

Response to **'It matters what Designs Design Designs: Speculation on multispecies worlds.'** Christine Mortimer

I will begin this response, by carefully situating myself. I am not a designer nor am I an academic expert on design, philosophy or speculation. I come from the very pragmatic world of management! However, reading Michelle's article enabled me to make a myriad of connections to things I have read or seen in an effort to speculate on 'what worlds make stories' (Haraway, in Westerlaken, 2021). Engaging with this idea, I find myself in the space of Le Guin's *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986), on a journey to discover connections of 'transformations and translations' (Le Guin, 1986), in the hope that the contents of my bag will help tell an alternative life story.

One of the first items that went into my Carrier Bag was David Attenborough's *A Life on this Planet*, which I watched during the English Lockdown 2, specifically the statistics which are burnt into my memory. The year I was born there was a world population of 3 billion and the 'wild places' of this earth still accounted for 62% of the land mass. Now in 2021, there is a population of 7.8 billion people and the wilderness covers just 36% of the land mass. However, the solution is apparently simple: equitable distribution of world wealth will lead to a stabilized human population, and then we can start to put things right. Rapidly following David Attenborough, Ursula Le Guin went into the Carrier Bag. I thought that Attenborough would 'seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story' (Le Guin, 2019:6), and not, as Michelle mentioned in her introduction, leaving me feeling paralysed by the sheer scale of both the problem and the proposed solution.

Attenborough talks about animals - the animals in the wild, which meant that Derrida also had to go into the Carrier Bag. His statement 'the animal. What a word! The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature' (Derrida, 2002: 392), started to reduce my paralysis by thinking through what did I mean when I speak of animals, and then my imagination once again freezes. To the rescue comes Foucault, who confronts the issue of the limitations of our own thought systems and the incredulity we experience when confronted with alternative ways of thinking, "certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies' (Foucault, 1970: XV). And so, into the Carrier Bag goes Foucault.

This alternative way of thinking is also seen in Michelle's article, through the illustrations, which have provided a connection to Derrida's article, the picture in words that he conjures of the cat staring at him naked and his feelings of shame, of being seen naked by the cat and what this means (Derrida, 2002). The illustrations also bring to mind Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and the art of trying to envisage the world of the animal as a 'human come animal', with Gregor, having turned into a giant bug, trying to find his voice, 'All right, people did not understand his words any more, although they seemed clear enough to him, clearer than previously, perhaps because he had gotten used to them' (Kafka, 1915/2002), but as Derrida suggests we give the term 'animal' no rights to respond (Derrida, 2002) and Gregor's plight is therefore silenced. So together with Le Guin, Foucault and Derrida, Kafka also goes into my Carrier Bag.

The idea of humans turning into animals, is by no means new, it is trope that features heavily in fairy tales and in films. At the start of the English Lockdown 3, I decided to engage in old films, and watched *A Brief Encounter*, whilst considering this response. Imagine my surprise when the female

protagonist, Laura, when describing her new friend, invokes the animal kingdom in her phrase 'yes, he's a nice creature'. (Lean & Coward, 1945/46). This short phrase connected my thoughts back to a 'nice' version of Ursula Le Guin's techno-hero, the Ape Man, with his long, hard, white bone rejoicing in his first murderous act (1986), and the search for an alternative life history that provides a foundation to harmonious relationships with the 'others' of this planet. So, into the Carrier Bag go David Lean and Noel Coward for starting to blur the boundaries between human and Other.

Coming up to date, the stories of *Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor (2015), create a world where jellyfish type aliens, humanoids and many other fantastic 'others' travel together to the galaxy University in a whale type creature that grows into a space transport and gives birth. Here we find a world where the human and others live, work, learn, play and communicate. One of the charms of this trilogy of novella's is the way that the protagonist Binti highlights how even those of us with the best intentions fall prey to prejudiced views, and how we have to be forced to reassess everything that we thought we knew. For me, this is at the heart of Michelle's article and led me on this journey to collect connections, ideas and authors to fill my Carrier Bag, so in goes Nnedi.

My carrier bag is currently full, and I would like to thank you Michelle for enabling me to begin the painful task of trying to reassess how I view this beautiful, varied, multi-worlds planet and the connections I can make in articulating those worlds into speculative Life Stories fit for a planet in trouble.

References:

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