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Introduction: Figure, Figuring and Configuration

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Introduction

The word "figure" refers to many things: numbers, characters in texts, representations of persons or other entities in images; turns of phrase; abstractions and personifications; movement or series of movements; a diagram or a short succession of notes. Alongside these many everyday uses, the figure has a long history as a concept, migrating across disciplines and fields of research, including literary and historical studies, art criticism and history, philosophy, politics, feminism, science and technology studies, information and computer science, mathematics, design, sociology and anthropology. We do not discuss all these understandings

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here, but consider a few that have been influential and are relevant to the contributions in this collection.

We aim to address how figures, figuring and configuration provide a way to study complex, contemporary problems and processes that require interdisciplinary approaches. We outline how individual contributions make use of figures, figuring and configuration. We demonstrate what is at stake in the analysis of figures, the practice of figuring, and the compositions of configuration.

Part 1: Figure

In his essay "Figura" (1938/1959), Erich Auerbach shows why beginnings and ends often meet in figures. The Latin word *figura*, from which the English word follows, came into Latin via technical Greek discourses on *morphē* and *eidos*, *schēma*, *typos* and *plasis*—a constellation of words that plays with the subtle differences between form and plastic shape, statue and portrait. By late antiquity, Auerbach argues, a tension emerged within *figura*, which retained both its material (concrete) and immaterial (abstract) significance. The classical meaning given to *figura* encompassed forms, shadows and speculative appearances, which tied it to a vestigial materialism (Porter 2017). For Auerbach, these philological tensions between the material and symbolic became fundamental to how pagan figures entered Christian doctrine and devotional practice.

Long into the medieval period, *figura* signified ways of knowing that connected signs to material and historical life. The Old Testament "prefigures" the New Testament, past and future are symbiotically shaped in, and indeed incarnated by, typology: Word made flesh. What Auerbach calls "figural representations" go beyond the work of allegory or metaphor, however. Figural representations involve an economy of prediction and fulfilment, an event or person signifying both itself and a second that it involves or fulfils, with each retrospective analysis serving as an opportunity to read the present in a past, while each event or type of the past has the potential to join a phenomenon in the future. Such a time is lived conditionally and *in potentia*, inhabiting what Giorgio Agamben names the "already-and-not-yet" of the figured future and the adopted past (2000: 74, 138–45).

Auerbach's figural representations are adaptive signs, the work ascribed to them is multiple and their referential capacity varies according to different traditions of practice and innovation. For Auerbach, figures intervene in and transform the referent: each figure (p)refigures, making room for the work of figuration and subsequent configuration and linking practice, including the practice of analysis, with expressions of potential. Every figure thus implies a serial creativity in that it contains "sign qualities, denoting an object, and thing qualities, which rather confect a 'figure' to be contemplated" (Tygstrup 2021: 238).

Edward Said characterises this feature as an "essentially Christian doctrine for believers but also a crucial element of human intellectual power and will" (2013: xxii). It is this "but also" that has allowed Auerbach's analysis to branch from the semantic meaning of the word "figure" into an analysis of a world, what he calls a "historical situation" (1938/1959: 97), while also enabling figures to continue to be taken to be exemplary forms of humanistic reason. Historian Hayden White writes that it is this tendency to mix concept and method that allowed figuralism to underpin "Western culture's unique achievement of identifying reality as history" (1999: 96). As we shall see, other and alternative understandings of figures and configuration have emerged to both support and undermine this sense of humanistic achievement and its proprietary enclosure of "culture," "reality" and "history" by Western forms of thought.

Although Auerbach did not intend his methods to be either sociological or political,[1] thinking with figures has accompanied a variety of approaches in the social sciences, the humanities and political practice. For example, Georg Simmel's sociology used the figures of the stranger, the poor and the adventurer to illustrate a more general condition, whereby "each person is called to realize his own, his very own prototype" (1971: 557). Norbert Elias developed a sociology in which great significance is attached to process and the interdependence of persons. For Elias, it is the social scientist's role to understand "the changing configuration of all that binds them to each other" (2007/1987: 79). Figurational

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[1] Replying to critics of *Mimesis*, Auerbach felt others had "ascribed to the book, in praise or blame, tendencies that were far removed from me: that the method of the book is sociological, even that the tendency was socialist" (2013: 570).

sociology produces an understanding of persons as relational, provisional, performed and in-process. It aims to show how figures articulate inter-mingled processes operating beyond the scale of singular or unitary enti-ties such as the individual or society, towards their dynamic and continuous figuration.

