

Changing Patterns of Self-Other Interaction in the Contemporary World

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1. Introduction: What Does it Mean to be Human?

The COVID-19 virus is another alarming disruption to be added to climate emergency, mass displacement, poverty, technological change, and automation; all of which are putting into jeopardy not only our health and socio-economic and political structures, but also our ways of thinking, acting, working and living. These uncertainties and disruptions are all part of newly emerging and perceived crises of the human and its relationship to others, both human and non-human. In this definitional space, what we understand and experience as knowledge is being constantly challenged and put into question by far-reaching, rapid, chaotic, simultaneous and interconnected changes (Sardar 2015a: 26–7). Consequently, the very notion of what it means to be human has changed and continues to change: ‘Individual and collective identities can no longer be understood as produced within defined locations, and their study can no longer be confined to observable activities and ideas within one locale’ (Moore 2004: 79). We are being forced to reassess our notions of human relationships and emerging virtual and actual forms of ‘sociality’ with others (Moore 2012). Some of these novel interactions are the result of freshly created animate beings, robots, memories and imagined futures (ibid.), yet others are returning us, through a form of repositioning, to forms of sentient life recognised by indigenous peoples, as in sentient lakes, rivers and mountains (Desjarlais 2014; Escobar 2016; de la Cadena 2015, 2017; de la Bellacasa 2017; Myers 2017).

The result is the continuous questioning, rethinking and reimagining of our interactions with the ‘self’ and with the ‘other’, not just other humans, but non-human others, the living world, our environments and the modern materialities of human creation. The underlining thread is ‘a specific set of passions and preoccupations about otherness’ (Moore 2013b: 98). How, then, in these chaotic times can the humanities help us build more and hopefully better social connections with these others?

Through the exploration of three examples from art practices, aesthetic performances and community-led collaborations, this chapter provides a multidisciplinary approach animated by two interrelated questions: First, how can the humanities account for our continuing failure to co-exist with others and how should we respond to the new emerging forms of failure? Second, how do the humanities help us assess what is relevant for changing or reimagining our ways of being?

In section 2, we articulate our positioning towards the humanities and what we believe is their biggest challenge and opportunity: their ‘reinvention’, humanities’ adaptability to navigate the uncertainties of the ‘contemporary moment’. In section 3, we review and

reflect on how other literatures and scholarly debates have examined questions of the 'self' and the 'other', their changing interactions, and the processes of knowledge production through *alternative frames of reference*, *speculative potentialities*, and *ethical imaginations*. In section 4, we explore these issues further with three case studies: *I Roam*, a short film of a whale with a bio-logging camera by French artist Sonia Levy; *Solaris*, a theatre play adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's 1961 novel by Scottish playwright David Greig; and *Stories in Transit V*, a collaborative storytelling workshop organised and performed by youth migrants, artists, writers and musicians in Palermo, Italy. We draw the main points together with a discussion and conclusion in section 5.

2. Rethinking and Reimagining the Humanities in Uncertain Times

Within the arts and humanities, the backdrop of global and local uncertainties and disturbances of the twenty-first century has been coupled with a context of threatening cuts and declining numbers of university students taking up *humanist* disciplines (Collini 2012; Bulaitis 2017). In British, European and Western contexts these preoccupations have led to the defence of humanities' public and plural value across five main claims (Small 2013): their distinctive disciplinary character and understanding of what constitutes knowledge, with a strong emphasis on the self and the human (Collini 2012); their subjects of enquiry and methodologies address important aspects of day-to-day life that are at odds with neo-liberal principles of economic usefulness and measurement (Collini 2012; Bulaitis 2017); they help us understand what happiness and well-being might look like, how can we work towards them, and how education can enhance the forms and qualities of some of our pleasures and creative processes; their central concerns with aspects of cultural representation, cognitive practices of reflection, argument, criticism and speculation are fundamental to the proper working of democracy informing various aspects of social, economic and political life (Nussbaum 2010); and they are non-consequentialist and have intrinsic value.

The thorough examination of the genealogies and discussions of these claims is outside the scope of this chapter, and while we adhere to these claims, albeit with caution to their strengths and limitations, we think it necessary to deviate from them. The current context of uncertainty of the contemporary moment, and the disruptions brought forth by it, call for a change in approach. Thus, we wish to avoid restating claims that seek to reconfigure humanities' 'epistemologies' and 'ontologies' to fit neoliberal discourses of impact, binary exercises of instrumental versus intrinsic, and daunting marketisation and commodification strategies for student recruitment and research publication 'successes'.¹

Instead, we propose to focus on what we believe to be the humanities' biggest challenge, strength and public value; their continuous reinvention and adaptability. These reinventions, which can already be seen in the emergence, splitting and merging of disciplines and bodies of knowledge (Braidotti 2017, 2019), are perhaps best expressed in the humanities' relentless claim for value scrutiny through rhetorical, historical and philosophical reflection, and their embrace of different forms of knowledge production and speculation. To face the complex and dynamic changes of the contemporary moment, the humanities capacity, and responsibility, to reimagine themselves will be fundamental for creating and opening up spaces to learn to cope from past and present realities and experiences, and to envision and speculate about new and alternative ways of being.

Yet, in their process of reinvention, the humanities ought to consider carefully the concepts and genealogies used. The 'frames of reference' we use to imagine and understand

the world shape our ‘terms of encounter’ with others (Myers 2017). The problem lies in the fact that, often, many of the concepts used within academic and expert circles remain removed from popular understandings of what it means to be human, of what is to know. Similarly, the mere adoption of alternative practices and forms of knowledge without really changing our ways and means of enquiry and epistemological categories risks reducing them to a confusing ‘pluralisation of others’ (Savransky 2017: 12).

