

SECOND PREPARATORY WORKSHOP

for April 12-13 2022

Arts and Human Rights Symposium -  
Building Positive Relations: The Arts, New Materialism,  
Posthumanism & Human Rights

Friday January 28<sup>th</sup> 2022

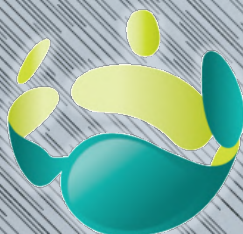
Workshop

The Arts and Human  
Rights in the Context of  
Being Cyborgs, Living  
Speculative Futures

This event is held via ZOOM

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# DETAILED AGENDA

## **10:30 - 10:40: (Oonagh) Welcome:**

- Land acknowledgements
- Recap introduction to the project and overview of the January 14<sup>th</sup> workshop
- Note-taking by Gloria *and* participants

## **10:40 - 10:55: (Ramon) Round table (45 seconds each) introductions on the theme of the arts and human rights in the post-human age of being cyborgs living speculative futures:**

- What is your practice or research in relation to human rights and the arts in the post human age of cyborgs?

## **10:55 - 11:35: (Oonagh) Group discussion of how being cyborgs living speculative futures impacts on human rights and art\dance\theatre\music making and performance:**

- Consider examples of human rights in relation to being cyborg and living in speculative futures. How are human rights evolving in the age of cyborgs?
- Explore how art\dance\theatre\music making and performance can express ideas about being cyborg and living in speculative futures.
- Are concepts of human rights adequate for the issues we face being cyborg and living in speculative futures, or are they causing us to miss important dimensions of our experience?

## **11:35 - 11:55: (Ramon) Discussion of how the arts and human rights can confront, reimagine, or reconcile new materialism, post-humanism and being cyborg and living speculative futures:**

- How could this be addressed in a manifesto on the arts and human rights?
- What words are needed in terms of shifting directions and expressing solidarity?
- How could art\dance\theatre\music making and performance contribute to expressing this shift and alignment around core values?
- What approaches would you suggest for developing the concept note and the manifesto?

## **11:55 - 12:10: (Oonagh) Round table (45 seconds each) closing thoughts about how being cyborg impacts on human rights and the arts, and how to address this in the manifesto, other takeaways and next steps**

## **12:10 - 12:15: (Ramon) Wrap up, acknowledgements, closing.**

# PARTICIPANTS



## Al-An deSouza

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Al-An deSouza is an artist, and Professor and Department Chair of Art Practice at University of California, Berkeley. They work in photo-media, installation, text and performance, and have published two recent books: Ark of Martyrs (2020), and How Art Can Be Thought (2018).

Andrea Fitzpatrick (pronouns: they/them; she/her) is a researcher and academic at U. Ottawa, who teaches contemporary art history and theories. Their interest in human rights is related to the issues that are explored in the work of international artists using many media -- from photography, to video, to performance, sculpture/installation, to painting, and beyond -- who present concerns for identity, subjectivity, gender, embodiment, resistance to war, colonial oppression and occupation, and the desire for freedom of speech, in their artworks. Fitzpatrick's research has focused on artists, memorials, and monuments from Iran, the Arab world, Palestine/Israel, Africa, East and South Asia, and Germany, that show a concern for ending or resisting the useless suffering of conflict and oppression.

## Andrea Fitzpatrick

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## Ann Wettrich

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Ann Wettrich is an artist, educator and arts consultant based in the San Francisco Bay Area in the US. Her current work addresses pressing social, cultural and environmental concerns. She is one of two lead artists from Fieldworks Collaborative; Director of Programs & Administration for Emergent Art Space working with young artists across the globe. For well over forty years, she has served in creative leadership, program development and advisory roles with numerous educational institutions, civic agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Iranian-Canadian concert pianist, interdisciplinary composer, artist-researcher, educator and Ph.D candidate in individualized studies in fine arts, Anoush Moazzeni enjoys a performing career that has, frequently, taken her around the world. The development of her art incorporates the interaction between artistic interpretation and scholarly reflection; particular areas of her interest in research-creation include artistic research and philosophy on stage.

