

## Transcript of the Lecture Performance:

# TAKE CARE ENCOUNTERING LIFELIKENESS – AGAINST A NEW WORLDSAVING ONTOLOGY

*Martina Leeker aka Fanny Cyberton, Consultant for Digital Cultures and Performances, coming from the year 2043, and Fanny Cybertron – the Avatar, Afterlife of humans in the Internet. Aachen/Berlin, 2024/2025*

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*Performed within the Workshop: Probing Non-Anthropocentric Vulnerabilities for More-Than-Human Care, by: Martina Leeker (Universität Köln) and Konstanze Schütze (PH Karlsruhe), Care Research Lab. Track 6: Vulnerability and Caring: Perspectives and Challenges, April 22, 2024.*

*The performance consists of a lecture on Zoom with a power point presentation.*

## First Scene. Fanny's input on active matter

**Fanny Cyberton** *speaking with emphasis and persuasion:*

Dear people and friends. I'm Fanny Cyberton, a consultant for digital cultures and performances, coming to you from the year 2043.

Today, I visit you during the important conference on LIFELIKE FORMS AND SYSTEMS at the University of Aachen ([PoM, Aachen 2024](#)). The organizers invited me to tell you about the future of our earth and our human existence coming from the important concept of LIFELIKENESS. You are just starting unsurely to think about it and to practice it.

*SLIDE 1 (see Appendix)*

Contrary to your state of the art, we are already living in cooperative assemblies with biological organisms, lifelike materials, and technological objects, which form intermingled and interdependent environments and systems. By doing so, we saved the world and generated an equal society and a profound, happy life for all parts.

*SLIDE 2 (see Appendix)*

We worked on this, based on a wonderful and important research-project of your times, conducted by a very competent and brilliant team of researchers from Humboldt University Berlin, called: [MATTERS OF ACTIVITY](#).

*SLIDE 3 (see Appendix)*

It is about a new understanding of matter as active material (Schäffner 2018; Eder et al. 2020), overcoming the idea of materials – such as iron or wood – as dead and passive matters, given for human-centered instrumentalisation. Contrary to this destructive attitude, coming with turbo-capitalist extractivism and fantasies of god-like engineering, you must understand wood is an active, living material that has been immobilised for too long by sealants (Eder et al. 2020; Friedmann and Krauthausen 2022; Friedmann and Krauthausen 2023).

*SLIDE 4 (see Appendix)*

In contrast to this, wood's lifelikeness is seen for example in the hull of a wooden ship, which only becomes watertight when the lifelike intrinsic architecture of wood is taken into account by the layering of the planks, creating a water-impermeable joint (Eder et al. 2020). The second condition for impermeability is the interaction of wood with its environment, reacting to humidity and temperature (Eder et al. 2020, Friedmann and Krauthausen 2022; Friedmann and Krauthausen 2023).

*SLIDE 5 (see Appendix)*

This concept of active materials comes together with the idea and practices of an adaptive and comprehensive design, building networks of diverse and self-organised, symmetrical systems. An ontology of lifelikeness is born, unfolding an epistemology of a humbly respectful being-with-the-world. Furthermore, with active matter come new forms of care as "promiscuous care" (The Care collective 2020, p. 40), which means a borderless, mixed, interdependent, and relationist care beyond kinship and anthropocentric concerns of humans. This care lies beyond ideas of autonomy, control, and powerplays of caregivers, or care-institutions.

*SLIDE 6 (see Appendix)*

It was this return to the analog that helped us overcome the one-way street of digital techno-centric transhumanistic escalations (Loh 2021), which led, among other things, to climate change and racism. In our days, we are designing systems of mutual care, approaching the digital from the vital forces of analog living and lifelike assemblies. Or, to be precise, the ontology of ACTIVE MATTERS tells us that there are higher forces and performances than human can imagine or control, because there "[s]leeps a song in things abounding" (German: *Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen*, Wendland 2013). The new credo is: We are all one.

## Second Scene. The Avatar's Intervention I – The Church Story

**Fanny Cybertron – the Avatar** *whiny and melancholic*:

I have to intervene, I see a problem.

I'm Fanny Cybertron – the Avatar.

I'm your afterlife in the Internet. We live in a kind of hyper-cemetery of your research, debates, arguments, discourses, and hi-stories. I am a flaneur within this cemetery, picking up your waste and putting it together in my understanding.