Figuration offers other thinkers a creative means of blending and tran-sitioning between units, scales, orders or magnitudes of time and space. For example, figures are central to the work of Walter Benjamin, who used them to arrest world-historical processes of modernisation. His dia-lectical treatment of Charles Baudelaire's poetry of a new urban moder-nity is representative. Baudelaire is often remembered for celebrating the figure of the *flâneur*, the disinterested urban aesthete and observer. For Benjamin, it is with the *flâneur*'s emergent and collective opposite, the crowd, that the true "sensation of modernity" becomes apparent. In the figure of the crowd, Benjamin argues, one can experience "the disentegra-tion of the aura" (2003: 339), the uniqueness of things in the world, in what he calls "immediate shock experience" (2003: 343). Handled dia-lectically, figures like these—others include the storyteller, the angel and the collector—offer Benjamin a means of specifying what is both new and significant about modernity rather than what is simply novel.

Importantly, however, many scholars have been suspicious of the power invested in figures and critical of the historical, political, racial and technological presumptions and prejudices of those that speak for them (see Dawney, this volume). The arbitrarily coherent—and white and male—canon detailed above is continuous with declarations that the use of figural representation is "Western culture's unique achievement of identifying reality as history" (White 1999: 96). Some have pointed out that figuring involves both inclusion and exclusion; for example, the fig-ure of "man" figures who gets to be considered *human* by means of a series of constitutive exclusions (Mbembe 2017). Does one have to be male to count as "man"? White? Western? Wealthy? Able-bodied? For Alexander G. Weheliye, "racialisation" is crucial to this figure's constitu-tive exclusions: in his terms, it "figures as a master code within the genre of the human represented by western Man" (2014: 27). Weheliye argues that focusing on how this figure is constituted and who it excludes allows us to take "humanity" itself as an object of knowledge. This particular

figure can function as a "heuristic model" for reflecting on and critiquing how we produce knowledge about the world (2014: 8).

In offering us a means of connecting word to world, figures are doubled. They inform: that is, they participate in knowing, containing qualities that shape how knowing is known. But their tendency to eschew specification or determination also leads us to the very limit of expression and representation. Among philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Jean-François Lyotard, singular figures are illustrations to be contrasted to the *figural*, a disruptive force that is irreducible to systemic and linguistic approaches to representation and whose movement is a portal to pure sensation and becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1994; Lyotard 2011). For Michel Serres, by contrast, "figures of thought" are quasi-algorithmic, providing mobile protocols or operations that turn thinking into a set of parameters to be performed on something (Watkins 2020: 22-3). Serres' figures are both natural phenomena and literary and mythological in process. Figures as various as a fox or the Challenger space craft, the Greek god Hermes or the movement of a rugby ball are equivalent in that they carry out and participate in the emergence of concepts. The very movement of figures makes them useful to think with.

Part 2: Figuring

Once you start hunting for figures, it's hard not to see them everywhere. They inform research into all manner of things, objects and processes across disciplines and modes of scholarly enquiry. A well-crafted figure can lend consistency to thought, drawing together its disparate threads; indeed, for Paul De Man, "figurality" is an essential component of philosophical speculation (1988: 13). What makes figures so compelling to think with is that the shape they lend to thought contains an imperative—to put thinking to work. To invoke or propose a figure *of* something, to figure *with* something or to declare that you or someone else should figure something *out* is to suggest, tacitly or not, that figures involve the work of figuring. The recourse to using figures to illustrate a conceptual claim or to specify what's really at stake in our research has methodological implications: it prompts us to

ask not only, with De Man, what thinking with figures does to our thinking, but how it shapes our methodological engagements with the objects of our thought.

Taken as a method, figuring has productively diverse connotations. It can involve giving shape to something or, alternatively, to apprehend the shape that something already has. It can mean to calculate, solve or discover something, as in to figure something *out*. Figuring can also mean to play a role *in* an event or happening. The expanded conception of figuring proposed in this collection encompasses each of these disparate processes.