## Anoush Moazzeni

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## Boel Christensen-Scheel

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Boel Christensen-Scheel is a professor of aesthetics and art theory. Currently she holds the position as the dean of the Department of Art and Craft at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. She has a Ph.D. in contemporary art and performance theory, and her area of expertise is widely linked to art's experiential, social and educational possibilities. She initiated the research group Art in Society at Oslo Met, and she is the main editor of Nordic Journal of Art and Research.

Dirar Kalash is a musician and sound artist whose work spans a wide range of musical and sonic practices within a variety of compositional and improvisational contexts, he is also an independent researcher.

## Dirar Kalash

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## Elizabeth Presa

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I am an artist living on Dja Dja Wurung country in south eastern Australia and teach Sculpture and Art Theory at the VCA, The University of Melbourne. My research is conducted through art and philosophy. Currently I am researching ancient augural practices as prompts to developing more contemplative and ethical relationships to the environment.

Elsy Zavarce is a Ph.D. student in Art Education, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University, Montreal. She is a multidisciplinary visual artist, researcher, and an emeritus professor of Architecture and Design at Zulia University. She was born in Canada and grew up in Venezuela. Her work is part of public and private collections in South and North America. She is in constant experimentation, exploring different mediums and materiality, dealing with memory, resistance, and global concerns of a citizen of the world. Now being forced to be an immigrant, she examines the notion of belonging, territories, diaspora, and identities

## Elsy Zavarce

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## Gloria Song

PhD Candidate, University of Ottawa  
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Gloria Song is a Ph.D. candidate in Law at the University of Ottawa, researching access to justice, housing, and gender in Nunavut. She is also a project coordinator for the Law Society of Nunavut, and an analyst with Polar Knowledge Canada, where she leads Canada's implementation of polar science diplomacy treaties.

Neuberger-Jesin Professor of International Conflict Resolution, Faculty of Law, and HRREC Director at the University of Ottawa, 35 years experience as a practitioner/scholar working at the international level toward the effective realisation of human rights including minority rights, preventive diplomacy, transitional arrangements and genocide prevention.

## John Packer

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## Lorrie Blair

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Lorrie Blair is a professor in Art Education at Concordia University in Montreal. Her teaching and research interests include artistic research and ethics, qualitative research methodologies, art teacher identity, teenage cultural practices, accessible photography, and craft practices. She is the author of *Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation* (2016, Brill).

Exploring the nexus between art and current theories and practices of human rights, Omid B. Milani is the curator of *Images of Justice*, a political cartoon series on human rights issues as a part of CONTEKST, a research project on the Image-Law relationship. <https://Contekst.Education/>

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## Oonagh E. Fitzgerald

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Oonagh E. Fitzgerald, B.F.A., LL.B., LL.M., M.B.A., S.J.D., Member of the Law Society of Ontario. I am an artist and international lawyer, a Senior Fellow at the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, a Vice-President of the International Law Association of Canada, Co-Chair of the Canadian Environmental Domestic Advisory Group under CETA, and an INDI PhD student in the Fine Arts Programme, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Website: <https://oonaghfitzgerald.ca>

Ramon is a Social Catalyst & Artist who sends social and political messages intended to inspire people to reflect about their communities, both local and universal. Ph.D. (2021). Currently, Faculty Member of Fine Arts at the University of Seville (Spain) teaching new media-based courses.

## Ramon Blanco-Barrera

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## Ricardo Dal Farra

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Professor of Music, Concordia University, Canada. Director of the international symposia Balance-Unbalance (BunB) on how the media arts could contribute to solving the environmental crisis, and Understanding Visual Music (UVM). Creator of the Latin American Electroacoustic Music Collection hosted by The Langlois Foundation, Canada. Former UNESCO researcher and Hexagram director.

