From Annihilation to High Life: Feminist Posthumanism and Postfeminist Humanism in Contemporary Science Fiction Film

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Contemporary Science Fiction Film

Please send abstracts of 500 words max. and a short bio (250 words max.) to the co-editors: Julia Empey (empe3530@mylaurier.ca) and Russell Kilbourn (rkilbourn@wlu.ca)

Deadline for submissions: June 15, 2020

The editors of this proposed journal special issue seek papers on the following topic:

In 2018 two films were released—Claire Denis’ High Life and Alex Garland’s Annihilation—representing two different poles of contemporary SF film narrative, and two different explorations of specific posthumanist (as well as transhumanist) themes. The two films are similar to the extent that they challenge the Enlightenment Humanist narrative that has dominated Western thought for the last four centuries. Annihilation and High Life can be conceived as two ends of a spectrum of contemporary SF cinema intimately invested in the debates around the posthuman and the critical posthumanities within a feminist critical-theoretical context. The decentring of the human at the core of posthumanist thought has its corollary—indeed, its typological anticipation—in feminism’s de-centring of ‘man.’ That neither of these transformations has entirely succeeded is a problem that informs the story in each of these films, albeit from entirely different perspectives, with a radically different audiovisual language in each case.

In Rosi Braidotti’s (2019) terms, we are now living “the posthuman predicament” resulting from the convergence of the ongoing critique of a Eurocentric Humanist philosophical legacy and the anthropocentric habits of representation it supports. According to Cecilia Åsberg (2018), critical posthumanism is in an important sense exemplified in feminist theory, “long critiquing the centrality of the figure of Man for its gender chauvinism.” Arguably, the (dis-)embodied female could be the ultimate posthuman subject. This special issue seeks to place posthumanism and feminism in direct conversation as mediated through contemporary science fiction films. Both posthumanism and
feminism aim to counter or dismantle a masculinist, patriarchist Enlightenment Humanism, and SF cinema has been putting these seemingly disparate schools of thought into dialogue for some time now. Where typically the mention of SF in the posthumanist context brings a whole set of (often clichéd) transhumanist tropes to mind—the cyborg, technologically augmented bodies, AI subjectivities, etc.—for this special issue we encourage instead the submission of papers that either: (a) prioritize analyses of specific examples of contemporary SF cinema that engage in meaningful ways with the burgeoning field of critical posthumanism; or (b) utilize such films as case studies in the interrogation of posthumanist and feminist as well as humanistic ideas. In either case, papers grounded in formal film analysis are strongly encouraged.

Key Words: posthumanism; feminism; science fiction film

References