Figure's most obvious (and original etymological) sense is spatial, but not in the sense of form imprinted into matter: the figure is shaped by and shapes its grounds. This distinction between a figure and what surrounds it is fundamental in disciplines that study visual objects, most notably art history, though it was also the subject of Edgar Rubin's psychological research into perception (1958) and further formalised by Gestalt psychologists. Though colloquially conceived of as opposed elements of an image or scene, Rubin's figure and ground are intimately related because the distinction between them is articulated by what he called their "contour," or shared border. Through experiments with images or objects containing components that reverse the relation between figure and ground, Rubin argued that figures that emerge from grounds exhibit something like a "shaping effect" (1958: 194-5). For W. J. T. Mitchell, the image that Rubin used to most arrestingly illustrate this effect—the eponymous "Rubin vase," which can be seen as a decorative vase on a dark background or two faces on a light background—reflects on its own conditions of emergence: it is what Mitchell calls a "metapicture" (2008: 9-10).

If figures are metapictures that draw attention to their conditions of emergence, they also inform our engagements with things and processes beholden with, through or by them. Diagrams do this in a particular way. For Charles Sanders Peirce, what defines diagrams is their capacity to depict both "a set of rationally related objects" *and* "the relations between" these objects (Peirce 1976: 316-7). By inscribing these relations, diagrams

render the objects of thought operable in new domains—such as when spatial relations re-present algebra, as, for example, in Cartesian co-ordinates (Krämer 2010).

In his philosophical discussion of the use of figures in mathematics, Gilles Châtelet suggests that diagrams provide us with a way of apprehending thought in the act. Figures "trac[e] contemplation" by materialising how problems are worked out (2000: 8). More generally, they capture the "gestures" that give thinking its texture or shape. These gestures might include tracing lines or plotting points, but they also include more complex or embodied manoeuvres, like cutting shapes out or articulating contexts—as when a figure of a circuit conveys the sense of an electromagnetic field's encompassing, spatial "around" and, along with it, "a new type of intuition linked with the domination of oppositions by loops and bends" (2000: 154). In this conception, figures aren't just representations or depictions, or a "subsidiary 'tool'" of mathematical reasoning. They have what Châtelet describes as an "ontological dignity" which makes certain kinds of mathematical operations possible before the theory behind them is fully understood (2000: 11). For Châtelet, it is not only that figures like diagrams operate or that they're one of thought's enabling "cultural techniques" (Krämer 2010: 2), but that, in figur*ing*, they make it possible to apprehend the production of knowledge. In this conception, figuring precedes and succeeds distinctions, ordering—after Rubin, we might say *contouring*—relations between figures and grounds.

It is by figuring air, for example, that what might otherwise be taken for granted can be acknowledged, allowing us to appreciate its place at "the foreground of our perception as both object and condition of perception" (Horn 2018: 23). The installation *Yellow Dust* instantiates this process and demonstrates how it works. By translating data about air quality into a mist that could be seen, felt, and stepped into and out of by participants, as Nerea Calvillo and Emma Garnett suggest, interventions like these allow those who engaged with them to "[a]ttend[] to corporeal processes of practising air" (2019: 344). As Châtelet might put it, this figure traces comprehension: figuring air figures air *and* how air can be thought.

Part 3: Configuration

The word "figure" can be conjugated with a variety of prefixes and suffixes: prefigure, configure, disfigure, the figural, the figurative and figuration. But these "fixes" do not secure the object or entity in place. In Claudia Castañeda's terms, figuration incorporates "a double force: constitutive effect and generative circulation" (2002: 3). And this double force is why figure and its "fixes" have acquired a special value in helping us to understand our contemporary situation. By speaking to the relations in and by which figures figure, figure and its "fixes" provide us with a means of understanding and analysing problems that emerge in and through complex relations: of configuring.