Any future efforts towards the development of a humanities that seeks to narrow these divides should encourage and adopt ontologies and performances that, while complementing cognitive and reflective thought, also place the affective, the imaginative and the speculative at the very centre of social and political practices and concerns.

These processes necessitate a novel approach through which to rethink and experience new and emerging patterns of self-other interaction. It is not possible to understand, let alone explain, processes of social and political transformation without considering and engaging the personal hopes and aspirations behind them (Moore 2013a). Here, as we propose in this chapter, the humanities’ quest of what it means to be human and live with others, and how – if at all possible – to live well with those others, must start from the *ethical imagination* (Moore 2011). That is the forms and means that are used to relate to the self and to the other, be they actualised or fantasised discursive forms, reflections, affective practices, objects or emerging institutions (Moore 2020). Thus the *ethical imagination*, that thread holding together the various topographies through which self-other living interactions occur, opens up possibilities for change and transformation by unfolding *alternative frames of reference* that enhance our capacities to understand and navigate uncertainties and unwelcomed disruptions (ibid.). These frames must also be approached as *speculative potentialities* that allow us to adapt, embrace, reflect and hypothesize, and better communicate ‘what is’ and ‘what is yet to be’ within the many worlds we inhabit with others.

It is through these alternative frames and speculative activities that the *ethical imagination* leads us to explore novel forms of knowing, experiencing and fantasising that are based on care, honesty and solidarity. These are the means, we argue, through which the humanities can help us navigate and better communicate the novel and changing forms of relation of the contemporary moment.

3. Patterns of Self-Other Interactions

3.1 *The ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ Across the Humanities and Beyond*

Scholarly research within the humanities, social sciences and beyond has studied issues of self-other interactions from a variety of perspectives. For example, debates within the Digital Humanities and machine learning studies examine the emergence of new habits of thought, preference, conduct and expression as a result of ‘algorithmic cultures’ – the sorting, classifying and hierarchising of humans and others (people, places, objects and ideas) by artificial intelligence and computer-run complex mathematical formulae (Striphas 2015; Hallinan and Striphas 2016). Feminist social analyses have studied how trends of individualism, the increasing preoccupation about the body, the notions of choice between ‘being oneself’ or ‘pleasing oneself’, and the emphasis on self-surveillance and self-discipline are extensions of a ‘contemporary sensibility’ compounded by neoliberal entrenched inequalities related to gender, race and class (Gill 2007, 2019).

Future, transformative and forecasting studies explore humans’ changing relationship to the living environment not just in terms of the natural phenomena and resources of

the planet, but also of the interconnected and rapidly accelerating ‘chaotic’, ‘complex’ and ‘contradictory’ processes of disruption affecting human ways of being, doing, thinking and relating to other humans, animals, micro-organisms and things (Sardar 2010, 2015a; Fergnani 2019). Researchers involved in international development and community-led participatory approaches have examined the complex relationships and processes of iterative reflection through which values, behaviours, perceptions, knowledges and experiences are formed, exchanged and negotiated, creating or closing emergent structures and spaces for action and social change (Moreno et al. 2017; Moreno et al. 2020).

Cosmopolitanism, citizenship studies and transnational studies have approached these issues from the perspective of people’s freedoms and rights of movement across borders, changing notions and forms of sociality and belonging, and normative frameworks of membership and representation. Some of these conversations have examined issues of territorial sovereignty, ‘citizenship’ and ‘legal membership’ (Anker 2010; Holland 2013), normative frameworks regulating peoples’ movements across borders (Bosniak 2008; Benhabib 2004; Sassen 2008), and individuals’ increasingly diverse motivations to move (Vertovec 2014; Meissner and Vertovec 2015). In a similar vein, political sociologists and anthropologists have studied the socio-economic and psychological implications of ‘irregularisation’ and institutionalised ‘illegality’ deriving from immigration regimes and integration policies (Calavita 2005; Bosworth et al. 2018), and the political resistance to include ‘denizens’ in policy-making processes affecting their lives (Squire 2009, 2011; Khan and Weekes-Bernard 2015; Allen 2016; James and Mayblin 2016). Other analyses have focused on what is termed as ‘cosmopolitanism on the ground’ or ‘actually existing cosmopolitanism’, arguing that in a globalised, interconnected world everyone is a cosmopolitan, aware and well-informed of the differences and changing demands of others outside immediate kinship and communities (see Beck and Sznaider 2010).

However, while these debates are important and have certainly contributed to the emergence of new narratives and forms of governance that depart from the interconnections of difference, globalisation, transnationality and the ‘shifting’ of borders (physical, legal, cultural), they remain problematic for several reasons. First, they are predetermined by fixed, normative structures, discourses and ways of imagining and thinking about the ‘global’ and ‘the other’ that give little or no purchase to understandings and lived experiences of diversity and difference (Moore 2013b: 109). Second, in overemphasising the interconnections between cosmopolitanism, the ‘global’, and the enhanced capacities for communication, information and sharing with the ‘other’ brought forth by the massive scale of digital technology and social media change, they seem to deproblematise and forget that ‘diversity’ and ‘distinctiveness’ are not intrinsically attractive and compatible for everyone (Moore 2013b: 99; Skrbis and Woodward 2007). Third, economic globalisation, digital technologies, politico-global debates, and telecommunications accelerate and catalyse processes of ‘worldmaking’ and ‘world imagining’ that are parallel and overlapping, connected and interoperable, but also not shared, mutually incomprehensible and non-commensurable (Moore 2011).

