent distinction or as a space of free-floating indistinction.

More broadly, each of these engagements with evolutionary biology through the concept of difference raises the question of what is at stake through critical thought's encounter with biology. Although initially enticed by the promise of a biological foundation for a theory of progress, Karl Marx voiced his suspicion as to its ideological content. He noted how 'Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening-up of new markets, 'inventions', and the Malthusian 'struggle for existence''. Thus, while for some, Darwinian evolution represents a liberation from rigid conceptions of the human as transcendentally distinct from – and superior to – the animal, Marx and many others have pointed out how Darwinism seems both to emerge from and reproduce capitalist and bourgeois values. Aside from extreme manifestations of this dynamic, in eugenics and naked biological essentialisms, other critical and theoretical attempts to engage biology fetishize "difference" at the expense of recognizing and analyzing material, historical, and culturally situated sexual, racial, and class differences, through which a truly critical view of reality can be gained.

This stream invites contributions that seek to engage critically, historically, and creatively with concepts of difference in relation to biological and evolutionary discourses, to reflect on the ways in which such an engagement might (or might not) be possible, and to examine whether establishing a difference between so-called "critical" thought and "biological" thought is desirable.





Papers which explore these issues of difference, evolution and biology are welcome, and might include (but should not be limited to) the following topics:

- The animal other
- Critical histories of biological thought
- Representation versus ontological difference and the biological
- Neo-materialism and biology
- Sexual difference and sexual selection
- Reproduction and eugenics
- Evolutionary utopianism, genomics
- Capitalism, competition, evolution
- Art, literature, and the aesthetics of biological difference



# Gendered technologies, gender as technology

Stream Organisers: Clementine Boucher

The histories of machines and femininity have long been understood as deeply entangled and mutually constitutive. The advent of new technologies such as artificially intelligent learning machines (including but not limited to: domestic and care technologies), new information technologies and biotechnologies (such as genetic manipulation and reproductive technologies) has prompted large-scale shifts in structures of economic and political governance, cultural production, medical practices, and so on. Consequently, they have raised questions regarding the contemporary relation between technology and gender.

Given the context in which they are deployed - neoliberal patriarchal capitalism - there are fears that these technologies serve to recode and reinforce already-existing structures of oppression. To give only a few examples, new reproductive technologies arguably serve to reify gendered roles and further remove reproductive agency from the hands of (potential) gestators (see for e.g.: Roberts, 2009; Hester, 2018; Preciado, 2013). Moreover, the progressive automation of care work and domestic labour is not necessarily followed by the reconfiguration of gender relations - or increased happiness, for that matter (see for e.g.: Hester 2017; Federici & Vishmidt, 2013; etc.). These phenomena require that we assess the role of new technologies for the production of gender, sex and gender relations critically. On the other hand, Xenofeminists and trans feminists have also made the argument that such new technologies could help recode femininity for the promotion of feminist liberation. Again, to give only one example, the obviously artificial gendered scripts of AI Virtual Assistants - such as Siri or Alexa - could break the link between gender and biology by revealing the artificiality of gender and sex. In such cases, some claim gender should be viewed *as a technology*, which can be repurposed and put to use (Preciado, 2013; Goard, 2017; Hester, 2018).

