

CALL FOR PAPERS

REPRESENTATION IN THE TIME OF THE POSTHUMAN: TRANSHUMAN ENHANCEMENT IN 21ST CENTURY STORYTELLING

16th International Conference on Contemporary Narratives in English

<http://typh.unizar.es/conference>

University of Zaragoza, Spain

May 29-31, 2019

The drive towards personal progress may be considered intrinsic to the human species. Whether intellectual, emotional, spiritual or bodily, perfection –or, less ambitiously, improvement– has always been pursued by different means like education, cultural development, meditation, or physical exercise, to name a few. What seems to have changed in recent decades is the tools available in the race for individual enhancement, given the rapidly evolving fields of science and technology as applied to human desires to enlarge one’s memory and intelligence, lengthen one’s life span, or create genetically stronger and healthier children.

This interest in human progress is key to understand Transhumanism, a cultural and philosophical movement that sees in reason, science and technology the means to overcome human limitations in both our bodies and minds (Bostrom, More, Pearce, Kurzweil). Genetically modified and technologically enhanced humans are transhumans in constant development towards the posthuman, a condition which would radically exceed the capacities of present humans and would entail extreme physiological, genetic and neurological change.

This inherently optimistic movement contrasts with Critical Posthumanism (Badmington, Braidotti, Graham, Hayles, Wolfe, Haraway, Herbrechter), which also sees the human as non-fixed and mutable but which questions anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism and the centrality of the subject in the Anthropocene. They see transhumanism as an intensification of the Enlightenment concept of “Man” as the measure of all things.

The aim of this conference is to explore both how fiction in the Anglo-American sphere has addressed the question of what it means to be human and also how the literary field itself has changed in the time of the 4th industrial revolution (Floridi, Schwab), in which digital information and communication technologies have become essential and in which the analog gives way to the digital.

Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Representations of human enhancement and transhumanist beliefs in fiction
 - o Representations of enhanced human beings, cyborgs and digital posthumans
 - o Ideological positions and exploration of the contradictions of the posthuman in fiction
 - o Identities in (re)construction: gender, race, sexuality

- Global markets and environmental damage
 - New aesthetic and narratological approaches
 - Speculative fiction and other genres dealing with the posthuman
 - Topics of interest: utopian and dystopian approaches, ethical concerns and challenges
- Changes in the literary field and consequences of the posthuman
- From the analog into the digital
 - Enhancement as seen in multimedia and transmedia storytelling
 - Post-literature, trans-literature, enhanced literature
 - E-literature or digital-born literature
 - Changes in the traditional roles of the writer, the reader or the text itself
 - New sensory engagements

Plenary Speakers:

Stefan Herbrechter, writer, academic, translator and researcher on Cultural Theory and Critical Posthumanism at Coventry University (UK) and a Privatdozent at Heidelberg University (Germany).

Alexandra K. Glavanakova, Associate Professor in American Literature and Culture at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia (Bulgaria).

Sherryl Vint, Professor of Science Fiction Media Studies at the University of California, Riverside (USA).

The conference is organised by the members of the research project “Trauma, Culture and Posthumanity: The Definition of Being in Contemporary North-American Fiction,” which is part of the research group “Contemporary Narrative in English” at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Zaragoza, Spain.

Paper proposals should be 300 words maximum, including a title. Please submit proposals, along with a brief CV and email address to the conference organisers Sonia Baelo-Allué and Mónica Calvo-Pascual at posthumanconference2019@gmail.com

Deadline for submissions: January 7th, 2019.