While the forces of globalisation can bind us together, they can also enhance ‘unwelcomed proximities’ and ‘discomforting rationalities’ of difference (ibid: 3). Think, for instance, of pro-human rights social movements, climate emergency protests, versus corporate land-grabbing, soil exploitation and extractive industries; think Google, social media, CO2 emissions from Internet servers, *jihadism*, white supremacist groups against social justice, activism for race and gender equality, and non-human species rights (Moore 2013b). Many of these unwelcomed differences, disruptions and contradictions of the con-

temporary moment are old and innate to the human nature, yet in a context of globalised, interconnected, rapid and unsettling change, one cannot assume that empathy and cooperation will be naturally embraced by many (Fergnani 2019). In fact, left to its own devices, globalisation and the 'neoliberal economisation of value' (economic, financial, but also moral and emotional value) have shown to continuously undermine our notions of citizenship grounded in reciprocity, equality and solidarity (Mavelli 2018).

Processes of self-other interaction do not operate solely through the conscious thought and cognitive structures, but through emotions, affect, somatic engagements and imaginations (Moore 2011: 6). Questions of the self, by virtue of our sociality as human beings, always involve questions about the other. While engaging in definitions of the 'self' or the 'other' is outside the scope of this chapter, what is important to understand and imagine here is that exploring what is to be human concerns not just knowledge but also experience, not just theories but new ontologies, not just factual analyses of cultural representation and identification, but also 'speculative' explorations of 'meaning creation', 'identity negotiations' and emerging, not yet formed or consumed, imagined relationalities (Moore 2011; Savransky 2016).

We understand the self and the other, and their emerging and changing interactions, as 'connections in progress' and practices of worldmaking and world imagining (Cheah 2006; Calhoun 2008; Haraway 2016) that lead to difference and changing forms of sociality (Moore 2013b: 201). Thus, navigating the challenges of the contemporary moment cannot be successfully achieved within the boundaries of existing normative, epistemological and ontological frameworks. We need a change in our practices of being and doing, and in the ways in which we produce and communicate knowledge. Here the challenge, and opportunity, posed to the humanities, and to all bodies of knowledge and practice for that matter, is a political one; that of creating and imagining spaces to learn to live better together with others in the world, and the many 'worlds' comprised within it, 'from our most intimate relationships to questions of citizenship, international governance and planetary concerns' (Moore 2011: 21).

3.2 *Learning to Live Better with Others: Knowledges, Experiences and Imaginaries*

In the uncertainty of the contemporary moment, conventional analytical frames of reference that operate on binaries, antonyms and opposites not only have become obsolete but they impede further analysis and new ways of understanding and experiencing the world (Moore 2011: 3–6).

To understand and navigate the complexities, contradictions and continuous changes of the contemporary moment we need *alternative frames of reference* and *speculative potentialities*, both of which are emergent and constitutive elements of the *ethical imagination* through which we relate to others in the worlds we inhabit (Moore 2011, 2013b, 2016). Ethically imagining worlds through plural representations of difference and actualised and fantasised possible futures does more than just bring those worlds into being; 'it creates pleasure which acts to enhance our sense of being part of humanity because it leads to sociability' (Moore 2013b: 101).

Current uncertainties and disruptions cannot be managed, controlled or predicted (Sardar 2010). These challenges require honest, inclusive and ethical debates that draw from across cultures and knowledges, academic traditions and ordinary understandings. Here, what we call the *ethical imagination*, 'the forms and means through which individuals

imagine their relations to themselves and to others' (Moore 2020: 30), opens up the possibility for change and transformation, thus making the engagement with *alternative frames of reference* necessary (ibid.).

This is no easy task as it requires 'new physical and mental spaces where diversity, pluralism, and contending perspectives are present on their own terms but also deeply invested in engaging others in creating and sharing information and knowledge' (Sardar and Sweeney 2016: 3). Yet, for *alternative frames of reference* to be truly transformative, we will also need a more qualitative shift to 'defamiliarise our mental habits' (Braidotti 2019: 77), and embrace 'deterritorialised' ontologies and practices (Braidotti 2017: 89) that rethink the human as beings inseparable in their flesh, culture and imaginaries from the world of plants, animals and the stars (Harcourt 2018; Alaimo 2019). We will need to break away from hierarchical, oppositional and domineering classifications and alienations between the 'human' and 'non-human' (Neimanis et al. 2015; TallBear 2015), in order to *conjugate* new and alternative ethics of knowledge production based on 'response-abilities', curiosities and attentions to affect, entanglement and rupture of both the self and the other, be they human or non-human (Haraway 2016).

However, merely adopting the alternative, 'deterritorialised' ways of knowing without really changing the means of enquiry and epistemological categories risks reducing decolonial thinking to a 'pluralisation of others' without really changing the ways and means of enquiry and epistemological categories (Savransky 2017: 12). Adopting different ways of knowing and doing will also require the cultivation of a different ethos, a reclaiming of the 'care of knowledge'. This is something Savransky associates with relevance both in the sense of 'what is' and 'what may be possible'; the search and practice of *speculative potentialities* (2016). Within the humanities, the social sciences and beyond, the fragmentation of disciplines and the resurgence of new ones with new terminologies and niche concepts bears the risk to have little to no purchase with popular understandings and day-to-day lived experiences of the very individuals enacting, engaging, enjoying and suffering with the worlds they inhabit, the 'real' and the 'imagined', the proximate and the distant.

