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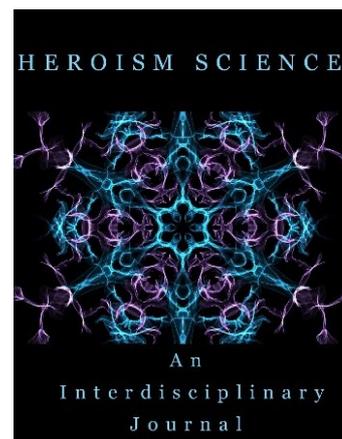
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Future Library: Hopepunk Heroism

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ABSTRACT:

Future Library (Paterson, 2014-2114) is viewed through the lens of the heroic imagination and heroism in community. The heroic vision includes an artist, writers, a forest, public architecture, and the city of Oslo. As the project grows, so does its community, across the world, encouraging transformative thinking for all. Future Library is an art installation created by Katie Paterson, described thus: “A forest in Norway is growing. In 100 years it will become an anthology of books. Every year a writer is contributing a text that will be held in trust, unpublished, until the year 2114. The texts will be printed on paper made from the trees, only to be read a century from now (2014-2114).” A silent room in Oslo’s Deichman Library holds the texts as they wait for 2114, for saplings to become trees to publish the anthologised stories. Future Library (Paterson, 2014–2114) is hope in practice, a patient transformation, hopepunk heroism for the planet. The readers of these stories, future learners, are not yet born. Such interconnections between art, nature, humans, stories, and buildings exemplify a line of flight where despite the uncertainty of today we can join a social horizon of hope towards our future.

KEYWORDS: *Heroism in community; Heroic imagination; Art; Future Library; Narratives; Hopepunk*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Stories are part of us, they have been likened to breath, they make meaning, “each story we tell is a fragment in an endless shapeshifting mosaic” (Miller, 2022). Walter Benjamin’s angel of history (1940), who faces the past with wings outstretched, would like to go back and fix the problems of yesteryear that lie strewn like debris, but instead the angel is being pushed into the future by the winds of progress. In contrast, *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) in Oslo, an exercise of hope, looks to the future of 2114, whilst slowing down the present, acknowledging the time it takes to grow a book, bringing writers, forests and readers together in the process, slowing down progress to allow for community. *Future Library* (2014-2114) is an art installation created by Katie Paterson, it is visionary action towards a hopeful future.

Just as a tree grows outwards ring by ring, *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) grows outwards as its community widens. A forest in Norway is growing to provide paper for the printing of an anthology of books. The books are added, one each year, not-yet-read, held in trust until the year 2114. The heroic imagination held within this vision includes writers, sustainable forestry, and public architecture. A silent room at the top of Oslo’s Deichman library holds the texts as they wait for saplings to become trees to bind the anthologised stories. *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is hope in practice, a patient transformation, heroism for the planet.

Hope in practice, a hopepunk praxis, notes that despite the difficulties of the Anthropocene, an era described as, “when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 5), a climate emergency, wars, and post-pandemic challenges, we can still take action towards hope. *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) holds the hope that there will be a future. The stories not-yet-read are cared for with community in mind. To care for, or protect is a heroic action, “hero derives from the Greek word *heros*, meaning protector or defender” (Kinsella et al., 2017, p. 20). Readers of these books, future learners, have not been born yet, the future guardians of the forest have not chosen a job in forestry yet. Such interconnections between art, time, nature, humans, stories, and buildings exemplifies a line of flight where despite the uncertainty of today we can join a transversal alliance between humans and nonhumans to support a social horizon of hope (Braidotti, 2019).

Author Alexandra Rowland coined the speculative fiction subgenre hopepunk, stating, “the opposite of grimdark is hopepunk. Pass it on” (2017, Tumblr). Hopepunk encourages small acts of kindness or positive action, for example, planting tomato seeds, or checking in on your neighbour during difficult times. Hopepunk does not say the glass is half-empty or half-full, hopepunk says, there is some water in the glass and asks, what are we going to do with it? Hopepunk takes a strengths-based approach and the belief that communities have the capacity to take care of each other. Punk is an operative word of action, acting through radical kindness. We can aspire towards taking small actions to support the community. *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) in Oslo is an example of hopepunk heroic action, addressing some of the excesses of the Anthropocene. It is an artistic expression of taking time, so we can consider the imaginary held in stories, and care for the sustainability of resources such as forests, and the transdisciplinary connection between the human and nonhuman, that is writers, artists, readers, stories, public architecture and trees, as the project asks that we delay our need for instant gratification.

