The Art of Being Inhuman
A Global Inclusive Interdisciplinary Conference

Friday 16th April 2021 – Saturday 17th April 2021
Vienna, Austria

The global novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has transformed the world as we know it, seemingly overnight. Every passing day bears witness to the best and the worst of humankind as we grapple with not only the health crisis, but also its reverberating impacts on every facet of society. We have seen countless examples of kindness, bravery and sacrifice among those who have done their part to assist their communities in stopping the spread of Covid-19. At the same time, displays of selfishness, greed and hateful behaviour of individuals and groups have punctuated the story of the world's battle with Covid-19 with reminders of how truly awful people can be to one another. As the sister project to the Art of Being Human, which examines humanity at its finest, the Art of Being Inhuman explores impulses that lead humans to act in ways that are inhuman, anti-social, or even downright evil. The four key impulses under investigation are:

Anger

Thomas Fuller called anger 'one of the sinews of the soul' – for it has the ability to stiffen us into action (fight rather than flight). Whatever its causes, real or imaginary, anger can result in unjustifiable violence and cruelty directed inwardly or against others. If suppressed, anger may trigger mental or somatic illness. It is not uncommon to feel anger at life-threatening/life-altering medical conditions, even when they do not appear to have a known cause. However, a popular response to Covid-19 has been to lay blame for the creation and spread of the contagion. Public outrage has been directed at a host of targets: China, the World Health Organisation, governments, leaders, individuals who break quarantine, and even essential workers, and resulted in behaviour that puts lives at risk.

Fear

Tangible threats to personal safety, the unknown, change, and difference are just some of the triggers for fear. While fear can have a paralysing effect, it can also provoke reactions that cause harm. For the historian James Anthony Froude, "fear is the parent of cruelty" and although cruelty need not be tied to anger, the two are often complementary impulses where responses to fear are concerned. With lives, livelihoods and lifestyles under threat from Covid-19, and no vaccine in sight, there is much to fear. It is little wonder that some people have lashed out at what they imagine to be the causes of fear – even if there is little evidence to substantiate this conclusion, and the individuals might not engage in such inhuman behaviour under ordinary circumstances.

Stress

Psychologists distinguish between the perception of pressure that characterises stress, and the body's response to it. Events perceived as stressful set off hormonal signals that make the body ready for emergency action. Prolonged and excessive stress is not healthy – being implicated in a range of physical and emotional ailments, which can result in the adoption of problematic coping mechanisms. In these difficult times, there are plenty of reasons for individuals to experience stress, not least because of the sheer uncertainty of when a vaccine for Covid-19 will become available, and when it might be

possible to resume 'normal' living. Unemployment and financial insecurity, mental and emotional strain from being isolated or of being trapped with other people, and the lack of access to stress-reducing activities are just some of the factors complicating efforts to cope with Covid-19. From indulging in excess alcohol consumption and hoarding necessary goods to protesting quarantine restrictions, people have dealt with stress in ways that cause further harm to themselves and others.

Vulnerability

Many people in society are not vulnerable by choice, and are suffering. Worse still is the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities, that makes it likely that certain individuals will come to harm. For example, homelessness, poverty, addictions, abusive relationships, and mental health problems may all co-exist in one person. Vulnerability is magnified by Covid-19. The elderly and individuals with pre-existing health conditions are medically more vulnerable to the coronavirus, as are particular ethnic groups, the poor, the homeless and others who lack access to health care. Individuals in abusive domestic situations are in greater danger when quarantine restrictions make it difficult to leave the house. Members of the LGBTIQ+ community may be denied medical care due to discriminatory practices by institutions and practitioners. At the same time, some individuals and groups with significant social privilege have used the circumstances created by Covid-19 to frame themselves as a vulnerable population whose views and ways of life are under siege by forces ranging from globalism to policies introduced by socially progressive leaders. Indeed, the challenges of Covid-19 appear to have opened up another ground for engagement in the ongoing 'culture wars', where the risks to all sides are heightened by the contagiousness of the virus and potential for shortages of supplies to galvanise unrest generally.

Operating from the presumption that these impulses have been part of the human existence for millennia, and can have both positive and negative consequences, this year's event focuses specifically on how the Covid-19 pandemic has created, magnified or otherwise informed the Art of Being Inhuman. It is by scrutinising the impact of the health crisis upon humanity's worst impulses that we enable the development of strategies for building a post-Covid-19 world that encourages all of us to follow the better angels of our nature.