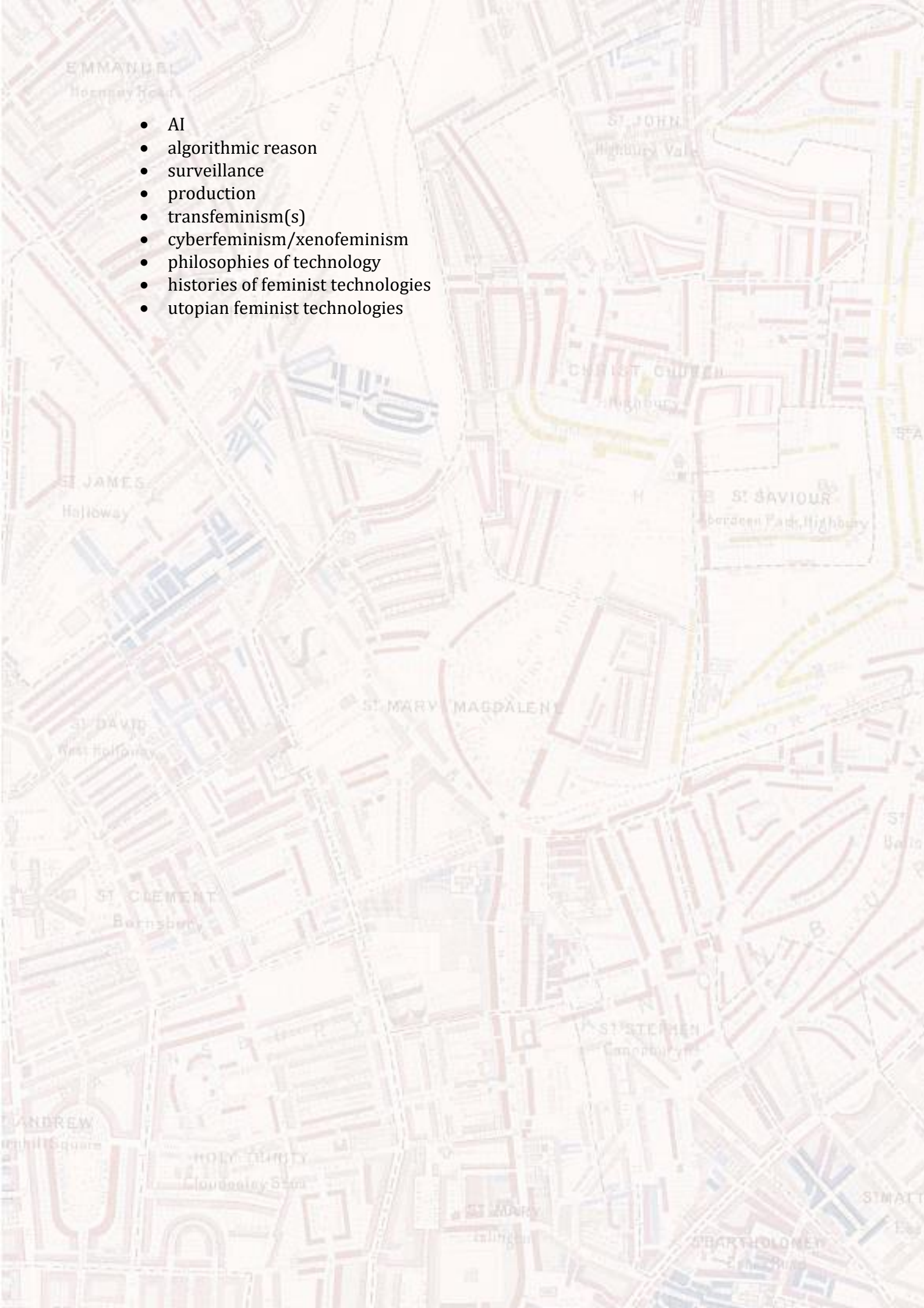
Such questions also lead to a more abstract set of interrogations around the ontological nature of new technologies, not just as tools but as mediums with an intentionality produced by their design, characteristics and structures. In that case, reviewing gender through the lens of technology opens new exciting fields of inquiry for critical thought. For instance, Luciana Parisi argues that algorithmic reason - or 'soft thought' - functions in ways not reducible to human thought, and thus could either reify or, on the contrary, help destroy patriarchal modes of thought by infecting gender with its alienness.