Configuring refers to a joining of diverse elements that is never final or closed, even as it is stabilised. In practices of system design, engineering and information systems processing, configuration is not the final arrangement of hardware and software components, but refers instead to a provisional implementation of organisational infrastructures across myriad and often incommensurate practices. Because of its emphasis on the activity or work of relating the elements of a figure in movement, configuration has found particular application in science and technology studies, which has developed it to encompass the reflexive delineation of the bounds and composition of an object of analysis. As Lucy Suchman says, configuration is "[a]t once action and effect" (2012: 49): it both holds things together and enables potential transformation. Configuration comprises a method through which things are made *and* a resource for their analysis and/or un/remaking, both "a mode of ordering things in relation to one another" and "the arrangement of elements in a particular combination that results" (Suchman 2012: 49). An arrangement may—in turn—become a mode of ordering. This "double force" is why configuration is particularly useful for analysing novel kinds of ordering associated with the rise of digital technologies, the more-than-human dynamics of ecological crisis and emergent socio-political formations.

D. N. Rodowick (2001) describes new media as technologies of the figural by drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of similitude: whereas "resemblance presupposes a primary reference that prescribes and

classes … the similar is unleashed in a temporal continuum without origin or finality … governed only by seriality, the similar multiplies vectors … that can be followed as easily in one direction as another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences" (Foucault 1983: 44). In enabling unprecedented control over strategies of ordering in time and space, he suggests, contemporary media expand the possibilities of figuration as similitude. Frederik Tygstrup describes the set of new objects-made-out-of-information as having a figural force:

> Intuitively, we would probably say that information is something predicated of discernible objects in the world. In the information society, however, the hierarchical relation between objects and information tends to get reversed. On the one hand, what seems to be information about an individual object increasingly stands out as the construction of a new, dividual object. And on the other, the aggregation of information about decoded, endlessly divided objects allows the recoding of completely new, transversal objects. (Tygstrup 2021: 237)

These objects have a "two-pronged expressive capacity, sometimes referring back to something existing and sometimes instantiating an image of something new" (Tygstrup 2021: 238; see also Cellard, 2022). Underpinning these transformations are technical platforms that, as Adrian Mackenzie (2018) argues, have an essentially configurative modality characterised by "configurative dynamism," "configurative differentiation" and "configurative growth." Ordered by the platform, digital media configure people and things in constantly varying and experimentally modulated relations.

Feminist science studies in general, and the work of Donna Haraway in particular, have engaged these possibilities of instantiating "something new" beyond (and before) the digital. *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) mobilises a politics of the figure that "rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility" (1991: 149). Throughout her career, Haraway has presented various "material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings co-shape one another" (2008: 4). These she calls "figures"

(sometimes "string figures"), but named differently according to the node or knot, the (con)figuration of different diverse bodies and meanings. Best known are the cyborg, oncomouse, Terrapolis, chthulu, which are "performative images that can be inhabited" (1997: 11; see also 2016). Their collective work serves to divert political energy from traditional figures of sociological, political and psychoanalytic thought—the mother, child, terrorist, immigrant, schizoid or hysteric—towards feminist figures that, for Rosi Braidotti, "materially embody stages of metamorphosis of a subject position towards all that the phallogocentric system does not want it to become" (Braidotti 2002: 13). Braidotti, Haraway and other feminist makers of figures and practitioners of figuration do not stand outside the world they describe. Figures are to be inhabited; they are historical entanglements to be felt, reckoned with, struggled over and occupied (see Braidotti 2006: 170; Bastian 2006: 1038).

This tradition of making creative, concrete, multiple and playful figures has inspired scholars that seek alternative ways of confronting complex relational configurations and, perhaps, imagining them otherwise. In their quest to "denaturalise humanist conceit" (Giraud et al. 2018: 64), for example, scholars in environmental humanities have taken up the challenge figures pose to normative separations between animate and inanimate, nature and culture, animal and human. The work of these scholars acknowledges that there are "dangers associated with particular figurations" (2018: 74). Yet it also finds a critical, even hopeful potential for alternate settlements between peoples and planet: if indeed "[w]e *are* certainly quite a crowd," then "the ways in which we meet as particular species, and how these entanglements mesh with non-anthropocentric thought, deserve still further figuration" (ibid.). In this work, figures become critical diagnostic as well as prognostic tools of speculation— images or personas that can be used to understand and contest the social, political and conceptual configurations that we have inherited.

