



Worldcon 75 Academic Track
Session 6: Blurring Genres

Thursday 12:00-13:30
Room 209

Chair: **Jyrki Korpua**

Abstract 1:

Laura E. Goodin (Deakin University, Australia):

Estrangement: The One True Genre

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Although relatively rigid distinctions between the various subsets of speculative fiction (that is, fantasy, science fiction, horror, and so on) have been the norm since the early 20th century (Wolfe 2011), they can be considered a relatively recent superstructure imposed on the earlier, and far broader, concept of estrangement (Suvin 1972; Shklovsky 1917). This paper traces the use of estrangement specifically in the decades before and after the era of the most rigid taxonomy in speculative fiction: the so-called “golden age” of science fiction (which has generally been defined as including the time between the late 1930s and the years just after World War II; see Glenn 2012; Nichols & Ashley 2015; Bloom 1995). The paper examines works from the Victorian and Edwardian eras to show that the distinctions later drawn between genres were irrelevant or unknown to writers at that time; instead, they wrote with the conscious aim of producing estrangement in the reader, combining a wide variety of narrative tools to do so. Next, the paper looks at works of speculative fiction produced after the proliferation of internet access in the 1990s, when the economic and logistical constraints to write within genre conventions began to loosen, and writers became increasingly likely to subvert or ignore these conventions, while preserving the aim of producing estrangement as a deliberate artistic goal. Ultimately, the paper shows that rigid distinctions between science fiction, fantasy, and other genres are artificial; that works that have been so classified are more alike in their use of estrangement than they are different in their genre conventions; and that a focus on estrangement as the aesthetic goal can provide both welcome artistic flexibility for writers and an increasingly imaginative and startling range of works for readers to enjoy.

Laura E. Goodin received her Ph.D. from the University of Western Australia in 2015. She is currently researching independently in the areas of genre theory, Victorian speculative fiction, and speculative performance writing.

Publications and Presentations:

Goodin, L 2016. Uncertain Borders: The Rise and Fall of Genre? *Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Fiction*, 18(1), pp.20-67.

Goodin, L 2015. Genre Boundaries: The Beginning of the End? Paper presented at the annual conference of the Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand, Wellington, June 30-July 2.

Goodin, L 2012. Uncertain Borders: The Rise and Fall of Genre?. Paper presented at the World Science Fiction Convention, Chicago, Illinois, August 30-September 2.

Abstract 2:

Mongia Besbes (University of Sfax, Tunisia):

Slip Stream and the Politics of Estrangement in *Naked Lunch*

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John Barth contends that everything is déjà vu in literature and that there is no room for innovation. He even calls it “the literature of replenishment”. Roland Barthes says that fiction is continuously reborn through collages forming a literary pastiche born out of the endless cultural repertoire. Slipstream is thus created as an intermarriage between mainstream canonical fiction and science fiction. Slipstream is a believable version of science fiction where robots and aliens fall in love, marry, bear children and pursue their own destiny. In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs creates a hallucinatory world in which “centipedes”, “mugwumps” and giant insects live in harmony in the “interzone”. The interzone may seem as the typical city with establishments, police and order. But, everything happens in a metaphorically strange way. Order is trespassing, clerks eat the cases and the infamous Dr Benway attempts to spread a normal sexual behaviour. The strange world that may seem as a picaresque mainstream novel is in fact a slipstream genre that not only establishes a parallel universe to our own but also constructs an ontological reality. In this reality, readers are drawn to reflect on the nature of the world and essence of their existence instead of simply looking for the epistemes of their being in their quest for the truth. Slipstream estranges its reader for the purpose of indicting a world that is essentially as caricaturized and perverse as it already is. The “weirdness” and “hazardous” nature of “the interzone” is merely an authorial statement uncovering the “unethical”, “unhuman”, “conspiring”, “paranoid” and “iconoclastic” nature of human history.