Academic Dean of Arts & English at the College of the Sequoias in California. Past Dean of Arts at Lane Community College, Oregon, Associate Professor of Art at South Texas College, and Instructor of Art at the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico. MFA in Painting and Drawing, BA Art, AA Liberal Arts. 2013 Fulbright Research Chair in Human Rights and Social Justice at uOttawa, past College Arts Association Education Committee Chair and current Professional Practice Committee member.

## Richard Lubben

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## Van Armenian

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Van Armenian is a Ph.D. at the School of Music at the University of Ottawa. His research is guided by extensive experience as a professional musician and a deep interest in mechanisms that value Indigenous music as a tool for the development of a unifying and ethical Canadian identity

# SUMMARY REPORT

*The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within the context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language. The “producers” and users of knowledge must now, and will have to, possess the means of translating into these languages whatever they want to invent or learn. Research on translating machines is already well advanced. Along with the hegemony of computers comes a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as “knowledge” statements.*

-Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, original 1979 Les Editions de Minuit, translated version 1984 University of Minnesota Press. *The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies* [at p.4]

## **Introductions on the theme of arts and human rights in the post-human age of being cyborgs living in speculative futures**

*“The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code.”*

- Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs And Women: The Reinvention Of Nature*

- *What is your practice or research in relation to human rights and the arts in the post human age of cyborgs?*

After a land acknowledgement to recognize the Indigenous peoples on whose traditional territories some of the participants are based, the facilitators re-introduced the project and provided a summary of the first workshop that was held on January 14, 2022 (see the workshop #1 report). The agenda circulated in advance of the workshop #2 included provocative quotations (some of which have been included in this report) and questions to stimulate the discussion. Participants were invited to add ideas in a Google Doc during and after the workshop.

Participants introduced themselves and their practice or research in relation to the workshop theme of being cyborg and living in speculative futures. As with the first workshop, a diverse array of disciplines, approaches and perspectives were represented by the participants. This introductory round established themes that were elaborated throughout the workshop.

## The relationships among technology, the arts, and human rights, and their ethical implications

### *Opportunities:*

- Digital technology allowing virtual participation can extend reach and enhance the inclusion of those who may have previously had less opportunities to participate in social exchange.
- Digital technology allows people to explore and represent their identities as avatars and in this manner participate in and build communities in a liberating and empowering manner.
- Digital technology enables artists to explore our cyborg existence and illuminate philosophical, human rights, political, social, economic, and environmental issues and injustices that may be obscured or suppressed.
- Technology can contribute to envisioning and enabling hopeful speculative futures.

### *Risks:*

- Technological design and computer coding are not unbiased and tend to reproduce and even further entrench in the digital space existing patterns of power, control, oppression, surveillance, exclusion, and inequity.
- Transforming our operative spaces towards the digital may change the meaning of a particular expression through this process of translation. It is important to note that the method of expression shapes, and sometimes determines, the expression itself.
- Enthusiastic adoption of the digital, transhumanism and speculative futures can also undermine a holistic understanding of humans as relationally embedded in, dependent upon, and responsible for their physical environment and natural systems.

### **Impacts of terms and definitions in shaping discourse, approaches, and actions:**

- Conceptions of technology can vary immensely. For the purposes of this discussion about the arts and human rights in relation to being cyborg and living in speculative futures, it is useful to keep the concepts broad, open, and fluid.
- Conceptions of being posthuman need to take account of the massive differences in human experience: while a handful of white western business men build phallic machines in which to transport their cyborg selves to outer space and fantasize about neocolonialism in space, many disenfranchised, oppressed, racialized, gender-marginalized people on earth are denied their basic humanity, treated daily not as “human” but as “sub-human”, and subjected to indignities, abuse and denial of basic rights and freedoms, including rights to language, culture and life-giving connection with their environment.
- Participants also discussed approaches to encourage artists to present speculative futures based on hope and justice. This involves building inclusive and supportive curricula that embrace the art, history and lived experience of gender-marginalized, colonized, racialized communities and Indigenous peoples.

