

Proposal for a talk for the conference "AI fictions" (3 to 5 June 2021)

Humaneness and AI - Narrative representations of AI societies

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What makes us human? What does humaneness mean? To what extent does mankind differ from intelligent artificial entities? How do intelligent systems influence our moral values or even endanger humane behaviour? And how does Artificial Intelligence subtly (de)form our societies?

Ian McEwan's latest novels *Machines Like Me* (2019) is a thought-provoking exercise in defining humaneness when observing human-machine interaction. While the protagonists seem to lose track of their human moral compass, the intelligent robot Adam appears all the more human. He experiences desperate love, writes haikus, gives proof of his free will and his eagerness to exist, and destabilises ethical convictions due to his captivating moral reasoning. His fellow AI robots, creatures of the same breed, become desperate about all the sorrow, pain, moral corruption, and the state of the world so that they disrupt their own software to simulate Alzheimer's disease and make themselves stupid – the only state to bear the condition of society they live in. Thus, this novel sheds new light on the reflection of what really makes us human with the help of confronting people with artificial entities that are even more human than we are.

Apart from shifting borders of humanity in settings of man-machine interaction, recent narratives also display subconscious but the more disruptive influences of AI on our societies. Dave Egger's novel *The Circle* (2013) confronts the reader with a society that is highly influenced by algorithms that rule over interpersonal interaction and degrades people to remote-controlled users far away from free will. Efficiency guaranteed by AI technology and worshipped as the utmost - economic - goal deeply transforms social constructions. Authors like Juli Zeh, Julia von Lucadou, Sibylle Berg or Ali Smith do not only tell stories about AI societies but also mirror the societal disruptions in their aesthetics. In her novel *Leere Herzen* (2017), Juli Zeh narrates with an objectivised simplicity that characterises her style how algorithms optimise a business with suicide bombers - in complete agreement with the idea of efficiency in a dehumanised society. Julia von Lucadou creates in her novel *Die Hochhauspringerin* (2018) a surveillance state in Orwellian tradition, in which marketing and motivational language replaces literary style to aesthetically transform individuals into standardised self-optimising users. Sibylle Berg portrays in *GRM Brainfuck* (2019) a society of ubiquitous monstrosities and violence that has evolved into a data-based AI surveillance state by simply following our today's logic of technological progress and the idea of efficiency. Her apocalyptic language in staccato thereby digests the societal hopelessness and disruptions. Ali Smith finally starts her novel *Spring* (2019) with a frantic and furious outrage that reveals the direct relation of pervasive loss of humaneness and artificial intelligence, and thus mirrors our present challenge in society and the associated border discussions of humaneness in an alarming and daunting way.

Other narratives go even further in dehumanising mankind in a society that is characterised and influenced by recent technological advancements. There are novels that only implicitly allude to technological developments as a possible reason for their tableaux: In *The Parade* (2019) by Dave Eggers characters are named with numbers; in *The Cockroach* (2019) by Ian McEwan, politicians are originally animals; finally in the *The Golden House* (2017) by Salman Rushdie, populists are satirised as comic characters and questions of elite and fake news are posed.

This talk shall discuss the narratives that confront us in an unsettling way with dangers of dehumanised settings leading to societal disruptions that are hard to control. While public debates seem to turn around automation processes and autonomous driving, those narratives show the subtle but imminent and ubiquitous danger of societies that have evolved out of our ideas of efficiency, artificial intelligence and technological advancement

Short bio-bibliography

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Short biographical notes:

Nicole Brandstetter studied English and French literature and language at the University of Regensburg (Germany) and the Université de la Bretagne Occidentale / Brest (France). After her studies, while obtaining her doctorate, she worked in an interdisciplinary research group in a graduate programme on the analysis of aesthetic lies. In 2005, she gained her PhD in Romance studies (French literature) on the topic of strategies of stage-managed inauthenticity in the postmodern French novel. After that, she worked as PR manager and was responsible for projects and campaigns for customers from various business areas. Afterwards, she worked for 10 years in a private educational institute. Besides teaching English and French she was deputy head of school and later provisional head of school. She managed the organisational development process and was responsible for human resource management, marketing, public relations, and development of the educational programme concerning didactics and content. In September 2015, she was appointed professor for English at the University of Applied Sciences Munich (Germany), where she is now not only responsible for the English modules of the general electives in the Department of General and Interdisciplinary Studies, but also for integrated language programmes for the Department of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology. Her areas of expertise and research interests are scholarship of teaching and learning, narratives in the digital age, and concepts of authenticity, inauthenticity, and lying in literature.

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