This stream aims to gain some insight into how to critically examine the role of new technologies in patriarchal techno-capitalism, and on how to (re)think the relation between gender and technologies in order to engender feminist techno-futures. Such questions can be interrogated from a wide variety of viewpoints. For this reason, this stream welcomes papers on:

- Automation
- reproductive/ domestic labour
- reproduction and gestating



- AI
- algorithmic reason
- surveillance
- production
- transfeminism(s)
- cyberfeminism/xenofeminism
- philosophies of technology
- histories of feminist technologies
- utopian feminist technologies





## **Immanence, conflict and institution: Within and beyond Italian Theory**

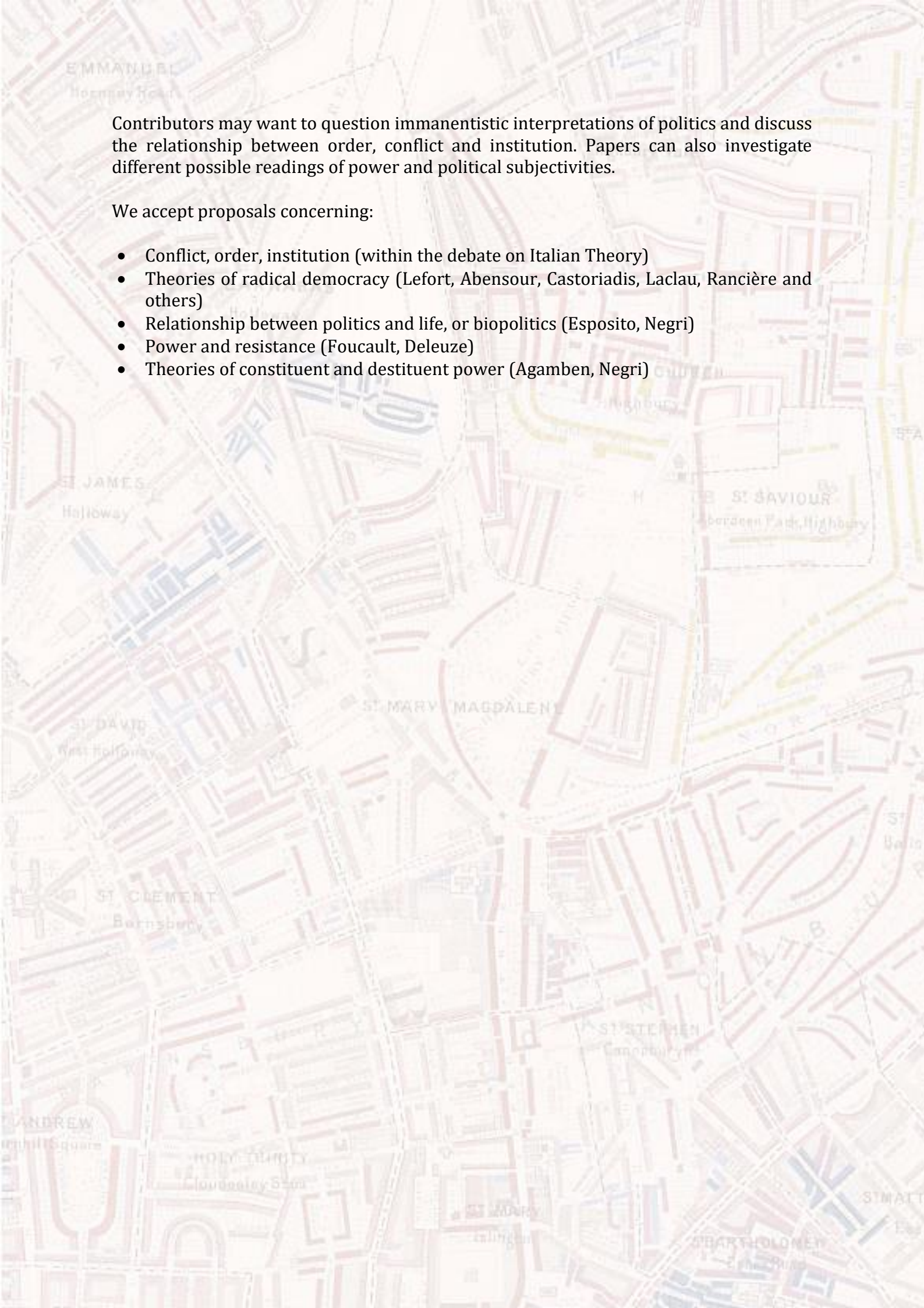
Stream Organisers: Laura Cremonesi, Mattia Di Pierro,  
Francesco Marchesi, and Elia Zaru