## Impacts of being cyborgs living speculative futures on human rights and art/dance/theatre/music making and performance:

*Deleuze, not unlike Haraway or, for that matter, the performance artist Laurie Anderson, thinks by inventing unconventional and even disturbing conceptual personae. These mark different steps in the process of 'becoming-minoritarian', that is of undoing power relations in the very structures of one's subject position. Figurations of these multiple becomings are: the rhizome, the nomad, the bodies-without-organs, the cyborg, the onco-mouse, and acoustic masks of all electronic kinds.*

- Braidotti, R. (2000) *Teratologies*, in: I. Buchanan & C. Colebrook (eds), *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press), pp. 156–172, at p.170

- Consider examples of human rights in relation to being cyborg and living in speculative futures. How are human rights evolving in the age of cyborgs?
- Explore how art\dance\theatre\music making and performance can express ideas about being cyborg and living in speculative futures.
- Are concepts of human rights adequate for the issues we face being cyborg and living in speculative futures, or are they causing us to miss important dimensions of our experience?

Guided by the discussion questions shared in advance, participants provided their thoughts on the impact on human rights and the arts of being cyborgs living speculative futures, expanding on themes introduced at the beginning of the workshop. Common recurring themes included power structures and the need to resist dualist/binary conceptions in favour of questioning or even discarding established categories and disciplines and acknowledging relationality. Some high-level points from this portion of the discussion are as follows.

### The state of being cyborg

- Being cyborg, in the sense of enhancing the human body with technology, is not a new phenomenon. Humans seem to have always relied on technologies as extensions of themselves, e.g., through using tools for cutting, digging, building, writing, drawing, and making music, etc., or wearing devices to improve visual or auditory acuity, to replace lost limbs, etc. Indeed, the term “cyborg” may be redundant because the concept of being human already includes the use of tools and particular methods.
- In the present era of rapid technological development, it is important continuously to interrogate the ethics of being cyborg, including considering what is being lost by translating and assimilating everything to digital form. What happens to the original meaning, language, and context of the expression, and its original connection to a moment in time, a physical location, and a natural environment?
- Many people around the world find themselves treated as forgotten, excluded, less than human, the “other”. In exploring the post-human condition should we not also affirm a framework of solidarity and empathy that emphasizes the inherent dignity and worth of every human?

- Drawing a binary distinction between the virtual realm and “reality” in the arts is artificial and unhelpful. The arts are about bodily and sensory engagement, even if through the medium of virtual technologies. We cannot have one (virtual reality) without the other (physical environment); from a holistic perspective, we cannot think of the self in absence of the other; one is not superior to the other; they exist in a bond.

### Power, inequity & the role of art

Foucault described the prisoner of a panopticon as experiencing asymmetrical surveillance and fear of punishment, such that he comes to police himself:

*He is seen, but he does not see; he is an object of information, never a subject in communication.”*

*“A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation [...] He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribed in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.*

–Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

- We are all subject to technology whether we have access to it or not and whether it is used for or against us. The cyborg relationship is inescapable and represents a relationship of power. Even our use of artificial intelligence such as Alexa resembles master/slave relations, showing a replication of power structures.
- Both technology and the arts can be used for ethical or unethical purposes, reflecting, reinforcing, or resisting the cultures in which they are based.
- Given the persistence of power structures in cybernetic spaces, and the ability of the powerful to use digitally enabled technologies to impose and consolidate oppression and exclusion, what are the limits and possibilities of resisting and creating new empowered cyborg identities?
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these inequities, especially impacting the most vulnerable, including those who do not have access to digital technologies. In the isolation and exclusion of lockdowns what happens to the identities of these people: do they experience a kind of social death?
- Confronting power and overcoming barriers of inequity will not come from technical solutions alone. The arts could play a role in fostering relationships of empathy and shared experience between human beings, cyborgs, and machines.
- The arts can offer strategies to critique, question, resist, envision, and shape our cyborg speculative futures. However, artists’ visions may be flawed as they too are influenced by and embedded in their cultural, political, social, economic, and environmental context.



