

KEC Course: Playing Multispecies in the Anthropocene.

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Abstract

This is a course description on how to work together and develop a game with the help of norm-critical pedagogy and feminist posthumanities. The course was first proposed by Linda Paxling and is revised by the KEC Board for Course Development to fulfil the quality assurance standards of the Arctic Bologna Process, which is standardized to address all types of students across geography and species at the institution. The course adapts Kumashiro’s work on anti-discrimination (2002) to fit multispecies learning beyond the strictly human, while adhering to rigorous academic scholarship with clear course objectives, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria. The course is intended for second-cycle students.

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Course Title: Playing Multispecies in the Anthropocene.

Course Description: Language of Instruction:

The course will be conducted in English, Fungi, and occasional Vulcanish (Fungi-English dictionaries will be provided to all students).

Course Objectives

1. Introduce students to norm-critical thought, methods, and practices.
2. Introduce fauna, flora, human, and fungi students on how to navigate within and between human administrative systems and bodies.
3. Students develop skills to communicate and collaborate across student species.

4. Students develop critical awareness of how language shapes assumptions of a *lingua franca*.
5. Attain knowledge of the philosophical, theoretical, and science histories of the nature-culture divide and how humans have benefited and continue to exploit it for domination.
6. Make a publication game; the game will be one exercise to deconstruct those propositions.

Skills focused on in the course:

1. Ability to discuss and experiment with the indestructibility of animated characters in conjunction with the vulnerability of certain marginalized groups.
2. Problem-solving and troubleshooting by testing comedic postures.
3. Ability to use a hammer as if it were a mouse or a joystick.

Course Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding

1. Students are introduced to the different topological models of the overlaps between nature and culture in human history and will be able to explain, compare, and discuss them.
2. Students are presented with feminist posthumanities methods and discourses on how to recognize and articulate the contradictions, disruptions, and inconsistencies in nature and how to classify and categorize them toward the effort to expand the humanist imagination inculcating practices of planetary conviviality.

Skills and Abilities

1. Recognize, question, and instrumentalize the nature-culture divide for comedic purposes.

Reflection and Evaluation

1. Demonstrate critical ability to reflect and evaluate how norms are categorized into those that produce true comedic effects and others that should be discarded into the trash cans of history.
2. Identify, assess, and articulate synthesized reasons based on the 5Ws 1H questioning to understand failure/success in the delivery of their own jokes.

Course Description

The Anthropocene And Feminist Posthumanities

It is about the past, presents, and futures of humans as well as fauna, flora, rocks, and waters (Kelly & McDonald, 2018, p. 6)

Feminist posthumanities comprise a postdisciplinary approach to practice with a focus on technological embodiment and environmental health, on sustainability and science communication, and in particular multispecies relations and non-human subjects (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018). It can be deployed as a useful figuration that breaks down the insistent dichotomy of nature and culture and shows how embodied nature is part of humans and vice versa.

In their research on speciesism and decolonial design practices, Westerlaken (2020) explains how the myth of human exceptionalism re-affirms differences of capacity, language, and emotion between humans and other species as a reason for superiority. Westerlaken urges us to move beyond this colonial and flawed myth, beyond a humanist imagination, and begin to imagine other stories, other worlds. Inspiration for creating stories comes from our existing worldview and from within that world we create scenarios. Therefore, it becomes crucial to learn and understand what our preconceptions are and cast away the prejudices that re-affirm an imperialistic world of Us and Them. Haraway (2016, p. 35) describes the importance of understanding how our thoughts have consequences for how we build worlds: "It matters what thoughts think thoughts, it matters what knowledges know knowledges, it matters what relations relate relations, it matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories." In their research, Westerlaken (2020) developed a "multispecies worlding" to counteract the negative consequences of speciesism, where they have worked with animals to think-with and imagine a non-speciesist worlding.

Course Expectations:

During the course students will produce a provotype for a computer game. A provotype looks like something familiar, but during interaction with it something unexpected happens that challenges preconceived ideas of what should have happened. This disturbance is an invitation to expand ideas of what things, experiences, and bodies could do (Alves et al., 2016).

Students are invited to work with the twine game, as well as other experimental interactive formats that push boundaries of what video games are and could be.