The critical theory of the last decades was marked by the concept of immanence elaborated by French philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, and developed in Italy by authors as Giorgio Agamben, Antonio Negri and Roberto Esposito (an approach recently called “Italian Theory”). In this framework the radical rejection of hierarchies was the condition for the creation of a radically egalitarian world: hence, the attempt to build a framework deeply rooted in immanence. However, such a perspective seems to present some shortcomings by now. This framework’s difficulty to theorize a statute of politics is the first evidence of the problems of this perspective. Immanence, the act of thinking without any fundamentals, nor over-ordinated universals, mandates the setting up on a completely unified and horizontal plane. From this point of observation, politics disperses beyond the boundaries of the State and the institutions – through microphysical relations, within society, into family hierarchies, along the structuring of knowledge – and could lose at the same time every specificity, every possibility of definition. Actions, subjectivities, conflicts: they all end up meaning just themselves. Their worth is only as temporary expressions of a pure immanence.

This understanding of the political reveals itself in the conception of power that these perspectives assume. That is, power is considered to be scattered and fragmented, and it can be defined only as a radical alterity. The only possible approach before power results in an escape from it, either in the active form of destitution or in the passive one of exodus. Power cannot be disputed or challenged, and neither can it be taken, because this would result in the betrayal of immanence. Thus, any possibility of a new and different institution seems to be impeded. What is lost, in these perspectives, is the problem of an articulation between the two dimensions of order and conflict. Thus, a dualistic pattern for the thinking of politics seems to appear in the background of this theoretical path. Politics, therefore, is described as a struggle between two opposed sides: constituent power versus constituted power, political affirmation against negation, insurgent democracy against the State, politics versus police, resistance before power, destituent power in front of institution. Thus, the emphasis is often on the constituent power of the political subject, in its capacity to struggle against constituted power or exceed the institutions, or in its ability to retreat from a mute social dimension in favor of a condition of inoperosity.

Recent studies in the field of so-called Italian Theory have underlined the merits and shortcomings of these theoretical and political approaches. Yet, despite their limits, what are the strengths of such a perspective on the political? Do we need a different approach to the questions of politics and power? Is such a new approach possible? Is a different way of thinking politics, conflict and institution doable?





Contributors may want to question immanentistic interpretations of politics and discuss the relationship between order, conflict and institution. Papers can also investigate different possible readings of power and political subjectivities.

We accept proposals concerning:

- Conflict, order, institution (within the debate on Italian Theory)
- Theories of radical democracy (Lefort, Abensour, Castoriadis, Laclau, Rancière and others)
- Relationship between politics and life, or biopolitics (Esposito, Negri)
- Power and resistance (Foucault, Deleuze)
- Theories of constituent and destituent power (Agamben, Negri)



## Multiplying citizenship: Beyond the subject of rights

Stream Organisers: Demet Gülçiçek and Irene Dal Poz

The recent resurgence of nationalism and statism has prompted a discussion around the meaning of citizenship in Europe as well as in other regions. Most of the traditions in contemporary political theory, however, rely on the classic dichotomy of inclusion & exclusion, citizens & non-citizens. The so-called migrant and refugee crisis, for example, engages predominantly with the implications of being excluded from a national body politic. This dominant investigative line is based upon the fiction of a universal and unitarian subject of rights, as it was conceived by the traditional theories of social contract. According to this paradigm, the notion of citizenship coalesces with belonging to a spatially-bound jurisdiction granting equality and protection.

