



'Research in Progress' Seminar Series Schedule

| Week | Date | Paper |
|------|---------|---|
| 5 | 31 Aug | You've Got Another Thing Coming: Containing the Linguistic Virus Dr Ben Eldridge |
| 8 | 21 Sept | An Architect's Approach to NTROs Dr Simon Pandal |
| 9 | 28 Sept | Holy Men and Artful Nuns: what paintings reveal about the lived experience of early modern women Dr Karen McCluskey |
| 11 | 19 Oct | New Suburban Landscapes Kieran Murnane |
| 13 | 2 Nov | Catholic Foreign Policy – Method & Models Kiara P Black |
| 14 | 9 Nov | TBA Dr Leigh Straw |
| 15 | 16 Nov | The Indigenous employee coalescence of national and organisational culture explored through sensemaking Australia and Covid Melinda Tunbridge |



You've Got Another Thing Coming: Containing the Linguistic Virus

Dr Ben Elridge

To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life. (§19)

– Ludwig Wittgenstein



Viruses have come to captivate our current cultural imagination: the global pandemic of COVID-19 is forcing large-scale changes across our societal functioning, and is prompting a fundamental reassessment of modern ways of living. However, as the increasingly desperate

search for a vaccine continues, it remains oddly overlooked is that viruses have been one of the most persistent elements of all organic life: with “cellular proteins playing very important roles in modern organisms,” likely to have had “a viral origin,” according to Patrick Forterre (155). The basic biological constitution of *Homo sapiens* itself is both overwhelmingly and inescapably viral: Nicholas F. Parrish & Keizo Tomonaga report, for instance, that for humans “nearly 80% of the genome” contains sequences which can be identified as leftover remnants from viral sources (176). Moreover, viruses are likely responsible for the development of consciousness: conscious thought itself may only function due to gene sequences comprised of viral remnants that retain their virus-like workings: viral elements “may have,” propose Elissa D. Pastuzyn, et. al., “been intricately involved in the evolution of synaptic plasticity and animal cognition” (277). Notwithstanding their danger, viruses are, disconcertingly, an integral part of human being: in a certain sense, our species is perhaps the ultimate pathogenic virus, and also host to a further complex of viruses. In this paper, I will be considering another novel virus, that similarly straddles the line between biotic and non-biotic: the virus of language. Through a close reading of the discursive disfigurements in Peter Watts’ rendering of the extraterrestrial Thing – in the short story “The Things” – the virus will be harnessed to contaminate the typically persistent divisions between human and non-human biology and, indeed, language and selfhood.

Forterre, Patrick. “Defining Life: The Virus Viewpoint.” *Origins of Life and the Evolution of Biospheres*, vol. 40, no. 2, April 2010, 151-160.

Parrish, Nicholas F. & Keizo Tomonaga, “Endogenized Viral Sequences in Mammals.” *Current Opinion in Microbiology*, vol. 31, June 2016, 176-183.

Pastuzyn, Elissa D., Cameron E. Day, Rachel B. Kearns, Madeleine Kyrke-Smith, Andrew V. Taibi, John McCormick, Nathan Yoder, David M. Belnap, Simon Erlendsson, Dustin R. Morado, John A.G. Briggs, Cédric Feschotte and Jason D. Shepherd. “The Neuronal Gene Arc Encodes a Repurposed Retrotransposon Gag Protein that Mediates Intercellular RNA Transfer.” *Cell*, vol. 172, Jan. 2018, 275-288.

Watts, Peter. “The Things.” *Beyond the Rift*, Tachyon Publications, 2013, 1-19.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, edited by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Blackwell Publishing, 2009.