Even then, learning to live better together within welcomed and unwelcomed difference and disruption is more than new ways of intellectual thinking and philosophical reflection, or merely examining the state of affairs or foreseeing where and how things can turn up to be. The *ethical imaginations* – that is, our fantasies and imaginings about the future, past and present – need to depart from an active, honest and shared sense of responsibility and solidarity. The different ways of producing knowledge and doing things, and the act and performance of envisioning alternative, not-yet consumed, ways of being and relating to each other necessitate affect, emotion, the placement of the body, fantasies and a rethinking and reimagining of our relation with others (humans, non-humans, un-humans, abiotic beings, things, technologies, the material and the intangible world) (Moore 2011). This is not to say that the *ethical imagination* is a pre-defined and fixed set of ideals and moral codes. Instead, our *ethical imaginations* constitute changing, often inchoate and always partial 'forms of engagement' and 'lived relations' (Moore 2020: 30), those creative actions and affective processes that inform, and are informed by, alternative ways of knowing and doing that take us towards less individualistic and more collaborative visions of the world (Montuori 2011; Hoover 2019).

Just as individuals and groups are never complete nor hermetically closed in their self-identifications, the ethical imaginings that give way to the plurality of *alternative frames of reference* and *speculative potentialities* are not and cannot be about producing

perfectly interconnected and interoperable worlds (Moore 2011, 2013b: 102, 105). Thus, the actualised and fantasised plurality of knowledges and experiences that emerge from and engage with our *ethical imaginations* can be both uncomfortable and incomprehensible ‘forms of unknowing’ as much as explicit ideologies, developed theories and well-established research practices (Moore 2020: 31). What is important here is that, through their labours in opening up and sustaining alternative and speculative forms of identification and belonging, our ethical imaginings establish new possibilities for connections to others (Moore 2011: 19–21).

We now turn to three case studies to explore how these processes are manifested and experienced, learned and unlearned.

4. Case Studies

How do the humanities help us navigate the uncertainties of the contemporary moment? In this section, we present three examples of creative collaborations and artistic performances which act as heterogeneous companions and practices of world imaginaries from different perspectives (both in message, form and actors) that show us how the humanities negotiate the novel forms and changing patterns of self-other interaction.

4.1 *Alternative Frames of Reference: I Roam by Sonia Levy*

We tend to cut up the world into intelligible categories that ‘humanise time and space frames’ in order to work. Such categories, units of measurement and lenses, are also the building blocks through which much of what being human in relation entails: forms of governance and social policy, documenting, analysing and interpreting, or creating, telling and sharing (Sardar 2015b). These *frames* which direct our understanding of the world, our theories of ‘crisis’, as well as our visions of the future, are the inevitable stuff of human engagement and imagination, and not necessarily that of nature. ‘We live in an age that is fully aware that its fictions are themselves models of human design on the world’ (Moore 2018: 1514).

To navigate the changing patterns of interaction within the contemporary moment, we must change how we think about these issues, create *alternative frames of references*. In *I Roam* (2015), French artist Sonia Levy presents us with a simple, yet very powerful, 3 minutes video where we see a humpback whale swimming in the ocean off the coast of Iceland. We only see part of the back of the whale through a bio-logging camera device attached to the animal. Apart from the whale’s curved and dotted black back, all that is in view is the emerald-green hues of the murky water. We also register or imagine what look like pieces of algae, fish, debris or perhaps waste as passing dots in the background as the animal travels. As the whale ventures up to the surface, we catch glimpses of the blue sky, some white clouds, bubbles and the ‘greyishness’ of the splashing water as the whale dives in deep again. When this happens, we hear the bubbles splashing against the camera. The movement of the whale, whether we want it or not, is irregular, something which is evoked for us by the narrative provided in the subtitles accompanying the video:

I roam through every ocean, generally preferring to feed and perform my uncouth gambols near extensive coasts, or about the shores of islands, in all latitudes between the equator and the frozen oceans, both north and south. I am irregular in my movements, seldom going a straight course for any considerable distance; at one time moving from

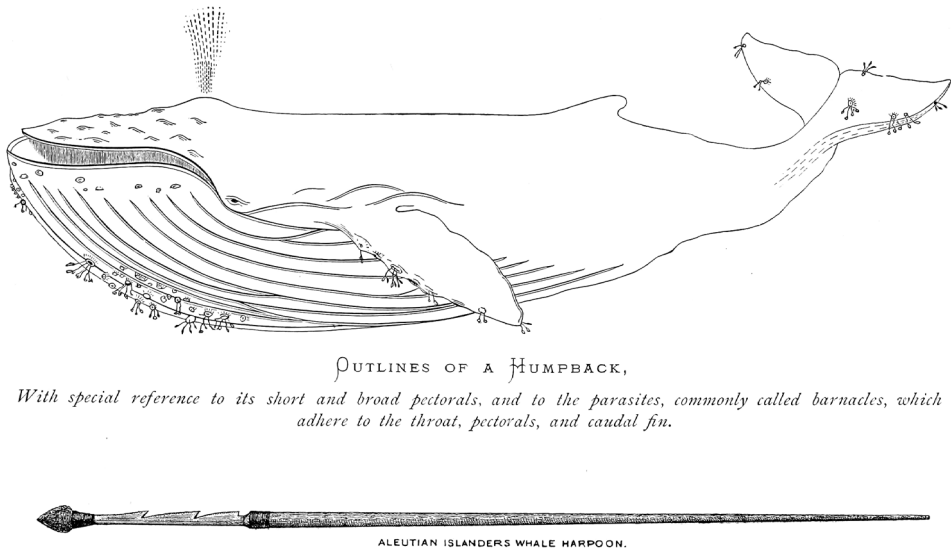


Figure 8.1 Drawings of a humpback whale and an Aleutian islander's whale harpoon by Charles M. Scammon, from *The Marine Mammals of the North-Western Coast of North America: Together with an Account of the American Whale-Fishery* (1874: 47)

the mast-head; at other times singly, seeming as much at home as if I were surrounded by hundreds of my kind; performing at will the varied actions of 'breaching,' 'rolling,' 'finning,' 'lobtailing,' or 'scooping'; or, on a calm, sunny day, perhaps lying motionless on the molten-looking surface, as though life were extinct. (Levy 2015)