Accordingly, we are thrilled to open up the Art of Being Inhuman to exploration, assessment and examination, with a view to establishing real world impact in the conclusions reached. We welcome presentations and participation from academics, artists, therapists, NGO workers, performers, scholars, thinkers, researchers and practitioners from a wide range of conventional and unconventional disciplines and areas of study, who have a contribution to make in understanding the art of being inhuman. Subject to the discussions taking place at the conference, there is an intention to form an innovative interdisciplinary publication with the purpose of engendering further interdisciplinary collaboration and discussion.

Key Topics

Key topics, themes and issues for discussion may include, but are definitely not limited to:

– personal relationships
– professional and therapeutic relationships (including codes, governance and practices)
– the workplace
– online/digital/virtual interactions

– clinical and medical perspectives

– addictive behaviours

– self–help and coping mechanisms

– civil society، institutions، movements، rights، and the rule of law

– education and training

– international relations

– indigenous cultures

– consumerism and business

– wealth، power and class

– philosophy، religion، and faith–based traditions

– marginalised/vulnerable people

– crime and punishment

– role modelling

– entertainment and leisure activities

– research، education، news media and other sources of 'fact'

– scientific perspectives

– technologies

– literature، poetry، drama، music، art، film، television، gaming

What To Send

The aim of this interdisciplinary conference and collaborative networking event is to bring people together and encourage creative conversations in the context of a variety of formats: papers، seminars، workshops، storytelling، performances، poster presentations، panels، q and a's، round–tables etc.

300 word proposals، presentations، abstracts and other forms of contribution and participation should be submitted by Friday 2nd October 2020. Other forms of participation should be discussed in advance with the Organising Chair.

All submissions will be minimally double reviewed، under anonymous (blind) conditions، by a global panel drawn from members of the Project Development Team and the Advisory Board. In practice our procedures usually entail that by the time a proposal is accepted، it will have been triple and quadruple reviewed.

You will be notified of the panel's decision by Friday 9th October 2020.

If your submission is accepted for the conference، a full draft of your contribution should be submitted by Friday 12th February 2021

Abstracts and proposals may be in Word، PDF، RTF or Notepad formats with the following information and in this order:
a) author(s)، b) affiliation as you would like it to appear in the programme، c) email address، d) title of proposal، e) body of proposal، f) up to 10 keywords.

E–mails should be entitled: Being Inhuman Submission.

Where To Send
Abstracts should be submitted simultaneously to the Organising Chair and the Project Administrator:

sean@progressiveconnexions.net Seán Moran:
viennainhuman@progressiveconnexions.net Len Capuli (Project Administrator):

What's so Special About a Progressive Connexions Event?
A fresh, friendly, dynamic format: at Progressive Connexions we are dedicated to breaking away from the stuffy, old-fashioned conference formats, where endless presentations are read aloud off PowerPoints. We work to bring you an interactive format, where exchange of experience and information is alternated with captivating workshops, engaging debates and round tables, time set aside for getting to know each other and for discussing common future projects and initiatives, all in a warm, relaxed, egalitarian atmosphere.

A chance to network with international professionals: the beauty of our interdisciplinary events is that they bring together professionals from all over the world and from various fields of activity, all joined together by a shared passion. Not only will the exchange of experience, knowledge and stories be extremely valuable in itself, but we seek to create lasting, ever-growing communities around our projects, which will become a valuable resource for those belonging to them.

A chance to be part of constructing change: There is only one thing we love as much as promoting knowledge: promoting real, lasting social change by encouraging our participants to take collective action, under whichever form is most suited to their needs and expertise (policy proposals, measuring instruments, research projects, educational materials, etc.) We will support all such actions in the aftermath of the event as well, providing a platform for further discussions, advice from the experts on our Project Advisory Team and various other tools and intellectual resources, as needed.

An opportunity to discuss things that matter to you: Our events are not only about discussing how things work in the respective field, but also about how people work in that field â?? what are the struggles, problems and solutions professionals have found in their line of work, what are the areas where better communication among specialists is needed and how the interdisciplinary approach can help bridge those gaps and help provide answers to questions from specific areas of activity.

An unforgettable experience: When participating in a Progressive Connexions event, there is a good chance you will make some long-time friends. Our group sizes are intimate, our venues are comfortable and relaxing and our event locations are suited to the history and culture of the event.

Ethos
Progressive Connexions believes it is a mark of personal courtesy and professional respect to your colleagues that all delegates should attend for the full duration of the meeting. If you are unable to make this commitment, please do not submit an abstract or proposal for presentation.

Please note: Progressive Connexions is a not-for-profit network and we are not in a position to be able to assist with conference travel or subsistence, nor can we offer discounts off published rates and fees.

viennainhuman@progressiveconnexions.net Please send all enquiries to: