

EDITORIAL

THE EDITORIAL BOARD IN COLLABORATION WITH BEATRICE MICHAELIS  
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## Editorial

The conceptual footing of *On\_Culture*, reflected in the pilot issue on “Emergence/Emergency,” is kept up in the second issue with its focus on “The Nonhuman.” There could not have been a better turnout for this issue, and the Editorial Board is particularly proud to present a collection of eight double-blind peer reviewed academic *Articles* and two *Perspectives*, all of which investigate, problematize, and develop key concepts and methods in the field.

Contemporary scholars draw our attention to matter, networks, affect, objects, and media in order to show how other entities act and shape our world. They argue that making these nonhuman entities visible helps us better engage with the contemporary moment and address twenty-first-century challenges such as global climate change, the collapse of financial markets, and nonhuman internet traffic. The nonhuman has been approached from such diverse fields as actor-network theory, affect theory, animal studies, assemblage theory, new media theory, new materialism, speculative and object-oriented realism or systems theory.

Turning towards the nonhuman in the study of culture, however, was not just about ‘contemporary thought’ — it was and is about politics, knowledge, and embodied experience both in the present and throughout history. Thus a “nonhuman turn” in the study of culture might just as well be described as a “re/turn of the nonhuman,” as research on the cultural and social relations of human and nonhuman actors can be traced to a variety of different intellectual and theoretical developments throughout the last decades of the twentieth century and well before.

A stimulus for the second issue of *On\_Culture* was the 2013 conference on “The Re/Turn of the Nonhuman in the Study of Culture,” held at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC). Organized in close collaboration with *C21*’s director Richard Grusin, the conference looked at how, more often than not, academic research today tries to solve issues of the twenty-first century with concepts from the twentieth century in institutional frameworks of the nineteenth century. The humanities are a case in point: important as they have been in the past and continue to be in the present, the very term ‘humanities’ can be seen as somewhat problematic today, as it implies an exclusive focus on humans and humanity. There is, however, hardly an issue

of cultural or social concern today which does not involve complex entanglements of human and nonhuman actors.

While the conference, from which some of the academic articles in this issue derive, also acknowledged the discourse on a ‘posthuman turn’ as an important inspiration, it treated the ‘nonhuman’ as a distinct concept which differs from posthumanism in important ways. Like the posthuman, the nonhuman aims to widen the scholarly perspective to include other natural, cultural, and social actors than humans; however, it does not claim a historic shift from humanism to posthumanism, but rather advocates research that takes into account the various complex relations of humans and nonhumans in contemporary as well as historical cultural and social formations. Given the conference’s focus on concepts, concerns, and challenges within the field and its openness towards forms of expression other than academic articles (e.g., performances and video installations), it naturally fitted into the framework of *On\_Culture*.

Resulting from a collaborative effort between the Editorial Board of *On\_Culture* and the conference organizers, this volume sheds light on the concept of the nonhuman through the lens of various fields such as material culture studies, literary studies, media studies, organization studies and (political) philosophy. The contributions focus on [the role of nonhuman entities](#) and [objects in literature, in the home, in nursing](#), and on the [“non-human as such.”](#) Other foci include a [media theory of nonhuman voices](#), the interrelations between [technology and spectral animal bodies](#) in the digital age, and the nonhuman in relation to [cultural practices in organizational life-worlds](#).

The academic articles are complemented by the *Perspectives* on [visual culture](#) and communicative [practices of transnational memory](#) in the Axis History Forum. The contributions in this second issue demonstrate that foregrounding the nonhuman enables a better engagement with contemporary issues such as global warming, the Anthropocene, digital culture, and clean and dirty work, as well as the political implications and entanglements of these matters.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the authors who shared their ideas with us and to an excellent team of proofreaders and peer-reviewers whose work is greatly appreciated.

[The Editorial Board](#) in collaboration with Beatrice Michaelis and Martin Zierold  
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