

22. Feminist and Posthumanist Worldings of Science Fact and Fiction in the Anthropocene

From Woofs to Words – Dog Characters and Human Speech in Contemporary Science Fiction

Jani Ylönen, University of Jyväskylä

Dogs are perhaps the quintessential human technology and the ultimate companion for humans. The humans have modified dogs and used them as tools for thousands of years during which dogs have also influenced and affected humans in seminal ways. While dogs are more rarely used as, for example, shepherds or hunters these days, they are now more than ever used as test subjects for new technologies and products. Meanwhile, humanity has started more and more to recognize their connection to the canine and the problems of creating barriers between “us and them”.

The juxtaposition of these two images of dogs, as test subjects and companions, has been part of the imaginary of science fiction from at least Olaf Stapledon’s *Sirius* published in 1944. Since then dogs have been used frequently as characters that, for example, evoke thoughts about technological development and the nature of humanity. Quite recurrently these characters also get to voice their own ideas, as they are given capability for human speech and language.

In my paper, I will examine a selection of dog characters who have been given capability to produce human language in contemporary science fiction. I will briefly touch upon how dogs are used to discuss technology and its influence on humanity. I will, however, more closely discuss what kind of ideas about dogs’ relationship to humans and vice versa do they represent. I will examine the characters through a frame work of animal studies and feminist posthumanism and study what estranging effects does giving “voice to the voiceless” have in these novels and perhaps even how the novels contribute to speculations about how our companion species envision the world.

The performance of bodies in trans/post-humanists myths

Agathe François, Université de Montréal

The following proposal will tackle the question of the body in trans and post-humanisms and the performativity of trans/post-humanists myths.

The current biopolitical context contributes to the emergence of « new forms of life » (Rose, 2007). Those new lives are also new bodies which can take the form of what Sarah Franklin calls « cyborg embryos » (Franklin, 2006), pre-bodies taken out of the biological body and fertilized in laboratory to be finally incorporated again in the mother’s body, during the process of *in vitro* fertilization. The « cyborg embryo » may reflect the very complexity of a contemporary body being forced to constitute itself as *bios* (the political body) while it is still unconscious and reduced to *zoe* (the physical body). Borrowing the words of Bernadette

Wegenstein, I am suggesting that trans and post-humanist discourses fully take part in the « fragmentation » and « holism » (Wegenstein, 2006) of the contemporary body. This ambiguous process of holistic fragmentation can be tracked in some of the transhumanists' ideological discourses on the body, always oscillating between both. Those discourses, be they praised or criticized, can be viewed as myths (Eliade, 1963) that take part in the building of post-human bodies. The trans/post-humanist bodies should therefore be envisaged through the question of performativity, given that they are part of a double process of « inscription » and « embodiment » (Lenoir, 2002).

My analysis will therefore require the use of a form of « heteroglossia » (Haraway, 1991), or a poetical approach, blurring the frontiers between fiction and reality, mythical bodies and embodied lives.

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Posthuman Bodies in Fanfiction

Marianne Gunderson, University of Oslo

This presentation is based on my proposed Ph.D. thesis project, the topic of which is fanfiction stories which blur the boundary between human and animal, and male and female bodies. Fanfiction stories are fictional texts made by fans about already existing media products, creatively rewriting the original media upon which they are based. Some of these stories also creatively rewrite the human body, using tropes such as male pregnancy, women with penises, and human/animal hybrids. Using the theoretical tools of feminist posthuman theory, this presentation investigates how fanfiction stories interfere with, transform and reinterpret the gendered and sexed realities of the body. Henry Jenkins has argued that fanfiction is product of the tension between fascination and frustration with the original media product upon which it is based, and that as such, fanfiction be read as critique of its source material. Building on this point

I argue that these fanfiction stories treats the human body as source material which can be rewritten, and that these stories can be read as expressions of fascination and frustration with human embodiment, and can be seen as critiques of the dichotomies by the sexed human body is delineated. By breaching the boundary between male and female and human and animal biology, these stories open up a discursive space which puts all of these categories at stake. In this presentation I will present some of the fanfiction tropes which rewrite the human body, outline how these types of stories relate to posthuman theory, and discuss how these stories might in return inform or challenge posthuman theory.

Thinking with Figurations - A Cognitive Perspective

Kaisa Kortekallio, University of Helsinki

Donna Haraway's practice is to think with figurations: actual entities, events, and actions that are also helpful in articulating "connections that have been rendered invisible by conventional Western dichotomies" (Bastian 2006, 3; see also Haraway 2003, 9–11). Telling stories about queer relations with our animal companions, species and individual, highlights the invisible science-fictionality of the technocapitalist way of life. These speculative fabulations estrange both the way of life itself, and the naturalized thought processes embedded in it – such as the categorical separation of nature and culture.

From the perspective of recent theories in cognitive narratology that emphasize the material and world-embedded aspects of cognition, figurations emerge as an affective form of embodied thought. Compared to philosophies bent on universalizing and abstraction, Haraway's figurative thinking more efficiently engages the mind that cognitive scholar Alva Noë (2004) has called "the skilful animal actively exploring its environment". In this presentation, I consider Haraway's figurative practices from a cognitive-narratological perspective, articulating the powerful ways in which they engage the reader's mind. Moreover, I consider how figuration can in turn help to further develop the embodied, extended, embedded and enactive (4E) approaches to cognition and narrative.

Narrators of unspecified gender – (Re)Constructing queer voices in contemporary fiction

Joonas Sääntti, Jyväskylän yliopisto

Many contemporary works of speculative fiction, but also some novels written in more realistic mode, have developed queer narrative situations, which challenge their readers understanding of their storyworlds. In my presentation I will focus on texts with narrators of non-specific gender, and to be even more precise, on texts that can be said to strategically resist readerly attempts to decide the gender of the narrator.