Transdisciplinary in nature *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is a living art project that hopes to continue beyond the death of its co-creators. According to posthuman critical theorist, Braidotti, art is:

cosmic in its resonance and hence posthuman by structure, as it carries us to the limits of what our embodied selves can do or endure. In so far as art stretches the boundaries of representation to the utmost, it reaches the limits of life itself and thus confronts the horizon of death (Braidotti, 2013, p. 107).

The *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) art project stretches boundaries by growing narratives from around the world and sounds like a story itself. *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is an affirmative art project that may positively influence affirmative worlding. Affirmative as it offers transformation towards better days, transformation through time, where according to Deleuze and Guattari, the present is what we are becoming, and what we are ceasing to be. Transformation by looking after the planet and acknowledging the time it takes to grow a book.

The 2014-2114 initiative of artist Katie Paterson, *Future Library* is an art project that embraces what Braidotti names a social horizon of hope (Braidotti, 2019). Braidotti encourages, “energizing projects that express generative narratives” (2019, p. 69). One such energizing project is *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114). It is an expression of the

community of the new, a growing collection of stories that holds hope for a future, that there will be a 2114, hope for forests, for readers, for writers, for the Spinozian concept of *conatus*, the desire to continue and hope for learners who engage with the project and its stories.

Future Library (Paterson, 2014-2114) enables a transversal alliance between the bio of a forest, the geo of the land, the techno of a library and the writers of stories. Like the ever-widening rings that form the cross-section of a tree trunk, a labyrinthine map, the *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) art project grows each year as it gathers another text to its ever-increasing (in)visible planetary archive. Trees influence architecture as the design of the reading room in the Diechman public library is reminiscent of the rings of a cross-section of a tree trunk. The 100 drawers in this room, that hold the texts, are made of glass, and are positioned one per vertical ring. Each glass drawer is visibly lit, bringing to mind the Rumi quote, “The wound is where the light comes in” a place where change is possible. Within these hidden texts are characters who may reveal their wounds and opportunities for transformation. Every year an author known to write about time is invited to gift some writing. To date the authors include, Margaret Atwood who has written *Scribbler Moon* (2014); David Mitchell who has written *From Me Flows What You Call Time* (2015); Sjon who has written *As My Brow Brushes On The Tunics Of Angels or The Drop Tower, the Roller Coaster, the Whirling Cups and other Instruments of Worship from the Post-Industrial Age* (2016); Elif Shafak who has written *The Last Taboo* (2017); Han Khan who has written *Dear Son, My Beloved* (2018); Karl Ove Knausgard who has written *Blindeboken* (2019); Ocean Vuong has written a collection of poetry (2020); Tsitsi Dangarembga has written *Narini and her Donkey* (2021); Judith Schalansky has written *Fluff and Splinters: A Chronicle* (2022) and in 2024 the chosen author is Valerie Luisell. And *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) has inspired a play, *A Long Time Coming* (2023), so the project grows like the ever-increasing rings of a tree trunk, a generative narrative.

Future Library (Paterson, 2014-2114) is a journey of growth, which, like the hero’s journey expects transformation, of setting and society (Allison & Goethals, 2017). The setting slowly changes in Oslo, the setting of *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) changes as a forest grows. Every year within the forest the most recent addition to the library is presented during a handing over ceremony. This cyclical ritual emphasises that the process is important in growing an annual community presence, a society that appreciates this slow-growing living archive. There is a sense of healing and resilient cohesiveness in a shared positive project that will extend for a 100 years. Like the ever-increasing rings within the

cross-section of a tree trunk, *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is a liminal space of outward growth, inclusive of an ever-increasing global community. The art project holds meaning as it is beneficial for others (Green et al., 2017), providing a prosocial inclusive community. Every spring there is a public handing-over ceremony in the forest where the trees are growing. At the ceremony the unread text from the chosen author is gifted to the Future Library Trust led by Anne Beate Hovind.

Expanding the horizon of time, away from short-termism, *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is hope in practice, it asks for patience, in a time where we are used to instant communication, defamiliarizing our expectations of instant gratification. *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is an inspirational heroic project which may encourage the meaning making, perspective taking, and critical thinking of learners who may be inspired to take positive actions of care and artistry in their own communities, writing their own stories for future readers. *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) celebrates the role of the imagination in shaping our future worlding. As Donna Haraway notes, “It matters what thoughts think thoughts... It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories” (2016, p. 35). Authors selected by a trust are chosen to inspire and engage the imagination of future generations. The art project itself excites the imagination and is like a fairy tale. The Silent Room in the New Diechman Library in Oslo is a sacred space, quiet and intimate, each book safely locked away in a glass drawer. A key opens each drawer. Windows in the silent room face the forest. The project raises questions that we cannot foresee the answers to: Will the forest survive climate change? Will languages have changed by 2114? Will there still be a printing press? Will people still read?