## Using art and human rights to confront, re-imagine, or reconcile new materialism, post-humanism, and being cyborg and living speculative futures

*[Rosi Braidotti's] Nomadic subjectivity enables us to take account of "the inter-connection between self and others...by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism" (p. 50). It enables us to retain enough of the humanist subject to take an ethical and socially just position on the world, without ascribing to the oppressive and problematic principles of 'high humanism'. Braidotti's mode of posthumanism aligns with the 'new materialist' thought which has been influential in the humanities and social sciences, emphasising as it does the agency of non-human matter and the need to revisit questions of human subjectivity in light of ecological crisis, contemporary geopolitics and technological shift (for example Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012).*

-Siân Bayne (2018). *Posthumanism: A navigation aid for educators*. *On Education. Journal for Research and Debate*, 1(2).  
[https://doi.org/10.17899/on\\_ed.2018.2.1](https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2018.2.1) at p.3.

- How could this be addressed in a manifesto on the arts and human rights?
- What words are needed in terms of shifting directions and expressing solidarity?
- How could art\dance\theatre\music making and performance contribute to expressing this shift and alignment around core values?
- What approaches would you suggest for developing the concept note and the manifesto?

### Our speculative futures:

Earlier discussions led to an exchange about actions we can take towards hopeful, inclusive, and just speculative futures. Ideas discussed included the following:

- Jean Luc Nancy's humanist philosophies on ethics might help focus away from binaries and towards the relational aspects of technological futures.
- Actions for utilizing the arts could include resisting the consumer capitalist-driven social media compulsion to only pay attention to matters briefly on a superficial level. Instead, the arts could be used as a slow antidote to refocus our attention on important values. For example, contemplating slowly an art object, sound or idea could help attune us to our environments, connections, identities, and relations within systems and machines.
- Voices outside the power centres have been "othered", silenced and ignored. Issues of gendered, racialized, and capitalized power are embedded in culture, history, and politics. Artists, academics, and activists from around the world reinvigorate the arts by introducing new identities, ideas, voices, sound, and imagery.
- There was much discussion on how to approach our relationship with the "other". How can we best acknowledge and respect difference and resist assimilation? How do we improve our language to be more welcoming and inclusive? How do we re-frame and re-conceptualize our relationships with each other, replacing pre-conceived notions of identities and categories into conversations that engender respectful relationships?

- This may also require re-thinking what “human rights” means. Some human rights may be more readily accessible in some third world countries than some first world countries. One example is the inequitable access to certain forms of health care in some first world countries. Interest in rights to health care and a clean environment are growing in importance in the post-human age.
- Using the arts to change the world also means including and collaborating with different kinds of people from different backgrounds and disciplines.
- How do we build a framework of methods and technologies to emphasize and practice solidarity to confront what humanity is experiencing in the post-human age of the Anthropocene?

### Developing a manifesto:

*"The men and peoples of today refuse to continue being passive recipients and executors of orders. They feel the need and demand the right to participate, to be actors, protagonists, in the construction of the new authentically democratic society. Just as they demand justice, equality, the right to health, the right to education, etc., they also demand their right to participation. And therefore to communication."*

- Kaplún, M. (1998) *Una pedagogía de la comunicación*. Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre. At p.63, translated from the original text in Spanish

Participants turned to the question whether there were important ideas from the discussion that could be included eventually in a manifesto. There was a conversation about the potential purposes of such as manifesto. For example:

- If the outcomes of the workshops and symposium lead to consensus around important ideas, it could be a way to express these ideas collectively.
- It might build bridges between the arts and human rights.
- It could affirm the human right to create and participate in the arts.
- It might give voice to some people who find themselves excluded from mainstream discourse.
- It could express solidarity about shared values in a form that is inclusive, interactive, and iterative.