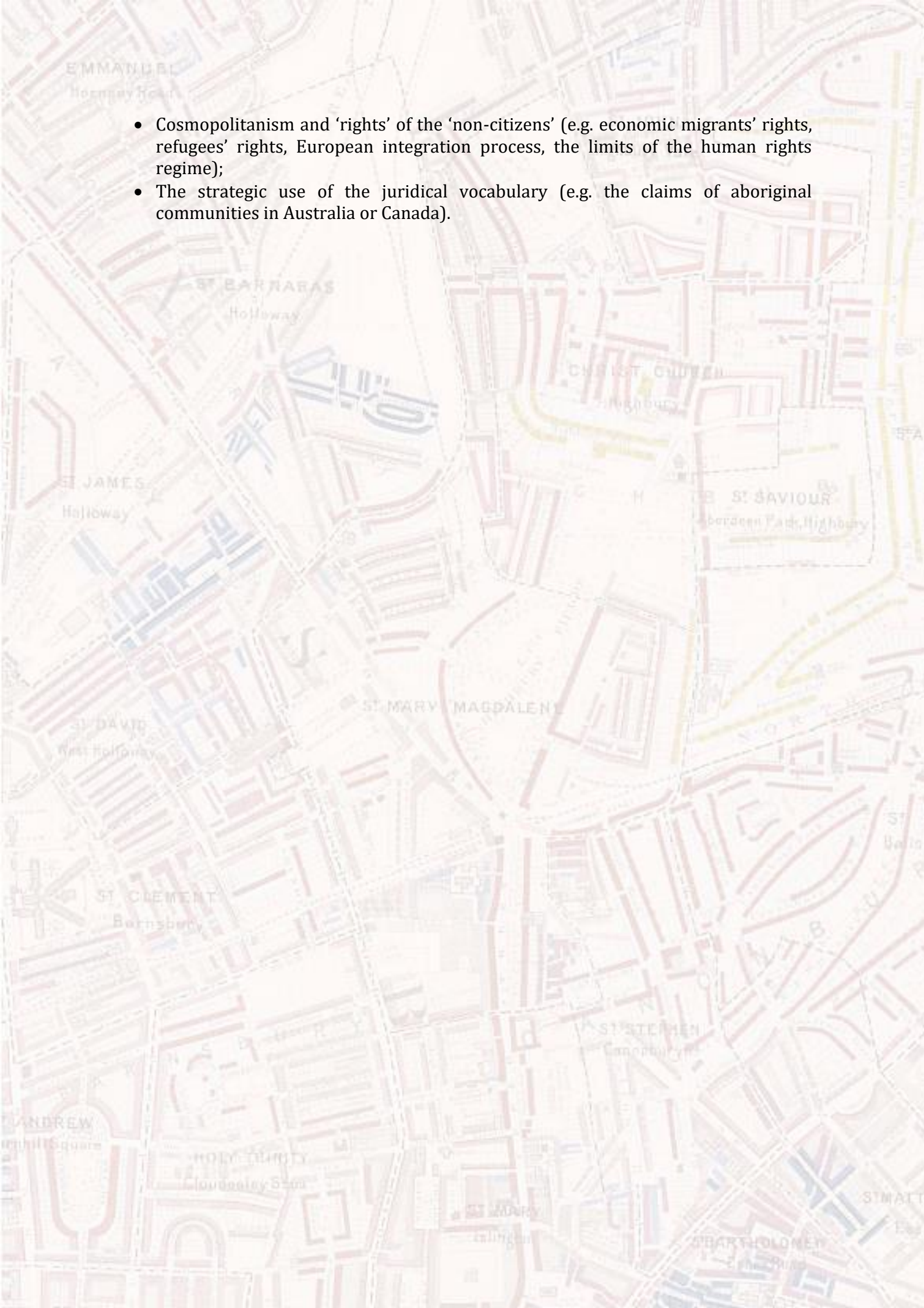
This stream aims to explore political, practical and theoretical approaches which do not reduce citizenship to the juridical subject. It will explore citizenship from a critical perspective by replacing the abstract and juridical category of the subject of rights with the idea of agency or the capacity to act. This shift of focus allows us to investigate who has the capacity to act/speak and to question what kind of capacity to act/speak subjects have. Particularly, we aim to investigate the practices and discourses negotiating, producing and limiting individuals' agency within the fiction of a regime of rights. By engaging with this set of problems, this stream aims to uncover the plurality of agents acting behind the formal label of 'citizen'. Rather than identify citizenship with the subject of rights, this stream seeks to highlight multiple citizenships, embedded in systems of inclusion, exclusion or marginalisation.

