EACAS 2019 – Rethinking revolution

Abstract Title

After the Revolution: Prototyping Post-Speciesist Futures

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What could a post-speciesist world be like?

Critical Animal Studies activists and scholars have developed convincing counter-arguments to speciesism and animal oppression. These arguments are continuously developed and reshaped through contributions from fields like gender studies, postcolonialism, environmental humanities, and philosophy. This broad range of approaches makes for an diverse and growing body of knowledge on the systematic discrimination, exploitation, and oppression of nonhuman animals, not least regarding the treatment of animals today and in the past. We argue, however, that this knowledge production is significantly more sporadic when it comes to constructive proposals of less speciesist futures. Where are the snapshots from potential futures, and alternative presents, where human-animal relations are radically reconfigured?

We suggest that in working towards an anti-speciesist revolution we need to also be able to imagine what living in a post-speciesist society could be like; and explore creative tactics for bringing these material propositions into being.

These kinds of speculations and constructions of scenarios involve future-oriented contributions from fields such as the arts, design, literature, architecture, and speculative philosophy. In other words, domains that are engaged with envisioning, prototyping, and rehearsing potential futures and alternative presents. In this paper, we discuss a number of works that in different ways materialise reconfigured relations between humans and other species. Examples include utopian artworks by Hartmut Kievert, Ursula Le Guin's ecofeminist stories, as well as our own design projects on sketching already existing post-speciesist animal-human encounters and redesigning recreational fishing practices. We discuss what tactics are employed by the creators and how their designerly approaches might

help in generating new ideas about possible futures. We also introduce and reflect on tools and practices from the design disciplines, such as sketching, prototyping, and design fiction that can be of use for CAS scholar-activists.

Importantly, an affirmative approach of imagining post-speciesist futures does not come without risk. It can be argued that constructive, at times hopeful, projects distract from militating against the currently dim situation that billions of animals face daily. It can also be argued that we are nowhere near attaining a world that can be considered hopeful for most animals on our planet. Shouldn't we focus on bringing about the revolution before speculating on its aftermath?

We argue that research and activism against speciesism ought to be complemented by constructive scenarios for post-speciesist futures. We seek to contribute to the field of Critical Animal Studies by calling for and articulating a stronger speculative and imaginative strand of CAS, without blunting the urgency and critical edge of the field.

Author biographies

Erik Sandelin is a PhD candidate in Art, Technology and Design at KTH Royal Institute of Technology and Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. In his design-led research, Erik is exploring and proposing everyday re-thinkings, and re-makings of human-nonhuman relations. Before returning to academia Erik co-founded and ran interaction design and innovation studio Unsworn Industries for almost ten years.

Michelle Westerlaken is a PhD candidate in Interaction Design at Malmö University. She is researching how the design of artefacts that mediate playful, joyful, or surprising encounters between animals and humans can inspire us to imagine alternative – non-speciesist – futures. As a designer she has worked on different playful artefacts and games that tried to encourage people to rethink the relationships we have with sheltered cats, cohabiting dogs, zoo penguins, and a colony of black ants. Her portfolio and publications can be found at www.michellewesterlaken.com.