

# On the monographic section about posthumanism



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In the pre-pandemic world of May 2019 the research group “Trauma and Posthumanity” of the University of Zaragoza held the conference “Representation in the Time of the Posthuman”. There, the authors of the monographic issue that we now present met to exchange ideas. One of these ideas was the possibility of working together in a publication, which soon materialized in a project for a journal that should have been published in Spanish, a language in which the connection between science fiction and posthumanism has been not explored in depth. That project fell through for that type of absurd reason that often plagues the academic world but we decided to continue in the language that the seven of us use professionally, English, as we are all English Studies academics. Our thanks go to my co-editor, Mariano Martín Rodríguez, who suddenly found in his hands the proposal to publish not one or two, but seven articles on the same topic in what constitutes *Hélice*’s first monographic issue (we hope there will be more soon).

As editor of the monographic section my call to the authors was based on a very simple idea: choose the science-fiction text you prefer—novel, film, TV series—and explain how posthumanism works in it. We did not agree beforehand to cover specific ground but, as happens, the articles do cover the period 1984-2020 except for my own excursion into 1818 to

examine *Frankenstein* as a posthuman text *avant la lettre*. In my article I consider the anachronistic application of current concepts to the science fiction of the past, warning that though this may be an illuminating exercise we still need to pay attention to how the texts were originally conceived. Mary Shelley’s novel is primarily a horror story, and we should not forget that the creature, posthuman as he is, is a fearsome monster and not just an object of compassion, as he mostly is in current analysis. Francisco Collado chose to focus in his article on William Gibson’s atmospheric *Neuromancer* (1984), one of the great novels about artificial intelligence. Collado is not interested in the relationship between human and A.I., however, but in vindicating the protagonist’s bodyguard Molly Millions as an iconic posthuman character. First seen in “Johnny Mnemonic” (1981) Molly is a self-empowered female cyborg of the type Donna Haraway dreamed of; technology is for Millions the only way forward in a world that offers women few options but a transgressive posthumanism. Beatriz Dominguez’s contribution focuses on the two versions of *Total Recall*: the very popular first film by Paul Verhoeven (1990) and the far less accomplished remake by Len Wiseman (2012). She is particularly interested in the figure of the mutant, specifically in how its presence in science fiction suggests that the future

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might create its own kind of abled and disabled bodies, for it is certainly not the case that the posthuman body will be necessarily an improved version of current humanity. The contrast between the two films helps Domínguez to consider this but also the different ideas about how dogmatic posthumanism may impact the repression of the less abled in the 1990s and the 2010s. Lidia Cuadrado's essay deals with the novel *Midnight Robber* (2000) by Canadian-Jamaican author Nalo Hopkinson. Applying the ideas of Francesca Ferrando's *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019) Cuadrado considers the clash between the techno-driven and the nature-driven civilisations in Hopkinson's work, paying attention to the interpretations of posthumanism from outside a Western, ethnocentric point of view. Returning to cinema, Rocío Carrasco explores in her article the figure of the clone in films such as *The Island* (2005) and *Never Let me Go* (2010), based on the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, and the animated series *World of Tomorrow* (2015, 2017, 2020). She delves into the ethics of biomechanical technology, which these works emphasize by allowing viewers to access posthuman subjectivity in an exercise aimed at increasing empathy. Amaya Fernández Menicucci discusses in her essay how the TV series *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-2020) and *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-2020) investigate the consequences of unlimited body-enhancement, the Cartesian mind-body dualism, and the rise of non-human consciousness in artificial posthumans to question humanity itself. Cyborgs and A.I. represent something new, perhaps even beyond the supernatural and the unnatural. Finally, Monica Calvo reads Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* (2018), a

dystopian novel about corporate control of global economy set in an Earth devastated by climate change. Calvo shows how Lai offers a welcome alternative to the separation of mind and body backed by cybernetic transhumanism through an ethics of the post-anthropocentric which re-humanizes the posthuman body.

All in all, as these articles show, posthumanism cannot be understood from a single position. We feel, however, that too often science fiction has been missing in the more philosophical discussions of this concept. Not even major academics such as Rosi Braidotti—author of the seminal *The Posthuman* (2013)—have fully understood the importance of science fiction (or speculative fiction, if you prefer it) as a huge laboratory of ideas about the posthuman. It has been, then, our collective aim to call attention to this omission, and to stress that, as *Frankenstein* proves, science fiction has been concerned from the very beginning with the problem of how technology can alter the natural evolution of Homo Sapiens. Posthumanism, as the articles show, has been mainly defended as a positive process of human enhancement that will lead to a happier transhumanist civilization, yet there is a dangerous underside to this idealism constituted by new forms of bodily marginalization that need to be prevented. Speculating with the future in fictional scenarios, as the texts we have chosen do, is, therefore, the best possible strategy to anticipate serious problems and to suggest satisfactory solutions that respect fundamental ethical values and human rights. That is how important science fiction is for humanity.

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