Referring to the century timeframe, the project’s first author, Margaret Atwood asks, “how will the meanings of words have changed in that time? For language itself is subject to pressure and metamorphosis, just as the rock of the earth’s crust is” (2014, p. 1). The second selected author, David Mitchell sees the library as a vote of confidence in the future, the ongoing existence of libraries, trees, readers, books, that incorporates trust: “We have to trust our successors, and their successors, and theirs, to steer the project through a hundred years of political skullduggery, climate change, budget cutbacks and zombie apocalypses” (2015). This trust in our future conveys a message of hope for young people. David Mitchell’s text for the *Future Library* project (Paterson, 2014-2114) is named, *From Me Flows What You Call Time* (2015) after a piece of music composed by Toru Takemitsu. This text interweaves with Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks* (2014) as Takemitsu’s orchestral music with percussion is

what Dr Iris Fenby, a corporeal version of body-hopping Atemporal Horologist, Dr Marinus, is listening to at 23:11 (11:11pm) on 1 April 2025, in her car, at the start of the section, ‘*An Horologist’s Labyrinth*’. As the clock ticks, 1 April 2025 fast approaches. The characters, the sojourners, the creative figurations’ labyrinthine paths may positively influence the journeys of those who read them. What obstacles and challenges are overcome, we need to wait until 2114 to find out, by which time we may not be here.

Author, Elif Shafak sees the stories as being co-created with the readers and the perspectives they bring to the writing. Shafak enjoys the different languages of the collection noting that “every language has its own rhythm, its own labyrinth” (2017, p. 7). Author, Sjon notes that *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is “a game on the grandest of scales” (2017, p. 1). Han Kang sees the possibility for transformation through the library:

If it is possible to call prayer the moment when, in spite of all the uncertainty, we have to take one step towards the light, in this moment I feel that perhaps this project is something close to a century-long prayer (2019, p. 3).

Maria Horvei also sees hope and a sense of endurance: If the project is about hope, then it is in the defiant sense of, “taking one step at a time, without a thought of giving up,” (2019, p. 7) to keep on going through small acts of courage, despite the difficulty of the situation. She is describing the hopepunk action of the everyday hero, the heroism of community, heroism for the planet. This is the hopepunk notion of endurance, a Stoic on-going-ness, a desire to continue, *conatus*. In response to the challenges of our times, Karl Ove Knausgard notes the need for a collective, community approach such as the *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114):

While the issues we face are enormous... our individual lives are small and insignificant, but only from there can we begin to look for ways to respond. As Paterson’s project reminds us, the solutions are to be found in what emerges in the networks between us, the connections of which are each a part. Not in the tree, but in the forest. Not in the book, but in literature (2019, p. 4).

These networks between us, the posthuman interconnections between human and nonhuman, between learners and stories and their possible futures excites a possibility of an affirmative world to come where transformation may be possible despite the difficulties we navigate. Author and advocate of nature’s remaining wild places, Jay Griffiths describes the project thus:

The Future Library works as an actualized fairy tale: the Rings, the Forest, the Promise, the Hundred Years, the Silence, the Secret Room... the wood is alive, if a tree is chopped down and turned into something... it remains charged with the life it had... A book is not a dead tree but living wood turned into speaking leaves... As a tree grows its rings from a power deep inside itself, so, metaphorically each book-ring is a widening circle rippling out to rings of writing and reading, wider and still wider out as much into the future as the past (2021, p. 6).

Last year, Judith Schalansky, whose writing brings the past into the present, giving voices to the silenced, joined the community of writers. She notes that one day the texts will dialogue and interact with each other.

2 A LINE OF FLIGHT FOR AN AFFIRMATIVE WORLD TO COME

Lines of flight are ruptures or breaks from the norm, destabilizing the status quo: “Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that ‘a society is defined by its lines of flight... there is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, the overcoding machine.’” *Future Library* (Paterson, 2014-2114) is such a line of flight, a heroic hopepunk action, it offers the transformative possibilities of a social horizon of hope, a human and nonhuman transversal alliance, a collection of stories with heroes and imaginaries, creative figurations, with snow balling ever-increasing affects, an endless shapeshifting mosaic. A balm for the angel of history, it is a becoming beyond us.

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4 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.