In this line of thought that this essay attempts to offer a reading of *Naked Lunch* as an example of Slipstream. Slipstream is a fiction of estrangement by excellence due to its peculiarity analogizing the determiners of mainstream literary genres to the eccentric nature of science fiction. Plausibility and eccentricity estrange the reader further to incite meditation on his current existence. Henceforth, this essay shall focus on the generic determiners of slipstream fiction in *Naked Lunch*. It will examine the dialectic relationship between the process of estrangement and the novel’s cosmos. This article culminates essentially on exploring the symbolic dimensions of slipstream fiction culturally. Imminently, strangeness is key to reflect on the dangers of conformity.

Mongia Besbes: A Teaching Assistant in The University of Sfax Tunisia/ A Reseracher in the field of Postmodern American literature Studies

Publications:

- *The Collapse of Grand Narratives in One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (book published by Éditions Universitaires Européennes)
- "Overcoming the Traumatic through the Psychedelic in One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest" (TAF publishing)
- "Keys to Words that Are already there: Chief Bromden' s Journey Towards Redemption" (Iafor Special Edition on the City")
- "On the Road of Traumatic Oblivion" (On trauma and Traumatic Memory volume in course of publication by Cambridge.

Abstract 3:

Minttu Ollikainen (University of Jyväskylä, Finland):

Estrangement in the Poetics of Finnish Group of Writers, “Reaalifantasia”

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“Reaalifantasia” is a Finnish group of writers founded by Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen, Anne Leinonen, J. Pekka Mäkelä and Juha-Pekka Koskinen in 2006. According to their manifesto, “Reaalifantastikot ja reaalifantasia”, the group is striving for a genre-free approach to literature, in which elements of different genres, such as fantasy and realism, could be used in the same works of fiction.

My paper will explore the poetics of reaalifantasia and the role of estrangement in it. I will start by introducing the ongoing discussion about the place of reaalifantasia in the field of Finnish speculative fiction. I will also discuss the definition of reaalifantasia formed by Mari Jämsén in her master’s thesis *Reaalifantasia fantastisen kirjallisuuden lajityyppinä* (2010). According to the definition, a reaalifantasia novel has a storyworld that is described to resemble the actual world of readers. This storyworld however includes at least one fantasy element, which estranges readers by deviating from their everyday world. According to my master’s thesis *Fiktio on jumalallinen uni* (2016), dreams that break their frames and invade the storyworlds around them are examples of this kind of fantasy elements especially in the reaalifantasia of Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen.

Next, I will discuss whether or not the fantasy elements of reaalifantasia are unnatural and estranging from the point of view of unnatural narratology. In their article “What Really is Unnatural Narratology?” (2013) Jan Alber, Brian Richardson, Stefan Iversen and Henrik Skov Nielsen present their different definitions of the unnatural of narratives. According to Alber, an unnatural element is a humanly, logically or physically impossible element compared to the laws of the actual world. This kind of unnatural elements are estranging when they occur in realistic contexts and cannot be naturalized or conventionalized by the genre. Iversen states that an unnatural element is a schism between the rules of a storyworld and the events taking place in the storyworld. The difference between Alber’s and Iversen’s definitions is fascinating when considering whether or not the fantasy elements of reaalifantasia are unnatural or estranging. This difference is also interesting when considering the effect of these fantasy elements on the storyworlds they are part of.

Finally, I will move on to the thematic function of estrangement in reaalifantasia. According to Jämsén, fantasy elements foreground the themes of reaalifantasia novels. According to Alber, thematisation is one way for readers to cope with estranging unnatural elements. I will discuss what the fantasy elements of reaalifantasia have to say to their readers.

Minttu Ollikainen: Both my master’s and my bachelor’s thesis in literature are about the unnatural dreams of the reaalifantasia of Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen. In my master’s thesis *Fiktio on jumalallinen uni* (2016) I study the way dreams function as estranging unnatural elements that break the time structures, narrative levels, narrative spaces and the boundaries of characters’ minds and thus foreground the ontological thematics in Jääskeläinen’s fiction. In the beginning of the year 2017 I began doctoral studies at the University of Jyväskylä to broaden my study to handle the poetics of reaalifantasia more fully.