Students will also make a publication related to the game and the research undertaken. The publication can be in any format and each species is welcome to draw from, use, and experiment with the forms of publishing or “making public” specific to their traditions. Fungi students, for example, can make a publication by colonizing a tree; fauna students are welcome to explore methods of marking territory as a form of “publicizing.” All forms of marking are allowed, including urination during exhibition hours; flora students can work with their leaves as “pages” in a “book,” and incorporating methods of (cross-)pollination are encouraged. Human students are encouraged to work with their own bodies (including their brains), with a focus on developing the mnemonic faculties and perform attention-encoding storage-retrieval techniques by reciting words in a performance.

We encourage collaboration among the species and cross-species exploration and transgression of species-specific communication, as well as pushing the boundaries in conventions of publication traditions.

**In accordance with the regulations as identified and prescribed by the Krabstadt Ministry of Health, humans need to apply for a special permit if urine is needed to mark their territory. All rules and regulations can be found on the website under INFO. Those allergic to electricity can find physical information and forms in room 105b, located in impasse corridor 34.

Background

This course dives into the fields of norm-critical pedagogics and feminist posthumanities, where students will learn methods of inclusive, critical, and comedic traditions and practices.

Norm-critical pedagogics* stem from Kumashiro’s work on anti-discrimination (2002) and sheds light on what is considered “normal” and therefore desired. Practices distinguished as “normal” have the power to sustain or change norms and can have dire consequences for subjects defined as “Other.” Feminist posthumanities recognize the relationships between human and non-human subjects in an effort to expand the humanist imagination beyond an anthropocentric nature-culture dichotomy and explore practices of planetary conviviality (Åsberg, 2017).

*Norm-Critical Pedagogics

Norms refer to behavior that is viewed as “normal” or “appropriate” and values elements or structures that are morally important to people. While value models are useful for understanding cultural differences, they do not sufficiently recognize cultural dynamics. Cultural dynamics pertain to how individuals acquire and make use of cultural beliefs and habits on a micro level and how cultures and institutions change on a macro level. As an alternative to value models, norm models position group behavior, such as a community’s patterns of thought and behavior, as context-specific and governed by social conventions. Considering norms as patterns of thought and behavior dependent on shared social conventions rather than individual traits something one inherently has is an important distinction when approaching the field of norm-critical innovation. A norm-critical innovation process focuses on understanding and challenging the norms that create negative differences of social exclusion, which means understanding the shared social context wherein the normative patterns of behavior occur. Social exclusion is a multidimensional process involving the lack or denial of products, services, resources, and human rights, which affects the quality of life and the general well-being of an individual as well as on a societal level (Levitas et al., 2007).

The concept of norm-criticality originates from the field of pedagogy, and specifically from Kumashiro's work on anti-discrimination (Kumashiro, 2002, 2015). The concept arises from a need to problematize the notion of tolerance to increase acceptance for less-privileged groups among privileged groups. However, the normative reasoning behind the inequality between the groups not only prevails, but continues to be reproduced. Unlike the tolerance perspective, the norm-critical perspective problematizes and changes the underlying norm model. The emphasis of norm-criticality is on showing the privileges embedded in a power structure as well as critically reflecting on one's own normative behavior (Ehrnberger, 2017). Norm-critique can be described as a pedagogical and normative practice that works towards increased social equality.

Mode of Assessment & Criteria

1. Formative assessment will happen throughout the course in the form of 1:1 feedback and Group Critique.
2. Summative assessment will be conducted in the final month of the course.

Assessment Criteria

To pass the course:

The student should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the different topological models of the overlaps between nature and culture in human history, and independently identify where the student is positioned in that complex geography. The main form of assessment will be an oral exam with powerpoint presentation.

The student should fulfill the game and publication assignment, which should contain a synthesized understanding of feminist posthumanities methods, as well as comedic situations that show originality, imagination, and purposeful will for mirth. The work should incite laughter, or be experienced as a comic intervention, in at least two different groups of peers and/or teachers.

The student should demonstrate the ability to work and think independently, forming their own set of criteria that can filter out levels of comedic success vs. failures. The main mode of assessment will be a quiz that incorporates a combination of visual and oral material, where the student is either told jokes or shown clips and fills out a multiple-choice form and rates them on a scale of 1-4 (from not funny to funny).

Reading /screening /gaming list (inclusive of other forms of references)

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