How do you imagine a narrator, who first appears female, then suddenly reports "itself" as something else? How is a supposedly "male voice" transformed when it is removed from a male body? How does one make sense of narrative situations where both gender and sexuality are constantly on the move? And what does all this have to do with posthumanistic critique of the human?

I want to argue that the creation of narrative voices, which intentionally and strategically resist gender-specific identification, is an important project in contemporary fiction. I also make the case that it greatly matters for queer feminists to read such voices without forcing them to fit assumed categories, such as woman and man, but also without doing the same with more recent identities (like intersexual, transgender, bigender or genderfluid). My presentation will hope to elucidate these arguments by using some examples of contemporary fiction, written in English and Finnish.

The relationship between literary queer theory and queer politics is often a contested one. What appears radical in literature may be at odds with the lived experience and needs of people identifying as queer in real life. Similarly, what makes for an empowering political statement may sometimes feel forced and extraneous, even an aesthetic mistake, in a work of

fiction. Arguing for the importance of narrative experiments and the ambiguities they create leaves big questions unanswered: for example, how should someone working with narrative theory consider current discussions about the cultural appropriation of queer lives and voices? I will propose that when discussing works of fiction, it still makes sense to focus on gender as a question of style and representation, not on the identities of their real life authors or readers.

Visions of the Future: Critical practices of design fabulation

Ramia Mazé, Aalto University

The field of futures studies have tended to imagine the future as primarily technological and material. The future is often portrayed as a discrete and definite location that might be arrived at through linear transition pathways along which the development of particular technologies is the privileged baseline for plotting human, cultural and societal ‘progress’ (if social factors are considered at all, ie. Wangel, 2011). Design has become a powerful discipline charged with visualizing such futures in accessible, popular and persuasive forms. Visions of the future, along with their norms and priorities, shape both policy planning and our everyday cultural imaginaries. However, such visions are far from neutral.

In my work, and with colleagues (Mazé and Wangel, 2017), we develop critical practices exploring visions of the future and how visions, as fabulations and as design artifacts, take part in (re)producing or countering current social norms, practices and structures. Further, through critical practices of design research, we explore, craft and debate alternative visions of the future. For example, in the ‘Switch! Energy Futures’ project (Mazé, Messeter, Thwaites, Önal, 2013), we elaborated ‘superfictive’ scenarios of alternative energy futures in order to draw out differences among and consequences of socio-economic and sustainability paradigms within contemporary policy (cf. Mazé, 2016). Our intention in this project was, thus, about stimulating debate and change in the present, which was also explicitly included in the scope and design of the project as a participatory performance with various stakeholders.

Futures can be understood as an everyday practice, made by professionals (such as designers), who are circumscribed by systems and structures, reproducing the ideals, knowledges and material realities of individuals – but who must also take responsibility for their assumptions, agency and power. Here, I discuss my/our work within the critical turn in futures and design.

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What can we learn from working with plants? (working title)

Darja Zaitsev, Aalto University

In my master's thesis for Curating, Managing and Mediating Art (CuMMA) at Aalto University I'm studying the artistic practices of six international contemporary artists and designers working with living plants. The artists are performance artist Essi Kausalainen, sculptor Raimo Saarinen, photographer Maija Savolainen, painter Ilona Valkonen, service designer Yiyang Wu, and sculptor Denise Ziegler. Instead of being interested in mere representations and setting up sites for art objects representing their objective values, my thesis aims to form a new kind of language to grasp the materiality in the interviewed artists' processes and to provide "spaces for curatorial action in which unusual encounters and discourses become possible" (Sternfeld 2010). The artistic/curatorial part of the thesis, Thoughts on art, materiality and plants booklet, brings another layer to the research through which I also reflect my own curatorial practice.

During the past few years there has been a rise of popularity of plants in contemporary art. However, most of the studies related to the topic consider plants as objects and tools for realising artworks, but fail to see them as agents and a vital part of the artistic process. In my thesis I tackle the questions concerning human and non-human relations and the effects of materiality. I will open my theoretical framework through feminist research, new materialism, contemporary art studies and curatorial research. I will use biological, philosophical and curatorial literature when analysing the data gathered through the interviews and compiling the curatorial booklet. What can we learn from working with – not only about/of – living plants?

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Memory of Resistance: Writing the history of resistance in Emmi Itäranta's novel Memory of Water

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Speculative fiction, Finnish Weird and dystopias have gained popularity in Finnish contemporary literature in the 21st century. Exploring these genres, many authors are focusing on environmental and sociopolitical issues such as pollution, climate change, political power and oppression.

This research makes a close reading on Emmi Itäranta's novel Memory of Water / Teemestarin kirja, examining the status of water and plastic from an ecocritical point of view in the post-apocalyptic, dystopian world of the book. The paper also looks into the ways in which tradition and the actors of power shape the everyday life in the society under a military dictatorship. The main focus, however, is on the possibilities of political resistance, which are related to both water and plastic. This resistance becomes the goal of the main characters, Noria and Sanja. The story is also analyzed from a feminist point of view, paying attention to the status of women and the emancipatory, revolutionary activity of the young, female main characters. Furthermore, the paper deals with the notions of history, cultural and individual memory, and propaganda, which work as instruments of the authoritarian biopower but are also a key to successful common resistance.

Keywords: Emmi Itäranta, Finnish literature, plastic, water, dystopia, speculative fiction, feminism, ecocriticism, environment, oppression, political resistance, biopolitics, memory