Contributions to this stream will therefore address the practical and polymorphous constructions of citizenship. We encourage submission of papers from researchers in different fields (history, history of art, geography, sociology, law, philosophy, anthropology, women and gender studies, literature, architecture, cultural studies, urban studies, post-colonial studies). Suggested topics might include, but are not limited to:

- The historical process of nation building and the myth of the citizenry (e.g. European and non-European constructions of state institution and the creation of a body-politic, Orientalism and Occidentalism);
- National and trans-national collective practices of resistance: the construction of a different citizenry (e.g. social movements, such as *ni una menos*);
- The relation between spaces and agency (e.g. gendered spaces, spaces and class distinction, racial or religious segregation, freedom of movement and national borders);
- In-between spaces as place of suspension and/or redefinition of sovereign power (e.g. detention camps, the Sea or the shore);
- Discussions around intersectionality (e.g. the relations between the categories of gender, race, class and sexuality);



- Cosmopolitanism and 'rights' of the 'non-citizens' (e.g. economic migrants' rights, refugees' rights, European integration process, the limits of the human rights regime);
- The strategic use of the juridical vocabulary (e.g. the claims of aboriginal communities in Australia or Canada).





## Radical ventriloquism: Acts of speaking through and speaking for

Stream Organisers: Lee Campbell and Christabel Harley

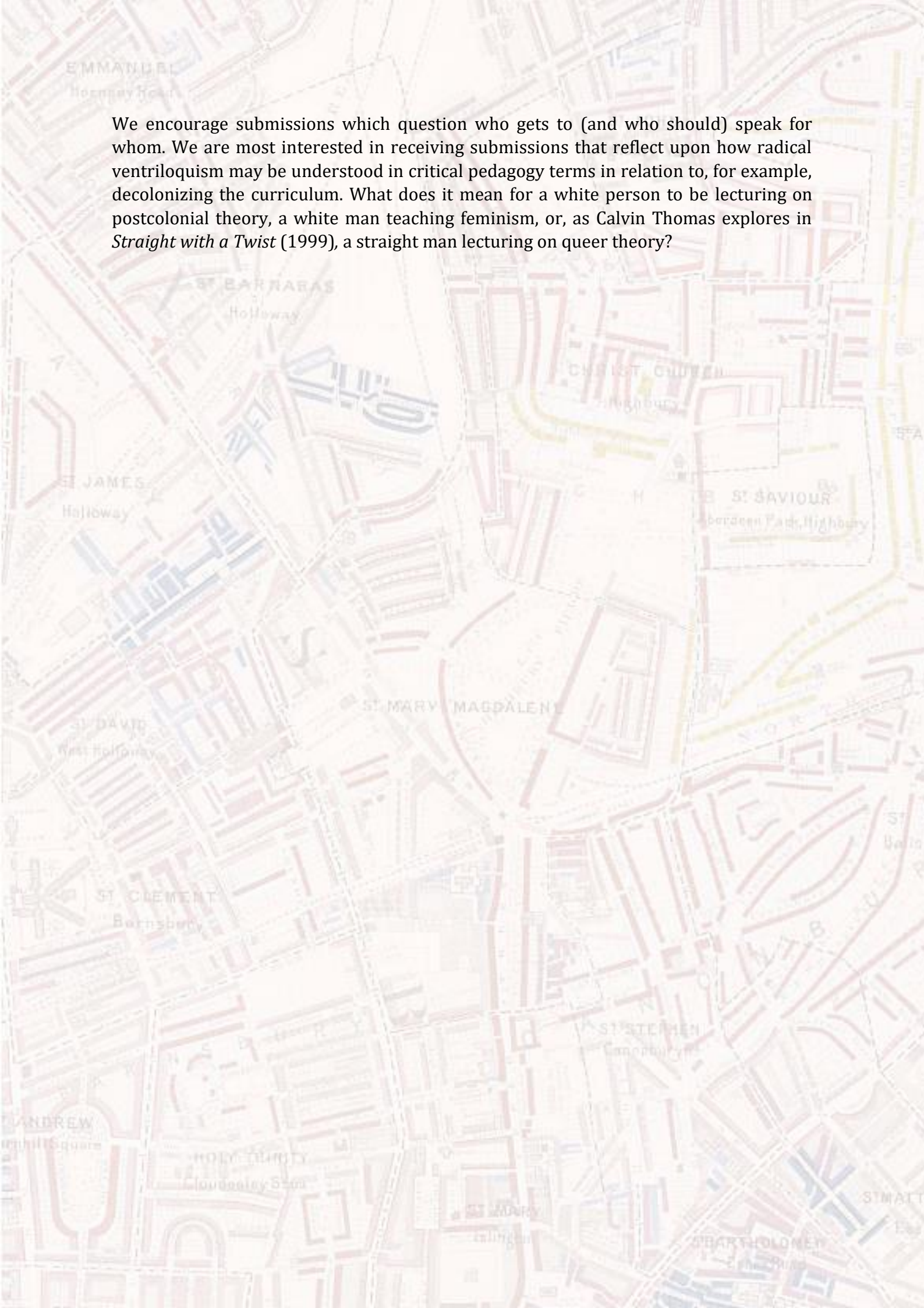
*[V]entriloqual relationships can be utilized as a metaphor, perhaps a paradigm, for generating ideas and organising phenomena of key philosophical interest [...]. In an unbridled, personal anthropomorphism we speak for things, as if things were speaking to us, reading their meanings for us, in voices of their own which, are, at the same time, of course, only our altered voices dislocated. The ventriloquist's audience becomes part of the total context of the act – a kind of witness and judge of the ventriloquist's performance. (Goldblatt, 2006)*