Similarly, work by Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) and Michelle Murphy (2017) is explicitly driven by the need to compose figures equal to contemporary political configurations. Each draws on Foucault's four figures of biopower—the hysterical woman, the Malthusian couple, the perverse adult and the masturbating child. Povinelli uses figures to identify what she calls the "governing ghosts" of late liberalism: the Desert, the Animist

and the Virus (2016: 15). Murphy characterises emergent figures as the "*phantasmagrams* of economic life" whose spectres of non-life, haunting the social reproductive consequences of the calculations of Gross Domestic Product, converge in the figure of The Girl: "the felt and astral consequences of social science quantitative practices, such as algorithms, equations, measure, forecast, models, simulations, and cascading correlations" (2017: 24).

This work invites us to reflect on how we use figures in the humanities and social sciences—and how we might make them knowingly and with responsibility. As Murphy writes, the girl is a "generic figure," but she is assembled from a broad range of practices, including "quantification, speculation, and affect … 'figured out' from a variegated patchwork of social science correlation and wishful speculation, of linked probabilities painted pink with tropes of agency imported from liberal feminism for a North American audience" (2017: 120). Figures, figuring and configuration, as Murphy reminds us, are historical accretions that now no longer rely only on the philological movement from word to historical situation but upon varieties of method and media, prefiguring, configuring and disfiguring.

It is this variety of method and media that this collection at once comments on and participates in. Our contributors identify figures, figuring and configuration as a means to query positions, political commitments and know-how. The collection experiments in alternate ways of knowing and living, finding and wrestling with figures that are both symptomatic of and can be used in the diagnosis of the relations that constitute the contemporary situation. The figure's configurative double force is what makes it something that can be engaged with *and* used as concept, methodological prompt and heuristic point of departure for creative and analytical engagements with thorny problems and tangled relations. It is the (im)*mediacy* of the figure that we aim to capture in this volume.

Part 4: Go Figure!

The chapters in this volume are collected here to entice others to "go figure!"—to show something of what the figure and figuring can do. Each chapter considers figures in specific contexts and traces the effects of

figures according to different critical perspectives and standpoints: no single way of figuring is advanced here. Instead, we draw attention to the many ways in which figures work, with the hope that you will be encouraged to "go figure" for yourself.

The next chapter is by Leila Dawney, who suggests that figures can play a central role in cultural politics—that is, in contestations over power, values and worth that play out in and through the production of culture. Recognising that figures have sometimes occupied a marginal role in the disciplines concerned with studying these processes—like sociology, political science and cultural studies—her chapter draws on the work of Michel Foucault, Erich Auerbach and Donna Haraway to propose a synthetic concept of figures equal to their cultural-political significance. With Foucault, her figures are "technologies of power" that order politics and society. With Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, she argues that insofar as figures are "performative images that can be inhabited," they are necessarily unstable, "labile" and in need of "care." Because figures are never fixed, it's incumbent on us not only to study them but also to remain attentive to their political force.

Scott Wark engages in a dialogue with Haraway's understanding of figures as performative images to be inhabited to argue that figures such as "the cloud," "platforms" or "the stack" allow for the apprehension of what is incommensurable in contemporary media: the speed, the complexity and heterogeneity of scales—both large and small. Rather than as images, however, he suggests that they do so by engaging the potential for reflexivity within media, understood as both instruments that mediate perception and cognition and *milieu*—literally, middle places—or *environments*. In this capacity, he suggests, figures have a unique capacity to help us understand how we live with, through, and in media-technical systems.

The chapter that follows is an interview between the artist Felicity Allen and Celia Lury. They discuss Allen's practice of Dialogic Portraits and the film *Figure to Ground—a Site Losing its System* (2021), which was produced as part of Allen's residency for a research project (https://peoplelikeyou.ac.uk/). Her dialogic practice allows for an exploration of both relations between the painter and her subjects, and the relations between figure and ground. It creates a double or multiple space in which the

figure of a person emerges. As Allen says, "In painting one might make a representation which has a background and speak of figure to ground, but 'ground' is also the sizing treatment and base colour on the canvas, for the picture itself. In this sense the picture itself is the figure" (insert pg ref this volume).

