

DOCTORAL THESIS

Animorphism in the anthropocene: nonhuman personhood in activist art practice

Konior, Bogna

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Abstract

Defined by the excess of abstracted production, the exploitation of natural resources and the continued impoverishment of the excluded, the Anthropocene is both a narcissistic prophecy of doom and a call to examine the roots of the environmental crisis. Against the death of “the human” in the contemporary theory unveils the violence of a global healthcare crisis, the persistence of illness, pain and pollution as the dominant sensory and political regimes, as well as the desire to become post-and trans-human, and to do justice to the plight of nonhumans under the reign of the *anthropos*. While the era interpellates the whole species as its subject, the continual presence of racism, colonialism and capitalism points to the specific roots of climate change, environmental pollution, and interspecies violence. As such, both realist and activist approaches should consider the inclusion of the nonhuman into the political as the *a priori* condition of resistance or change.

In this dissertation, I face up to this proposal, seeking to include nonhumans into the political and ethical sphere. In dialogue with animism, feminist materialism as well as decolonial and critical theory, I consider artistic and activist practices as communal, adaptive and programmatic. Rather than relying on a set of frameworks or the *oeuvre* of a thinker, I theorise the framework of “animorphism,” which accounts for activist art that does not present us with ideas and representations of nonhumans as damaged and vulnerable persons, but lets them manifest as such. Animorphic art practice lends a new visibility to small and slow violences that might otherwise seem imperceptible within the grand narrative of the Anthropocene. Rather than testifying to the changing nature of our global species-being, these practices are a form of tactical and geo-ontological activism, which unravels the world in a futurist gesture.

Against the dominant trends in post-humanist theory and environmental ethics, I criticise theorising nonhumans as “agency,” “matter” or “flow,” instead arguing for a personalisation of those often excluded by “green” art and activism. This is not a purely aesthetic coalescence but an assertion of animorphism’s suitability for developing adaptive practices in nonhuman communities in an era that necessitates *and* arises from damage, toxicity, predation and violence. The framework of animorphism pays attention to this condition and its resulting community. As such, its progressivism is no less than taking-into-account of the excluded. Through a theoretical inquiry as well as detailed case study analysis, I examine the practices of artists who intervene as designers, engineers and climate activists in order to resist the literal figurations of the *anthropos* but nevertheless remain attuned to the specificity of those, who struggle under the apocalyptic conditions of the world.

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