Participants discussed the potential purpose, process, content, and form of a manifesto, in this age of the post-human cyborg.

- It may not be possible to translate everything into the digital communication and some forms of digital communication may be inaccessible to some people.
- In developing the manifesto, it will be helpful to acknowledge the dominant, colonizing, gender-marginalizing, racializing, capitalist, cultural baggage and be open to new sources of knowledge and methods of knowledge production.
- In developing the manifesto, we could utilize multiple mediatic approaches to help mitigate access issues and power imbalances, and to expand potential meanings.

- Working with text will be helpful as we develop reflections and outcomes of the workshops and the symposium; ultimately the manifesto would need to be more than text.
- An interactive, socially engaged, international virtual and real art exhibition could explore the outcomes of the workshops and symposium and potential ideas for a manifesto. This might include, for example, individual and collective works of art, film, dance, music, and spoken word engaging with the concept of, or specific ideas for, the manifesto. It could include an array of 2-minute videos by each participant discussing, performing, or showing something of importance to the symposium outcomes and manifesto. The exhibition could be complemented by a diverse resource guide. The exhibition could provide opportunities for those who visit to engage with the materials and contribute to its ongoing iteration.

## Closing thoughts

*Public art is not about oneself, but about others. It is not about personal tastes, but about the needs of others. It is not about the artist's anguish, but about the happiness and well-being of others. It is not about the myth of the artist, but about his civic sense. It is not intended to make people feel small and insignificant, but to glorify them. It is not about the gap between culture and the public, but instead seeks to make art public and the artist to be a citizen again.*

- Armajani, S., cited in Chillida, A. et al. (2000) *Siah Armajani*. Madrid: Ed. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. At p.73, translated from the original text in Spanish.

Facilitators provided a high-level summary of insights and questions that emerged from this workshop and thanked participants for their engagement, assuring them that the workshop discussions will help inform the development of the agenda for the April symposium and the commencement of work on the manifesto.