The issue of how to understand media by re-purposing media is confronted by Liliana Bounegru, Melody Devries and Esther Weltevrede. Identifying the difficulties of studying the lived experience of participating in information flows, the authors propose the novel method of the research persona. Rather like an avatar, the research persona is designed to figure out how users experience personalised information flows, but it does so by enabling researchers to inhabit the position of fictional users on social media platforms such as Facebook. The authors show how the figure of a persona can be used to make visible how platforms configure Internet users through the use of digital, ethnographic and speculative methods.

For Matt Spencer, the field of "configuration management," or the task of configuring large and heterogeneous computational systems, provides a rich site for reflecting on the role that figures play in ordering our relations to technical systems. Spencer's chapter focuses on the emergence of "promise theory," a little-studied area of systems management that formalises the "intent" embedded within technical systems by their designers in the form of—tacit or explicit—"promises" that a system will act in a particular way. Spencer suggests that the development of this pragmatic technique for "configuring" systems is of significance for the study of computation, in particular, and for social scientists, in general, because it marks a moment in which our relationship to complex technical systems shifts. In it, he suggests, we find the emergence of a different kind of relational figure of technical systems: one that recognises that to recognise the "intent" of such systems is to realise that using them entails a form of cooperation rather than mastery. In the figure of "configuration management," then, we find not only an under-appreciated moment in systems management's recent history, but also an example of a pragmatic shift in how technical systems are figured that, perhaps, betokens a more realistic, open and cooperative means of conceiving how we live in and with technology.

Promise is also central to William Viney and Sophie Day's discussion of personalised medicine. In their chapter, they consider how a research study figured relapse of disease for patients treated for cancer and classified as being of high risk for metastatic recurrence. Focusing on the promise of personalised medicine through a multi-perspectival account of this study, they suggest that figures are used as an empirical proof in the research study they followed, while also forming promises in ways that are at once confirmatory and confounding. Drawing on the work of Auerbach, Viney and Day highlight the temporal dimension of the promise to show the ways in which the figuring of the disease in the research study encompasses multiple temporalities. Personalised blood monitoring of circulating tumour DNA uses novel genomic sequencing technologies but also follows an archaic analytic structure, insofar as it relies on serial figurations of something unresolved: a (yet to be defined) disease-in-progress.

Sophie Day, Jayne Smith and Helen Ward use a method of figuration to identify how different data and samples have been grown, cultivated, studied and propagated in a research hospital. Following Smith, a patient at the hospital and the titular "gardener" of their chapter, and "Grumpa," her tumour, enables the authors to track health data as it moves between the technical environments in which samples and data have been used. Their collaborative and investigatory work into how samples and data have been figured helps to identify the cross-cutting relations between care and research that are enabled—or disabled—by data's movement.

Jane Elliott also addresses how the figuring of time is integral to the realisation of the methodological potential of data. Discussing both self-tracking or personal informatics and methods of longitudinal research in social science in terms of how they figure the individual, she identifies the benefits of conceiving figure and ground in temporal terms, noting that while self-tracking practices rely on a cyclical and repetitive conception of time in order to observe, record and modify behaviour on a daily basis, longitudinal studies rely on a more linear conception of time. In her analyses of cohort studies, it is life events and key transitions that figure the individual against a taken-for-granted ground of everyday experience, whereas in self-tracking there is the potential for the individual to reflexively engage with their everyday lives. Elliott concludes with the

suggestion that "we therefore need to attend to more than the contrast between (or mutual constitution of) figure and ground, but their mutual constitution in cyclical and linear time" (191).

In their chapter about tracking and modelling air pollution, Emma Garnett and Srishti Bhatnagar also highlight the ways in which identifying a figure enables the relations between the objects and subjects of research to be problematised. Drawing on their ethnographic fieldwork as researchers in an interdisciplinary research project conducted in Delhi, the authors explore two occasions when the method of "person-centred environments" was troubled, revealing some of the underlying assumptions of disciplinary methodological and epistemological practices.

