

SLSAeu Conference EMPATHIES – www.empathies2017.com
University of Basel, 24 June, 11am-1pm

ROUNDTABLE: Empathy and NonHuman Agents

Futurist author and computer scientist Ray Kurzweil predicts that Singularity—the idea that machines will achieve human consciousness—will be reached by 2029. We are currently living through a cultural transition that is rapidly anticipating this reality and the many expectations and anxieties attached to it. How we live, work, and relate to machines (and how machines relate to us) is being called into question across diverse fields of research. While all intertwined, the latter two-pronged concern is the focus of this roundtable event. The following themes and questions will be explored:

- **(Trans/Para/Post)Humanism:** What does it mean to be human in an age of conscious machines? What are the ethical concerns this brings up?
- **Identities:** How are markers of identity written onto nonhuman agents? What are the cultural and political implications of this?
- **Economy and Design:** What is the role of empathy in design and consumer/user demand?
- **Representation and Creative Fictions:** How do contemporary science fictions envision empathy in a future of AI? What do these stories reveal about our hopes and fears?

Dario Stagno will chair a conversation around these topics with experts who will present 10 minutes on the following:

- **Professor Dr. Karin Harrasser (Cultural Studies, University of Art and Design Linz):** Empathy in physiological research and prosthetics.
- **Dr. Stefan Herbrechter (Cultural Theory, Coventry University):** Robotics and care in the film *Robot and Frank*.
- **Dr. Natalie Roxburgh and Professor Dr. Felix Sprang (English Literature, University of Siegen):** The problem of the human/non-human binary in the film *Ex Machina*.
- **Dr. Jennifer Whitney (English Literature, Cardiff University):** The role of race and gender in the Microsoft chat-bot Tay.

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