
Confirmed Key Note Speakers:
Prof Dr Roman Bartosch (University of Cologne)
Prof Dr Pieter Vermeulen (KU Leuven)



Call for Papers

“Tracing Non-Human Agency in Literatures in English”

15.11.2018-17.11. 2018, Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf

This conference will explore the range of relationships between the human and the non-human in literature, engaging with questions such as: How do non-human agents influence what is often perceived as ‘human actions’? How does the agency of the environment, technology, animals and other non-human agencies challenge the belief in human superiority? Acknowledging the disruptive agency of non-human actors, this conference proposes an engagement with non-human agents that puts to test the exclusive status of the human. We welcome contributions by PhD students who work in the fields of Postcolonial Studies, Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Comparative Literatures, Posthumanism, Ecocriticism and Environmental Studies or Cultural Studies who are interested in engaging with the topic of “non-human agency in literature”. The conference will provide a platform for exchange and collaboration among PhD students.

The topic “Tracing Non-Human Agency in Anglophone Literatures” proceeds from the assumption that non-human actors displace traditional western models of agency. The non-human is not merely an object for human interpretation or a static background against which human agency may be played out. Rather, it claims an agency of its own, which affects humans in frequently unpredictable ways. Though literature and other creative practices have always acknowledged the agency of non-human, it is only now – with the advent of more and more critical thought in the fields of posthumanism and ecocriticism – that we have the critical tools to adequately address the productivity of the non-human and its manifold influences and impacts. The non-human, so our assumption, shows its intractable agency in numerous ways: It may act back, ‘stare back’, or defer human action.

The discussion of non-human agency touches upon a number of topics that can also be discussed from a historical perspective:

- Environmental Agency
- Material Objects
- Animals and the Creaturely
- Digital Turn and Agency of the Machine
- The Agency of Literature
- Non-human Agents and Memory

The disruptive agency of non-humans compels scholars to re-think human/non-human relationships and re-conceptualize western concepts of modernity. This conference seeks to address the ways in which literature can bring non-human agency to the fore. We want to analyze the ways in which literature establishes the non-human environment as a dynamic configuration that not only surrounds humans, but which is constituted by and dependent on non-human actors. Proceeding from the assumption that humans only exist in their relation to non-human agencies interacting with them, this conference addresses the following questions: How can a thinking beyond the primacy of the human propel the acknowledgement of new forms of relationality? What are the ethical implications of decentering the human as the predominant unit of reference (Braidotti 2013)? How can literature avoid anthropomorphizing non-human agents?

Taking our cue from these questions among others, we will critically re-evaluate the ethical responsibility of literature and its potential to re-negotiate the relationship between the human and the nonhuman.

If you are interested in contributing, please send an abstract (300 words) for a 20-minute presentation including a short biographical note (50 words) and the topic of your current project to one of us no later than **July 31, 2018**. The conference language is English.

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