The video ends with the whale exiting to the surface once more and re-entering quickly afterwards, the image slowly dims to pitch black and the credits appear. It is when the credits appear that our perception changes.

If at first, we are invited to think and imagine a story as told from an untroubled whale, the video then brings together an interaction between seemingly parallel yet non-commensurable worlds from the present and the past (Thorsen 2019: 4–5). First, we remember that our visual experience is mediated and displaced by a bio-logging camera designed to collect data and provide access to the 'whale's world'. Second, the narrative in the story comes from a reformulated extract of Chapter III 'The Humpback Whale' from the book *The Marine Mammals of the North-Western Coast of North America: Together with an Account of the American Whale-Fishery* written in 1874 by naturalist and whale hunter Charles Melville Scammon (1874). While in the original text Scammon writes the text in the third person, referring to the whale as 'it', Levy has changed it to 'I', as if it were the whale that tells us the story, yet it is the account of a successful whale hunter and pioneer in Western marine life. From this point of view, the narrative of the text is displaced again. Scammon pioneered the hunt for the California grey whales driving them close to extinction, so it is no surprise that for every careful description of whales, there is a careful account of harpoons and tools for hunting and 'cutting-in' to the whales, as shown in Figure 8.1; 'whereas the descriptions of the whales' movements seemed free and uninhibited coming from the whale, they appear damning and troublesome coming from Scammon' (Thorsen 2019: 6–7).

I Roam forces us to ask when and what kinds of knowledges come from the world of scientific humans, and when and what knowledges comes from the world of a humpback whale. The haunting history of Scammon's cetology research as a predecessor to today's bio-logging devices is hinted at by Levy's work. 'Once we unfold these layers of the work, a certain vibration among diverse ways of knowing the whale as a non-human other start to come into play. What are we hearing and seeing shifts again' [. . .] 'Here place is displaced, it becomes a space in-between indiscernible worlds and ways of knowing them. Perhaps such artworks, ones that insist on being in-between, can then also be important knowledge producing practices in terms of engaging more-than-human worlds, not despite but *because* of their aesthetic qualities' (ibid.: 7).

Works like *I Roam* show us not only the potentiality of *alternative frames of reference* across space and time, but also the centrality placed on human, non-human and more-than-human relations involved in processes of worldmaking and imagining that these *frames* make perceptible. Levy's video composition, the whale, the bio-logging camera, Scammon's modified excerpt, the ocean and sky in the video are the *frames of reference* that are telling, showing, documenting, remembering and imagining the stories of different worlds for us.

Still, the significance of Levy's 'worldings' (Haraway 2016) is not limited to the exploration and juxtaposition of knowledges and rationalities between beings, forms of data and narrative perspectives. Through her work in *I Roam*, and other art-science collaboration projects such as *For the Love of Corals* (Levy 2018), Levy explores the points of articulation between science and the arts to address societal issues and our relationship to Earth. This shows us how through the creation and imagining of *alternative frames of reference*, artistic performances can inform and be informed by science and other ontologies, while granting us the possibility to 'redistribute the sensible', pushing what we consider 'legitimate' and 'normatively acceptable' places and stakes of power relations and politics (Thorsen 2019: 2–4). In this sense, what we describe as *alternative frames of reference* have echoes of what philosophers and intercultural studies scholars have referred to as 'aesthetic registers' (Rancière 2006), 'polylogues' (Chen 2010), 'hypothetical analytical structures' (Braudel [1949] 1995, [1958] 2009), or 'common trading zones' (Latour 2014), in that all these artistic performances and humanist-scientific collaborations provide an importunity to rethink and reimagine what can be seen and what can be heard, reconfiguring not only the place and voice of particular groups and beings, but the contexts of power and politics in which they are embedded (Dixon 2009).

4.2 *Speculative Potentialities: Solaris by David Greig*

The experience of knowing and imagining the world, as well as the processes of social transformation that emerges from our relations and entanglements (Haraway 2016; Tsing et al. 2017), are shaped by the 'categorisations' and methods of enquiry we use (Myers 2017). However, the processes of theorisation and intellectual reflection often used within the humanities and social sciences have little purchase or immediate relevance to the day-to-day language and experience of people's lives (Savransky 2016: 181–95). When theoretical abstractions and philosophical arguments happen in isolation, devoid of experiential relation, the drivers for real social change (emotions, values and imaginations) remain untapped. As writer and storyteller, Simon Hodges explains, 'The gate-keeper of our intellect – the emotional limbic system – relies on relationships. No matter how potent the arguments, that system will not allow more information to be processed

rationally by the “higher” faculties of the brain if there is no emotional connection’ (Hodges 2017).

