

Kilbourn, R.J.A., & Empey, J.A. (Eds.). (2023). *Feminist posthumanism in contemporary science fiction film and media. From annihilation to high life and beyond.* Bloomsbury.

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Feminist Posthumanism in Contemporary Science Fiction Film and Media strategically places itself within a consolidated and distinctly recognizable field by prioritizing science fiction as “the ideal venue for the exploration of [a] constellation of crucial themes” (1). These themes notably include HuManism and Anthropocentrism, along with their implications for the erasure or marginalization of ‘Woman’. Simultaneously, the book goes beyond mere placement within this established field, actively taking steps to advance and enrich the interconnections between feminist theory, posthumanist perspectives, and the expansive realm of science fiction. In doing so, it does not only acknowledge the centrality of science fiction in unraveling key societal themes, but it also contributes to the ongoing debate that seeks to bridge these critical frameworks for a more nuanced understanding of contemporary cultural narratives.

The theoretical framework of the volume is firmly grounded in the critical perspectives of scholars, most notably Rosi Braidotti and Cecilia Åsberg, a commitment that is explicitly articulated by the editors right from the outset. The primary objective is to explore the essential inquiry concerning the position of ‘woman’ within a societal and cultural context grappling with the task of discarding the remnants of the sexist, misogynistic, and colonialist underpinnings inherited from Western Enlightenment modernity. All the essays in the volume are woven around the central theme that posits “the (dis-)embodied female” as “the ultimate posthuman subject” (2). By engaging feminist and posthumanist theories in conversation with contemporary science fiction, the overarching goal of the volume is twofold. Firstly, the volume endeavors to underscore a significant point—beyond the inherent identification of the Enlightenment Human as ‘Man,’ it contends that even the critical posthuman subject, unintentionally or unconsciously, “remains, without a doubt, male” (1). This assertion establishes a critical foundation for the subsequent discussions within the volume. Secondly, the volume delves into the multifaceted role of science fiction, positioning it as a dynamic space where “women exploit representation to think critically about ‘what it means to be a woman’” (8). Simultaneously, it recognizes the paradoxical nature of this domain, acknowledging that science fiction sometimes remains “caught up in the contradictions of gender and misogynistic politics” (8). This dual exploration aims to unravel the complex interplay between gender, representation, and societal dynamics within the intricate tapestry of contemporary science fiction.

The book encompasses thirteen chapters organized into three distinct sections, each providing a comprehensive exploration of key themes within the realm of posthumanism. The chapters featured

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in the first section, which is titled ‘Posthuman Bodies and Identities’, intricately delve into nuanced issues surrounding embodiment, gendered subjectivities, and the complex landscape of reproductive technologies. These discussions unfold within the broader contexts of both posthumanist and transhumanist narratives. The second section, titled ‘Posthuman Environments and Entanglements’, encompasses essays that shift their focus towards examining the intricate interplay between bodies and subjects within their respective environments. These explorations critically consider the positioning of individuals and their relationships with the environments they inhabit, offering insightful perspectives on the dynamic entanglements that characterize posthuman existence in science fiction narratives. The concluding section, ‘Posthumanist Endings and Futures’, takes a forward-looking stance, delving into considerations of what lies beyond the Human. This section particularly navigates post-apocalyptic scenarios and high-science fiction narratives that contemplate the future trajectories of humanity.

Although the title hints at the inclusion of science fiction “film and media”, the primary emphasis is squarely placed on cinema, specifically a rather limited selection of movies. The book dedicates two chapters to the exploration of *Her*, three to the analysis of *High Life*, and an additional three to the examination of *Annihilation*. Among the other films under consideration are prominent works that have garnered both critical acclaim and public success, such as *Arrival*, *Melancholia*, *Midsommar*, *Under the Skin*, *Upstream Color*, *Blade Runner: 2049*, and *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*. Within this context, the first chapter is thus particularly welcomed as it examines lesser-known Afrofuturistic and Indigenous Futuristic movies, thus standing out for its unique perspective. Equally stimulating are two chapters that specifically center around videogames. The rationale behind the limited selection of texts in this collection can be traced back to its origins. Each chapter emerges from a series of seminars specifically focused on *Annihilation* and *High Life*, and a planned panel at the 2020 Film and Media Studies Association of Canada Annual Meeting, which was never held due to the pandemic. Nonetheless, it appears timely for otherwise valuable contributions to the field of critical feminist posthumanism, and critical posthumanism more broadly, to consider expanding their scope by incorporating a more diverse range of texts. This expansion should not only include different media forms (notable in the volume is the absence of television, for instance) but it should also, and perhaps more significantly, strive to encompass texts from various cultural and geographical realities in a more comprehensive and consistent manner.

Overall, *Feminist Posthumanism in Contemporary Science Fiction Film and Media* stands out as a significant and commendable contribution to the intersection of feminist and posthumanist studies within the realm of media studies—a field that still requires extensive exploration to unlock its full potential. This book, by emphasizing a dual perspective, not only scrutinizes texts directly addressing traditional posthumanist themes but it also employs texts as tools for interrogating posthumanist thinking. This nuanced approach results in a diverse and thought-provoking collection of reflections that seamlessly weaves together theoretical speculations and in-depth case studies through close readings. The volume effectively bridges gaps within the scholarly discourse, paving the way for further advancements in understanding the intricate connections between feminist theory, posthumanism, and contemporary science fiction in the realm of media. The book thus invites readers on a comprehensive journey through the multifaceted dimensions of posthumanism, providing rich and varied perspectives on embodiment, environmental entanglements, and the potential futures that lie beyond the familiar boundaries of human existence.

