

**The conference will cover the following six themes:**

- **Ethics, Personhood and Morality**

(Coordinator: Asheel Singh)

All extant ethical systems are predicated on the notion of a person, whether as moral agent, locus of moral worth, or component of a morally significant collective. The nature of personhood is itself a difficult question, but one that has generally been theoretical rather than practical. We have been able to imagine difficult borderline cases (e.g. cyborgs, intelligent robots) that challenge us to clarify what a person is. But, with the notable exception of abortion, these have largely remained conceptual puzzles rather than practical problems. 4IR changes that, because its core is an increased interaction between human and machine, to the extent that these become intermingled. Previously, you might have referred to your diary as a part of your memory, jokingly; the prospect now is that the diary could literally be a physical part of you, via some sort of implant (of course in digital, not paper, form). Conversely, your thoughts or memories might to some degree be uploaded to a network, much as your photos are now uploaded from your smart phone. If persons become intermingled with artificial systems in this way, how will we decide what to hold to account? I kill an innocent child and blame my self defense implant. Am I exonerated? Or: how will we decide what counts as a victim of a wrong or beneficiary of a kindness? My memories are central to who I am, but they are stored on the internet, because my brain degenerated due to Alzheimer's. Does the server therefore have some rights that would formerly have accrued to me? And: which systems form morally significant collectives? When human and machine become intermingled, these questions do not have obvious answers. Our entire ethical systems will need to adapt.

- **Uncertainty in the Anthropocene: Possibilities for a New Humanism**

(Coordinator: Joost Fontein)

This panel seeks to address the question of (post)humanism in contemporary anthropology. Increasingly, anthropologists have sought to capture an emerging body of new theoretical approaches under a 'post-humanist' rubric. These recent theoretical developments are but the latest in a decades-long anthropological critique of modernist dualisms, particularly the nature/culture distinction. Yet, there remains much unease with this notion. Humanism was never merely a conceptual or technical project. It was also always a political exercise that sought to protect the commonality of all human lives – a common humanity. The proposition here is that we should not reject humanism's central political imperative. Rather, the real challenge is to reconceptualise a new kind of humanism around this core in a way that moves beyond modernity's conceits and certainties, and embraces new understandings of our emergent, relational, open-ended, uncertain and necessarily incomplete becoming *in* and *with* the world; as a central tenet of what it is to be human.

- **Rethinking Spirituality, Technology and Society**

(Coordinator: Nqobile Zulu)

As the technological advancement revolution is evolving rapidly, so have affluent spiritual organisations embraced it to increase and influence their space(s) of activity. Digitalisation processes and the use of information technologies (IT) have raised the stock and expanded the global reach of spirituality services by transcending physical spaces. Religion-focused TV channels and livestreaming of spiritual services for example have enabled an online virtual presence that has negated the need for physical presence while bestowing global reach. To borrow from Schwab (2016), this transition and transcendence into the immaterial leads into contestations of the "what" and the "how" of doing things, and further "who" we are. Such debates have predominantly

outlined the impact of machines doing a greater amount of work than humans and have thus raised questions and concerns primarily at the effects on resultant unemployment as one of the more obvious trade-off. Yet other pertinent questions should focus on how technology is not only enabling exercise of hegemonic power by trend leaders (innovators) but also its impact on socio-economic development issues including the practice of spirituality. Technological innovation, particularly digitisation, combined with networking has enabled certain global collaborations which some call exploitation of the vulnerable. What have been the implications of the recent technological advancement on the spiritual experiences of people in the global south? Who is the captive audience within this space? What is the impact of this social innovation on spirituality's sustainability? Such debates opine on the increasing importance of pervasive automation on spirituality, which this theme track will delve into.

- **Politics, Power and Participation**

(Coordinator: Sarah Chiumbu and Suzy Graham)

Each new wave of technology has increased access to knowledge and possibilities for deliberation. The advent of internet and social media was widely hailed as creating new opportunities to spread democracy and increase opportunities for political and civic participation. However, a more insidious threat to the freedom afforded by social media has emerged. The recent developments regarding how big data firms that are misusing data to influence electoral outcomes and other political decisions bring attention to the risks of technology in shaping discourses and participatory democracy. This shows that the way digital technology is developed, distributed, and capitalized reflects power dynamics and ongoing patterns of privilege and marginalization. Data management and search algorithms are monopolized and controlled by corporations based in the global north. As we enter another technological revolution, an analysis of who holds the power and whose interests are promoted becomes important. What issues does the fourth industrial revolution raise for politics, participation and democracy in countries of the global south? How will 4IR and related technologies be employed, or exploited, by competitive political parties in vibrant democracies? How will the mainstream powers' structure in international political economy: knowledge, production, finance and security, be informed by or lead in the discourse of politics and the fourth industrial revolution?

- **Citizens, States and the Future of Work**

(Coordinator: Lauren Graham)

Central aspirations of the United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals include the promotion of productive and fulfilling work as well as the advancement of social protection policies which can address poverty and inequality. Yet our ability to achieve these goals is potentially constrained by the "Future of Work" – the idea that digital technology and artificial intelligence will increasingly replace workers, particularly in the jobs that are already low-paying and precarious (Balliester & Elsheikhi 2018). Traditionally, full employment was considered an achievable goal particularly in the Northern welfare states. Further, work was seen as bound by a contractual relationship between employer and employee that secured the future for employees in so far as processes for ending the contract and benefits for employees was concerned (Agarwala 2013). However, reality has shown that in developing contexts such as South Africa, structural unemployment and increasingly insecure and precarious employment ensures that this goal is not achievable. Predictions of how work will change further threaten this goal both in developing and developed country contexts. What have citizen and state responses been thus far, and what should they be as we face a reality of increasingly

precarious work? This panel will engage with research that has sought to understand worker responses, ideas about how regulations need to change, and what broader social policy responses should be to ensure that the SDGs of decent work, and reducing poverty and inequality are met.

- **Literature, Cinema, and African Futures**

(Coordinator: Pier Paolo Frasinelli)

In a growing body of theory, the last few decades have seen an inversion of temporalities whereby Africa and the global south are no longer seen as trying to catch up with the global north in the competitive modernization game but are now leading the way. From breakneck urbanisation, to the growth rate of the economy, to the pervasiveness of neoliberal social restructuring and engineering, inclusive of advanced forms of exploitation of labour, surplus extraction and processes of capital accumulation through the expropriation of land, water and raw materials, the global south is now at the cutting edge of neoliberal globalisation. In African and diasporic literary and film production, this has been accompanied by a proliferation of future oriented narratives and representations that, in the words of Kodwo Eshun, one of Afrofuturism's foremost thinkers, reorient cultural vectors "towards the proleptic as much as the retrospective". In literature, we have seen the publication of collections such as AfroSF (2012 – the first pan-African science fiction anthology), Lagos 2060 (2013 – Nigeria's first science fiction anthology), or Naledi Okorakor science fantasy novel Who Fears Death (2010). Meanwhile, in film production we have had (among others) Neill Blomkamp's District 9 (2009), Elysium (2013) and Chappie (2015), where Johannesburg and global south urban landscapes are turned into the setting of a dystopian future, as well as a host of films experimenting with images of African futures, from Wanuri Kahlu's short science-fiction Pumzi (2009) to Marvel's blockbuster Black Panther (2018). Against this backdrop, in this panel we will look at the different images of African futures produced by the diverse representations that can be found in contemporary African and diasporic cultural theory, literature and film.