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CART 360: Critical Reflection
(Our Symbiotic Life: An Exploration of Interspecies Relations)

The future is like a giant limitless opportunity where somehow everything will eventually be possible. It can be a playground to think of new society models or new ways to simply interact with each other and our environment. Futuristic designs have been in our minds since we realized how far the technology could and will grow and I have been inspired by science fiction since I was probably six years old. While it is important to push new ideas and experiments because these ideas could inspire others to create meaningful things, fiction design has the risk of being completely meaningless to the eyes of someone not interested in it. I am a bit torn between the fact that I do encourage any idea proposal and I am interested in any sort of new design idea but I'm also not convinced by the way these different scenarios were handled. It is a very personal opinion but I will try to go in-depth about my thinking and why these proposals are lacking important factors.

My first impression while reading the paper was that I didn't project myself into these scenarios or felt little concern about whether or not these specific futures could happen or not. I enjoyed Anne Haraway's views on how we should think about the future and I would agree that since the planet is already in a "damaged" state, our efforts should be towards rebuilding ideas and regeneration instead of some utopic future where the human is in control of everything. Like a very fertile land, the plants cannot survive without a good regeneration of the soil. We have known for a long time that we cannot just reuse infinitely the same soils to grow plants, the soil needs to regenerate itself and this is where the "Chthulucene", the world of mushroom and bacteria comes in. This really important part of the cycle is being forgotten while it will play a huge role in every plausible futuristic scenario. It appears to me that to find this relationship between humans and plants and machine, we had to assume that humans are in control of their environment like would suggest the "Anthropocene", a proposal for a new climatological era that humans provoked by changing their environment in extreme measures. I don't see the point of thinking about our relationship with plants without thinking of their symbiotic relationship bacteria and finding some ideas closer to what nature does best. As Haraway said in "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene": "The unfinished Chthulucene must collect up the trash of the Anthropocene, the exterminism of the Capitalocene, and

chipping and shredding and layering like a mad gardener, make a much hotter compost pile for still possible pasts, presents, and futures.”[1]

To be fair, this paper was not about biology or ecology but it took some very general concepts that don't push our relationship with plants than anyone growing one at home. In terms of design, I also had trouble with it. While these ideas were completed with low-fidelity designs, they didn't answer any sort of question, they were just compatible with a socioeconomic pathway. There was so much effort made into the presentation of something that could be either good or bad but excused because it fits in a fictive setting. The scenarios are interesting and they are more interesting than the design themselves. Even if it achieves to put some tangible and applied images to these scenarios, most of it is more comparable to a science fiction novel. In an interview, Bruce Sterling stated this following sentence about bad design fiction: “Bad design fiction would be just bad design—like, gee, wouldn't it be great if I could flap my arms and fly to the moon? No one's going to aspire to emulate you because your idea's stupid. They would just sort of fall dead. It's a goofy imagination that doesn't have any ability to compel.”[2] It's a bit harsh, but I do feel that way for most of the presented designs.

With all of this said, I must agree that fiction design has more to it than it seems. By eliminating any technical barriers to the designs, it is the design version of philosophy or unapplied mathematics. Some futuristic designs have shaped how some of the new technologies grew while being outside of the box.

This paper was a good opportunity to think outside of our modern relationship with technology and nature. Most of it was done right, but it didn't push far enough into it. Design fiction should be about creativity and not about plausible futures like Adam Rothstein said: “But creativity is more than betting on futures, and mainstream science fiction films and corporate concept videos are only part of design fiction's potential.”[3] Too much of the approach was made into the story, and not into the designs themselves. I very much liked the driving gardens idea. It proposed a new approach to transportation and feeding, two very common issues of the modern world. As for all of the other designs, I am just uninterested.

Bibliography:

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