## Some external references that emerged during the discussion

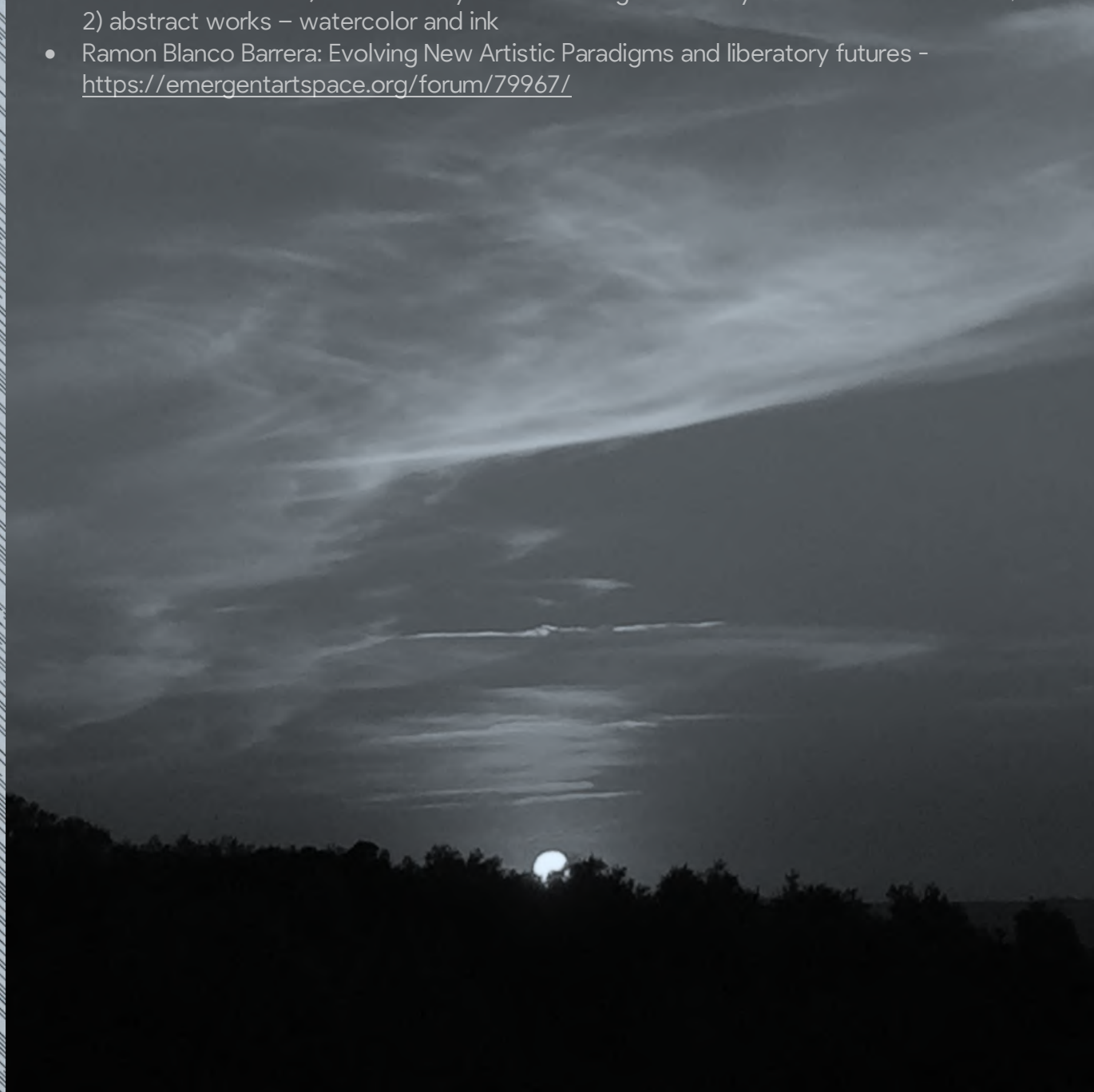
Balance-Unbalance International Conference: <https://www.facebook.com/balanceunbalance/>

Emergent Art Space: [Emergentartspace.org](http://Emergentartspace.org)

## People and their projects:

- Jean-Luc Nancy, author of *L'Intrus*
- Rehab Nazzal, Ottawa-based Palestinian-Canadian artist/activist who exposes the inhumanity of Israeli occupation forces using advanced "crowd control" military technologies on unarmed Palestinian democracy-seekers
- Luce Irigaray, queer feminist philosopher to recognize the difference of others

- Okwui Enwezor, and Sylvester Ogbechi, anti-colonial art historians, critiquing the theft of cultural innovation from Africa to Europe in artists like Picasso and art institutions such as Tate Modern, etc.
- Achille Mbembe, author of the book *Necropolitics*
- Omid Milani's art piece *Panta Rhei*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFOCCHbXnTs>
- Ariella Azoulay, exposing the inherent violence of official archives: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ms4MadONVs>
- Simone Weil, *Human Personality*: <https://lib.tcu.edu/staff/bellinger/rel-viol/Weil.pdf>
- Dengke Chen - <https://emergentartspace.org/artists/4741/> Uses nonlinear and often humorous storytelling narratives and animation to critically reflect social and ethical issues, while envisioning a world where sentient beings can live in harmony.
- Vikrant Kano - <https://emergentartspace.org/forum/83509/> & Jayeti Battacharya - <https://emergentartspace.org/forum/83764/> : Two artists from India addressing the impact of 1947 Partition of India and displacement across generations, using very different methods—1) documentary forms working with family archives and interviews; 2) abstract works – watercolor and ink
- Ramon Blanco Barrera: Evolving New Artistic Paradigms and liberatory futures - <https://emergentartspace.org/forum/79967/>





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