In the uncertainties of the contemporary moment, the humanities, then, must come up with languages and strategies that engage with individuals at every level, not just their minds, but also their emotions and fantasies. These novel, more emotional or practical idioms need not obscure or relegate the importance of theoretical and philosophical underpinnings within the academy. However, it is fundamental that the humanities rethink their methods of work as *speculative potentialities*, ‘intellectual attitudes’ informing, and being constituted by, certain ways of seeing the world, of coming to terms with how experiences materialise, and of how thoughts, emotions and dreams create ‘speculations’ of what is not-yet (Savransky 2016: 15, 185–6).

David Greig, one of the most important new playwrights in Britain over the past three decades, shows us a way for the humanities to bridge the divides of language, emotion and imagination. The hybrid poetic and realist style and ‘scrupulous dramaturgy’ of Greig’s theatre is ‘concerned with wider issues of politico-cultural identity and alienation within the liminal borders of postmodernity’ (Billingham 2007: 92). Since his first major work *Europe* in 1994 (Greig 2013), many of Greig’s characters appear to be ‘experiencing life from the border or margin, frequently metaphorically, in terms of an alienated, fragmented angst’ (ibid.: 94). In *Solaris* (2019), one of his recent works, Greig offers us a clear example of how *speculative potentialities* play out in ‘real life’. *Solaris* is a theatre adaptation of the 1961 Sci-Fi novel by Polish author Stanisław Lem (1970). In the story, a crew of Soviet cosmonauts encounters an unknown water planet, Solaris. We never see the planet, but we feel its presence through the crew’s sleeplessness, desperation and sense of loss at trying to figure how to communicate with it: ‘They fight with the nature of the planet below, their mission, their own motivations, and the dark horrors of their past that haunt the space station’ (Malthouse Theatre 2019).

However, Greig’s adaptation, a collaboration with Australian stage director Matthe Lutton and Korean-born set designer Hyemi Shin, is not just another reproduction of the novel’s many adaptations.² Greig gambles not only by changing characters’ genders and interactions to make them more talkative than taciturn (Badham 2019), but also by slightly twisting the plot itself, homing in on the themes of loneliness, communication and unknowability. In the play’s interpretation, *Solaris* learns to talk to its visitors gradually, manifesting itself in increasingly sophisticated ways, sending gifts of Earth-like objects, and eventually emissaries in human form such as ghosts and memories of the cosmonauts’ partners and friends (Fisher 2019). The play also uses the set restrictions as an opportunity to juxtapose spatial-temporal realities from past and imagined futures. The whole story takes place in one single space, where the imagined ‘future’ is portrayed through the vantage point of an analogue world fantasised in the 1960s Soviet context of the original novel and its first screen adaptations. ‘It was much better to think of the future as it appeared from that time. It’s a space station where people have books and smoke cigarettes, and look things up in encyclopaedia’, explains Greig (Badham 2019).

What Greig does in *Solaris* is to portray humans negotiating internal dialogues with themselves and the ‘impenetrable’ presence of Solaris, the other. The play also negotiates the crew’s own humanity and how that humanity is contingent: ‘A central part of being human is that in order to know there is a self we have to know there is an other, and how we negotiate our fear and desire about the other is at the heart of our consciousness of being human’ (ibid.). While throughout his career David Greig’s theatre has shown a plethora of heterogeneous plays both in form and theme, there is a very distinct and



Figure 8.2 *Solaris* production shots (Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh 2019)



Figure 8.3 *Solaris* production shots (Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh 2019)

powerful artistic voice ‘wedded to a deeply embedded sense of ethical commitment writing all these works’ (Wallace 2013). Through his work of bringing in new perspectives, speaking and performing in ‘translation’, Greig is constantly creating new imaginaries of the world with the opportunities and challenges inherent in everyday life; ‘placing us face to face with contradictory desires and incommensurable world views, but also with the hope that there is an elusive possibility of change’ (Wallace 2013: 3–4). However, while his work transcends current world socio-political problems and the sense of dislocation and uncertainty of the self, it also treats tropes of fear and anxiety within the drama where alternative fictional near-future worlds and exploratory dystopias are attempts at remembering and unravelling neoliberal social forces and models (Reid 2019: 86). He emphasises

not only the profound traumas of dislocation and alienation within the self and with the other, he also draws on the power of the imagination, creativity and wonder that connect his characters, themselves projections of his own internal dialogues, conflicts and imaginaries. Here, while his characters might be distant in personal, cultural or socio-political ways, they are unified by his love and empathy for them; he continuously asks himself 'why would someone, that character, do that? What would I, you, they do to be different given the same circumstances?' (Billingham 2007: 82).

What it means to be human, what it is to know are contingent processes coloured by our perceptions and lived experiences. These can be as different as the language we use to make sense of them and communicate them. Greig shows us that there are ways to unite these divergences through the 'facts of experience' (Savransky 2016: 185). A creative and reconstitutive activity of conceptual and experiential invention; one of 'speculative experimentations' (Savransky 2016) or 'the arts of the possible' (Moore 2011: 136–69). Regardless of the words we use to describe it, what is important is that *speculative potentialities* such as *Solaris* represents a clear example of how the humanities, through the exploration of self-other relations, including other beings, can adapt their languages and forms of enquiry as speculative experiences and 'adventures of thought' (Savransky 2016) with the potential to create moments of care in terms of collaboration, mutuality, kinship and solidarity (Hoover 2019).