Celia Lury's chapter identifies and unpicks three figures of speech associated with contemporary political campaigns. These figures of speech, "Not in Our Name," #MeToo and #JeSuisCharlie, have been used by people to identify and associate with each other, but the figures themselves contain personal pronouns that are crucial components to how identification and association are achieved. The focus of Lury's concern is a personal pronoun—"our," "je," "me" and "you"—and the analysis centres on the shifting distribution of the collectives the pronouns call into existence. Lury suggests that the disjuncture between "participating in/being part of" produced by media-specific uses of pronouns raises issues of social and political inclusion and exclusion, as well as challenging ideas of truth and individual identity. Accordingly, the chapter indicates how the multiply mediated, pronominal iteration of figures of speech expose both the limits and the possibilities of a non-representational politics.

John Frow is specifically concerned with the pronoun "you" that is characteristic of the personalising address of the Internet; as he says, "the pronoun 'you' is silently embedded in an imperative that works ambiguously as both an order and an invitation" (252). He argues that uncertainty of deictic reference is at the heart of the interpellation effect, captured in Althusser's discussion of a policeman calling out "Hey, you there" (Althusser 2001). Frow describes the significance of the ways in which while digital or algorithmic personalisation generate a "you" that is not based on fixed markers of identity, these imaginary figures are constantly being "contextually specified through acts of rigid designation that seek to tie them to a name and a legally established identity" (255).

These *points de capiton* pin the digital self to administrative and legal documents that comprise an individual's official identity. But rather than seeing the relation between real and algorithmic personhood as dichotomous, Frow supports instead the idea that there has been a fundamental change at the level of ontology, since "interaction with data, whether voluntary or involuntary, witting or unwitting, is integral to the actuality of our selfhood" (257-258). Proposing that figuring means both calculating and performing the form of the person, he concludes that no single form provides a ground.

Rather than the "you" of personalisation, AbdouMaliq Simone asks us to consider as figures those who are "something else besides," or rather, to think of figuring as "involving accompaniment or as always also accompaniment: something that does not discernibly alter the visual and sensual dimensions of an event or entity, that remains apparently aloof from its configuration, but which nevertheless prompts a reorientation of view and engagement; which at least raises a degree of uncertainty about what it is we are confronting in an appearance that otherwise has all the hallmarks of an integrity and coherence" (265). Figuring as accompaniment does not create an obligation or a debt; it does not even require mutual recognition or desire. Instead, Simone suggests, it is an enactment of agency not bifurcated by self and other, human and non-human, but an intersecting of multiple operations. It is "the restitution of spaciousness" (p. 282, this volume).

Coda

The contributions we have just described draw on a variety of approaches to the concept of the figure, extending beyond those we outline in the first half of this chapter. Many deploy the concept of the figure to consider contemporary forms of the person and relations of personhood. In these contributions, a person is sometimes distinguished from the individual: as the figure of a child with asthma (Bhatnagar and Garnett), as a singular and plural figure of speech (Lury), as data extracted from a self that moves between walled gardens (Day, Smith and Ward) or as data that accompanies or is integrated in a self (Frow). Other contributions

(Bounegru, Devries and Weltevrede; Viney and Day; Allen and Lury) share an interest in figuring as a research or artistic method, working across disciplines with numbers, narrative, diagrams and images, highlighting recursion, dialogue and the putting into time of figures of thought. In some chapters, the individual is recognised to be constituted as a specific kind of person, distinguished as such in time in relation to a ground (Elliott). Others still (Wark, Spencer, Simone) address issues of figure and ground, of figuration and configuration, of what it means to inhabit a milieu, a surround or surroundings. In doing so, they enable the worlds built into figures such as "the cloud" to be acknowledged; they offer the promise of a restitution of time and space.

What all the contributions share is recognition of a doubling that is intrinsic to figure. Both noun and verb, a figure is always figuring, sometimes as part of a configuration. So a figure may indeed be a number, a character in a text, a representation of a person or another entity, as well as a knot and a node, a turn of phrase, a movement, a diagram or a sequence of notes. But to describe each of these things as a figure is to indicate that it is both the end-point and the beginning of a figur*ing*, an activation of the multiple temporalities of the (historical and future-oriented) present tense (Lury 2019). In the relations between subjects (who or what is doing the figuring) and objects (who or what is being figured), that is, in the (im)mediacy of the relations between doing and being, are the cultural, political and methodological possibilities of figuring: a figure and its configurations.

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