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Costumed Visions Network Launch

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Tuesday, 12 May 2015

Costumed Visions Network Launch

By [Shawn Harmon](#), [David Lawrence](#) and [Gill Haddow](#)

Superheroes and supervillains are human approximations possessed of abilities or capacities beyond those considered species-typical. While these beings may acquire their powers in a variety of ways, those empowered by genetic and/or techno-scientific means are of particular interest. The processes by which they gain their capabilities frequently approximate those which scientists are currently seeking to intervene in our physiology, or the way futurists are anticipating that our physiologies will be modified.

They can be distilled into the following archetypes:

- Those who experienced an evolutionary jump or germ line genetic mutation at birth (e.g., mutants, or homo superior, such as Wolverine, Storm, and Colossus).
- Those subject to an induced genetic transformation as a result of ethical or unethical science (e.g., mutated humans such as Captain America, She-Hulk, and Spider-Man).
- Those who rely on implanted or overlaid technology that is somehow integrated with their organic beings (e.g., Deathlok, Misty Knight, and Cable).
- Those who rely entirely on high technologies, typically worn externally (e.g., Iron Man, Guardian, and Vindicator).
- Those who are designed and rely on machine intelligence to achieve autonomous awareness (e.g., Danger, the Vision, and the Human Torch).

These archetypes encompass a number of approaches to, and realisations of, the enhanced human, and they are a useful device through which we can understand and critique different states of being and doing, some of which may be just over the horizon. Their visions of enhancement and social interaction offer popular and compelling imaginaries that can offer insights around existing practices, including those around social deployment of technologies, ethical and legal control of science and human interaction, and different forms of embodiment. In short, they offer a novel way to think about contemporary constructions of normative bodies, health, embodiment, and equality; one that is of interest to a wide range of publics not normally engaged with the academy.

The Costumed Visions of the Enhanced Body project, funded by the Wellcome Trust, is a collaboration between the Institute for Science Ethics and Innovation at the University of Manchester, and the JK Mason Institute for Medicine, Life Sciences and Law at the University of Edinburgh. It will explore comics portrayals of the enhanced body, engaging with questions such as:

- What do the depicted enhancements say about current ideas of treatment and enhancement?
- How are different embodiments treated, and what does that say about value or values?
- How is science and technology portrayed, and are comics useful for science communication?

On 16 September 2015, at the Manchester Meeting Place, the project team (David Lawrence,

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Shawn Harmon, Gill Haddow) will join with other interested contributors (including Professor Scott Bukatman, Mr Dan Abnett, Professor Andy Miah, Dr Simon Locke, Mr Alan Cowsill, Mr Mik Scarlet, Dr David Kirby, Dr Thomas Giddens, and Dr Yasemin Erden) to undertake an interdisciplinary discussion around these questions. It will provide a unique lens through which to focus on persistent academic debates about embodiment and the ethics and regulation of enhancement.

Information on the meeting is available on the [Mason Institute website](#).

Attendance at the meeting is free but ticketed, and [registration is through Eventbrite](#).

If you wish to join the Costumed Visions Network, please contact David Lawrence (david.lawrence@manchester.ac.uk) or Shawn Harmon (shawn.harmon@ed.ac.uk).

Posted by [Mason Institute](#) at 09:10

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