4.3 *Ethical Imaginations: Stories in Transit Project*

Certainly, the collaborative nature of cultural productions and aesthetic performances within the humanities are intrinsic to the way these values and meanings become bound up with and constitute relationships of care (Moore 2011: 27–8). But when faced with daunting figures and incommensurable realities of despair such the mass displacement of millions of people or the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, to name but two examples, it is easy to become confused and forget where the humanities are situated and how they might help. While at its onset the situation on the COVID-19 pandemic changed by the hour (WHO 2019), latest figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were around 70.8 million people across the world who had been forcibly displaced from their homes; that represents nearly one person forcibly displaced every two seconds (UNHCR 2019). This includes over 41.3 million internally displaced individuals (those who are forced to migrate within state borders), 25.9 million refugees, over half of whom are under eighteen years old, and nearly 3.5 million asylum seekers.

What is the place of the humanities, one might ask, within a context of mass displacement and the uncertainties of a global pandemic, of a climate emergency and the extinction of species, of scarcity of resources, land-grabbing and expropriations from extractivist industries, of increasing poverty, inequality, social discontent and the rise of extremisms and far-right populisms? How, in these contexts of exclusion and social injustices, can the humanities help address our ongoing failures, as human beings, to live well together with others?

What we need are collaborative practices that are based on *ethical imaginations*, the means and practices that take us beyond the 'state of affairs' and allow us to engage across different spatial-temporal realities and potentialities, inherent simultaneously in affect and cognition, in the normative and the possible, what is, was and what is not-yet, and that divert us from individualistic and totalising affirmations towards imperfect, honest, caring 'lived relations' (Moore 2011: 77–105, 2016: 50).



Figure 8.4 Animation filmmaking (Stories in Transit 2018b)

Stories in Transit (SiT) is one such example of collaborative cultural production where relationships of care emerge and can affect positive social change. Started in 2015 by writer and scholar Prof. Marina Warner and Dr Valentina Castagna, the project organises storytelling workshops in the UK and Italy, bringing together young migrants and displaced individuals, irrespective of their 'legal' status, with artists, writers, musicians, journalists and academics. SiT explores how and to what extent storytelling can provide spaces for shelter, collective memory and belonging. In times of uncertainty, social exclusion and great physical, emotional and mental deprivations, 'the argument needs to be made for the right of access to a life of the mind and creative potential. What cultural steps can be taken to affirm the right of refugees/migrants/arrivants to freedom of thought and imagination – intellectual mobility? Is expressing the imagination and passing on traditions and testimony part of human rights?' (Stories in Transit n.d.).

One of SiT's most recent workshops, Stories in Transit V, which took place in Palermo over the space of four days between 13–16 April 2018, brought together more than fifty migrant students and a diverse group of volunteer artists, musicians and writers to prepare materials and rehearse the performances of three short stories (Stories in Transit 2018a).³ The four-day workshop involved group walks to gather ideas and do mapping for the stories, drawing, painting and crafting of masks and customs, music-playing and singing, animation filmmaking and play rehearsals, as well as warming-up games and discussions about the topics of the stories (*ibid.*). Following one of the stories, a group discussion took place spontaneously about who was to blame for the disaster that had overtaken the village. As Warner reflects, 'this was a strong example of experience informing the storytelling, and giving the participants a way of speaking up about what they have been through' (*ibid.*: 3).

riences, fantasised futures; and physically/materially distant others, like other humans – politicians, media, academia). The list goes on as we include other non-humans (the environment, the city flora and fauna at home and at destination) and the un-humans (the boats that carried them in their travels across the Mediterranean, the concrete of detention centres, the paper of asylum seeking forms). Most importantly what these stories exemplify is that *ethical imaginations* require more than conscious and critical thought to bring change; instead, we need to take account of the fact that ‘thought is bound up with fantasy, affect, emotion, symbols and the distortions of space and time’ (ibid.: 18).

Stories like those narrated, re-lived and re-negotiated through the SiT workshops are forms of self-other interactions. Much as the *alternative frames of reference* and *speculative potentialities* explored in our previous two examples, these stories are necessarily produced within specific historical contexts and shaped by certain social, economic and political changes. However, and while instigated by these factors, they are not and cannot be reduced to them (Moore 2020: 32). This is because people’s hopes, aspirations and ideas of self-identification, belonging and relation to others are fundamental in developing the attitudes and possible responses when engaging the challenges of the contemporary moment (ibid.: 31–2).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

To face the uncertainties of the contemporary moment, the humanities must engage with and foster alternative practices of knowledge production and enquiry. As we have argued throughout this chapter, this represents both the humanities’ greatest challenge and their greatest opportunity. A challenge because adopting new ways of thinking and doing requires a necessary confrontation and departure from traditional and predetermined debates and normative discourses that, while reproducing binary, hierarchical and dominating affirmations, obstruct the process of transformation (Moore 2013b; TallBear 2015; Haraway 2016). In particular, this means ceasing to reproduce oppositional concepts and processes such as the cognitive vs. the performative, the actual vs. the speculative, the human vs. the non-human, the academic vs. the ordinary. The humanities must come up with the means and practices that take us beyond the limitations of current theories of globalisation, culture and agency grounded on binary and opposite frames (Moore 2011: 15, 206), and engage with *ethical imaginations*, the forms and means by which individuals imagine and actualise relations to themselves and others (Moore 2016: 50, 2020: 28–34).

There is certainly hope. Research and creative practices like oral history and storytelling, for instance, already serve as powerful resources not just to reminisce collective memories and experiences, but also to shape collective imaginaries and inform positive social and political change (Perks and Thomson 2016). Oral histories, for example, have shown to empower individual narrators, generate public awareness and recognition of individual and group experiences, while creating ‘learning landscapes’ in which to foster understandings, sympathies and commitment within geographical communities and groups undergoing political persecution, marginalisation and socio-economic dislocations (High 2016, 2018). The humanities have also proven to have direct social and political outcomes, through the manifestation and exercise of artistic and aesthetic collaborations and performances that redefine and redistribute intellectual authority (Frisch 2003), give way to new and alternative collaborative analyses (Kerr 2016), and create new social imaginaries (Rancière 2006; Dixon 2009). This has been evidenced, for instance, in the land rights struggles of indigenous peoples (Perks and Thomson 2006), the financial and

political support gained by Central American refugees in the US (Westerman 2006), and by making otherwise silent voices heard in order to influence power relations and policy change, as in the case of homeless stories (Kerr 2015) or migrants in indefinite detention (Herd and Pincus 2019). Stories can also, through respectful and active listening and emotional connections, open up spaces for reconciliation and dialogue to diffuse hostile situations or shape social activist and political campaigns (Hodges 2014, 2017).

However, in a context of constant, rapid, complex disruptions of the self within and of its interactions with others, the humanities cannot restrict their quest for the human condition and knowledge to the 'cognitive'. They must also draw from the affective, the emotive, the somatic and the imaginary. They must turn to the experiential process, both the tactile and existing, as well as the immaterial, the what was and is yet to be (Savransky 2016).

Here what we need are *alternative frames of reference* and *speculative potentialities*, both emerging and constituting processes of our *ethical imaginations* through which we construct, in actualised and fantasised ways, ourselves, our worlds and the forms of belonging and identification through which we relate to others in those worlds (Moore 2011, 2013a, 2016). Ethically imagining worlds through *alternative frames of reference* and *speculative potentialities* not only brings those worlds into being, it also develops our sense of being part of humanity (Moore 2013b: 101).

Ethical imaginations are not a pre-defined and fixed set of ideals and moral codes. They constitute ever-changing, often inchoate and always partial ways of learning, 'forms of engagement' and 'lived relations' (Moore 2020: 30). They are underpinned by those creative actions and affective processes that inform, and are informed by, alternative ways of knowing and doing that take us towards less individualistic and more collaborative attitudes and engagements (Montuori 2011; Hoover 2019). For the humanities, the opportunity here arises from their relentless capacity to reinvent their disciplines, methodologies and categories. We have shown how the humanities can embrace these interrelated processes in the 'actuality' and the 'imaginary' through three examples from the visual arts, the stage performance, and the community collaborative.

Alternative frames of reference, *speculative potentialities* and *ethical imaginations* are the thematic concepts we have chosen for our analysis. They are not pre-emptive and definitely do not preclude other categorisations, '[t]here is no single behaviour, mode of thought, or method that can provide an answer to all our interconnected, complex ills' (Sardar 2010: 437). What matters is that when approaching processes of thinking, performance and the imagination, such as the examples examined in this chapter, we do not attempt to understand them as mere spaces or tools of practice or enactment to engage with a set of problems. They are not solutions. Rather, we ought to experience and inhabit them as locally situated moments, attitudes that offer us opportunities *to care* about how we think and relate to our worlds in relation to ourselves and beyond ourselves (Savransky 2016). These examples are opportunities to rethink, reimagine and connect those ways of thinking, feeling and doing (theories, methodologies, performances, practices) that make us human in context, with others. They make perceptible, without being totalising, some of the kinds of strategies, forms and rationalities required to negotiate the changing forms of sociality (ibid.: 1–23).

Finally, in adopting new ways of thinking and doing, of speculating and envisioning things, we must pay attention to language and to how we communicate things. This is not about a mere 'repackaging' exercise of humanities' disciplinary conventions and methods of enquiry so that they become more accessible, engaging or interesting to the general

public. Bridging the divide between academic and non-expert, ordinary understandings of what it means to be human and what it is to know, requires us to engage with these emerging and reimagined bodies of knowledge, practice and imaginings not along disciplinary, epistemological, geographical or chronological lines, but as ‘historically situated attitudes’ and ‘ethical sensibilities’ (ibid.: 10).

This means that the forms and means through which the humanities study and imagine the self and its novel interactions with the other, the *alternative frames of reference* and the *speculative potentialities*, must start from *ethical imaginations*, forms of engagement that animate fantasies, practices, ideologies, normative frameworks and institutions based on care, honest collaborations and solidarity (Moore 2016: 50–1). These are not a set of instruments for producing new epistemological and ontological solutions to the problems and issues of the contemporary moment, rather they are lived and imagined, future, past and present relations for subjective, social and political transformation.

Notes

1. For an in-depth discussion around these issues, see Collini (2012) and Bulaitis (2017). See Small (2013) for a thorough examination of the five main defenses of the humanities in the European and Western context.
2. *Solaris* was first adapted as a Soviet television play in 1968 by directors Boris Niremburg and Lidiya Ishimbayeva, and then in the more widely known cult Sci-Fi films by directors Andrei Tarkovsky in 1972, and more recently by Steven Soderbergh in 2002 (Brooke 2019).
3. The three short stories were narrated by three participants and performed using different media, these included: Numu Touray’s *Uno per te e uno per me* (One for You and One for me), which used puppets; Amadou Diallo’s *Il Vecchio e il Serpente: La storia del genio di Palermo* (The Old Man and the Serpent: The Story of the Genius of Palermo), performed with traditional *cantastorie* (story-singing) where participants were telling and singing to images projected on a painted board banner; and Dine Diallo’s *Il Cacciatore e il Figlio del Re* (The Huntsman and the King’s Son), which used a combination of animation film and live action drama (Stories in Transit 2018a).

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