Ventriloquism, in its most common usage, refers to a form of popular entertainment consisting of performers giving voice to inanimate objects through a careful interplay between what is heard and what is seen. The beginnings of ventriloquism can be cited in the jester's scepter. The jester gained power by not using his own voice. He spoke through the voice of his scepter—a miniature representation of his own face. Similarly, ventriloquists speak through their puppets as a way of “distancing” themselves from criticism.

This stream explores expanded forms of ventriloquism and asks: ‘What may constitute a radical ventriloquism?’ and explores the possibilities of ‘radical ventriloquism’ and its potential as useful and applicable to enabling important discussions about what it may mean to ‘speak through’ and ‘speak for’ others/objects/things across a range of artistic/creative disciplines. Whilst recognising that ‘in Nietzsche’, as suggests David Goldblatt, ‘the artist allows certain forces which he designates at will, to move and speak through him.’, we particularly welcome submissions from individuals and groups from beyond arts and humanities. We are most interested to explore how, for example, a scientist would conceptualise ‘radical ventriloquism’?

Leading on from the previous quote, Goldblatt, in *Art and ventriloquism* usefully goes on to remind us that, ‘in Foucault, while certain persons speak for things (art *and* nature), persons also speak for other persons, those muted in the social Diaspora such as the mad, the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned.’ Disability is often presented and represented by abled-bodied medics and others. This aligns with Linda Alcoff's assertion in *The Problem of Speaking for Others* (1992) that ‘privileged authors who speak on behalf of the oppressed is becoming increasingly criticized by members of those oppressed groups themselves’. In response, we invite papers that theorise, articulate and demonstrate how radical ventriloquism nudges at these crucial debates: ethics/politics of representation / giving voice to those ‘marginalised’.





We encourage submissions which question who gets to (and who should) speak for whom. We are most interested in receiving submissions that reflect upon how radical ventriloquism may be understood in critical pedagogy terms in relation to, for example, decolonizing the curriculum. What does it mean for a white person to be lecturing on postcolonial theory, a white man teaching feminism, or, as Calvin Thomas explores in *Straight with a Twist* (1999), a straight man lecturing on queer theory?



## Rethinking new materialisms: Ethics, politics and aesthetics

Stream Organisers: Hannah Richter and Ignasi Torrent

This stream seeks to interrogate the theoretical achievements and the political purchase of the new materialist intervention, which emerged as a counter-movement to language-based post-structuralism. Against the epistemological orientation of the former, new materialisms ground onto-genesis in a material force or relationality to highlight how subjective agency and the productive iteration of language are shaped by forces external to the human realm. Especially in the light of pressing ecological concerns and questions of agency and responsibility arising at the dawn of the Anthropocene, new materialist perspectives receive increasing attention in more applied disciplines of social and political research. Here, researchers seek to rethink communities and collective decision-making beyond a hierarchical relation between humans and non-humans.

The proposed stream, firstly, hopes to explore the practical and political implications of new materialist thought. Some advocates of a new materialist account on governance seek to resist the idea of intentional political planning or steering as remnants of modernism. But what, then, is the practical purchase of new materialisms? To what extent do its theoretical interventions offer insights which can be translated into practical action or at least can alter our understanding of agency, relationality or ethical responsibility in a way which is meaningful to the (human and non-human) communities? If new materialisms, supposedly rooted in 'the real', do not offer lessons for human engagement in the face of challenges posed by the former, what do they offer? Secondly, the stream intends to discuss whether and how the new materialist ethos advances on discourse-focused post-foundationalist attempts of explaining earthly encounters. New materialisms mediate reality through a wide range of aesthetic registers beyond Enlightened reason and science, including arts, magic and fiction. Are new materialist ontologies simply 'better' ways of storytelling and understanding the world in its shaping forces? Is the insistence on a material creativity which is thoroughly external to the human realm not overlooking the shaping power of social structures? Is there room for envisioning immaterial and incorporeal immanent forces as *sine qua non* for matter to be real, thus addressing the disputed limits of new materialism?

This stream invites papers, workshops and roundtable discussions from a wide range of disciplines which draw out or discuss the ontological, ethical, political or aesthetic purchase of new materialisms, using amongst others the work of Whitehead, Heidegger, Simondon, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Braidotti, Haraway, Latour, Harman, DeLanda, Barad, Meillassoux, Grosz, Tsing and Morton. Proposals submitted to this stream could discuss the practical implications of Anthropozoic phenomena (protracted armed conflicts, refugee waves, capitalist infrastructure, endemic poverty); the ontological underpinnings of new materialisms (the human/culture and nature divide, flat ontologies, or relational ontologies, vitalism, Non-Western ecologies); the interaction of different shaping forces in producing 'the real' (architecture and design, artistic and aesthetic forms, scientific innovations).



## Thinking critically with care

Stream Organisers: Fay Dennis, Jade Henry and  
Emily Jay Nicholls

A (re)turn to care is occurring across the social sciences and humanities. Responding to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) call to attend to 'matters of care' in Science and Technology Studies (STS), this panel asks what it means to think critically with care.

While attending to neglected affective labours has been an enduring feminist concern, care is employed here as an embodied, sociomaterial 'ecology of practice' (Stengers, 2005). So, to 'think with care' is to be actively involved in responding to and creating worlds (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). It is an ontological as well as an ethical and epistemological concern, by which to care is to attend to, and affirm relations with, others, to live 'as well as possible' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). However, to associate care solely with positive affirmation and progress is to run the risk of dislocating seemingly caring relations from their unequal pasts. Following Murphy's (2015) call for 'a vexation of care', and in relation to the non-innocence of care, we employ and encourage a critical and reflexive engagement with care in order to also consider the sociomaterial generativity of a lack of care – of discomfort and critique.

We invite contributors to the stream to ask of their research assemblages, networks and attachments – technologies, policies, design innovations and environments, healthcare settings – not only what or whom is being cared for, but by who? And who or what decides? How does thinking with care contest or contribute to relations of power by which sometimes a lack of care is an act of care?

Staging an interdisciplinary feminist and queer attempt to think critically with care, we would be particularly interested in receiving proposals that demonstrate commitments to:

- Situated and indigenous design
- Queer studies
- Decolonialising health and medicine
- Inventive and speculative research methods
- New materialisms and 'ethico-onto-epistemologies'
- Disrupting environmental hazards and 'chemical infrastructures'
- Technological innovations in care and its critique
- Rethinking healthcare treatment and policy