*SLIDE 7 (see Appendix)*

As for my problem:

What if people don't get the difference between your ontology of active matter, on the one hand, and the idea of passive or 'dead' materials coming with the current hype around engineering life, on the other? Or, what if we actually can't make this difference? Maybe the concepts of active and passive matter are only two sides of the same medal. And your narrative of a turning point – concerning a new era of understanding matter, redefining the relation of humans and environment, downgrading the digital – is short-sighted?

*SLIDE 8 (see Appendix)*

The dark sides of this medal, which are always resonating with your happy ontology, are the discourses of synthetic biology, murmuring that biology is technology, that is to say: engineering and claiming that life is to be coded, going down to the level of genes (Müller 2023). What if your idea about active matter is only a pathway to geoengineering? (Müller 2023). To sharpen the point: This engineering approach is about a godlike desire and power of engineering life and constructing worlds according to researchers' will and interest.

*SLIDE 9 (see Appendix)*

Remember the stories about synthetic-biologist George Church, who – as it is told – sought women as surrogate-mother-uterus for carrying cloned neanderthal babies in order to breed a humanlike genetic material for fighting diseases (Grolle 2013; Hall 2013).

*SLIDE 10 (see Appendix)*

Church's other idea is re-engineering mammoths as a weapon against climate change (Taschwer 2024).

### Third Scene. Fanny Cyberton and the Reindeer-Story

#### Fanny Cyberton:

I see the problem: You are missing the point and apparently you can't understand the quality and the deepness of the turn to the ontology and epistemology of active matters. It is indeed a profound disruption.

*SLIDE 11 (see Appendix)*

I will tell you a story that is the absolute opposite of godlike-engineering to make YOU understand more deeply what it is all about, and to train your consciousness to become part of our new ontology at the same time.

Please, dear Avatar and dear guests, lean back, adopt a comfortable posture, relax all of your muscles, and just listen. If you like: Close your eyes.

*SLIDE 12 (see Appendix)*

*The following text is coming from an audio track, spoken by an artificial voice.*

(The story is compiled from descriptions of the film “Mnemonia” from 2022, a collaboration between Emilia Tikka, Oula A. Valkeapää and Leena Valkeapää)

**artificial voice:**

Oula is a reindeer herder who lives in the reindeer’s time and follows their movement. The everyday rituals of living in the landscape keeps the ancient connection between the herder and the herd alive. The land carries the memories of past migrations of the herders and their herds. But the nomadic way of life and migrating in the reindeer’s natural rhythm is vanishing, which leads into fading of the ancient connection between herder, reindeer, and landscape (Tikka et al. 2022).

The story goes on in the year 2102, when the Gulf Stream has collapsed and arctic climate slowly cools after decades without snow. Only few tame reindeer have survived the storms, echoing the long-lost nomadic culture. A bioscientist is wandering since years through empty beaches of the arctic ocean. She is searching for remains of a bygone reindeer who used to migrate in the area. She believes that the reindeer carries epigenetic memories of her ancestors in its bones and therefore could help her to remember (Müller & Tikka 2023; Mnemonia 2025).

In the year 2152 the Living connection to reindeer and land is central. *The Biometric Visa, The Book of Mnemonic Biosciences, and the Reindeer Harness* are everyday items, materialising a different kind of technoscience future that now follows the reindeer’s rhythm. (Müller and Tikka 2023, p. 113; Mnemonia 2025).

The human-nature-technology relationship is renegotiated collaboratively through reindeer ontologies, contrasting the engineering-driven concepts of the synthetic biologists. The tacit knowledge of the *living relation* between humans, reindeer, and the land is taken as being as much of a fact as the latest bioscience research. The *living*, symmetric relation of mutual exchange constitutes the flourishing of the ecosystem (Müller and Tikka 2023, p.110, p. 118).

## Fourth Scene. The Avatar’s Intervention II - the Hippie-Story

**Fanny Cybertron – the Avatar** *whiny and melancholic:*

*SLIDE 13 (see Appendix)*

Awakened by your story, I finally recognize and understand the real history and the dangers of your new ontology. It is connected to the allegedly happy prehistory of today’s desire for distributed agency and techno-ecological entanglements in the psychedelic Hippie-times of the 1960s. They invented a technological be-in, claiming: We are all one (Turner 2006). This was seen as an attitude to save the earth and to destroy the unequal and oppressive bourgeois society. This motto of ALL-ONE-NESS is – obviously – the connecting point to your story about the reindeer-ontology, fighting for an expanded consciousness as

basis for a better world, just as the hippies of the 1960s. Furthermore, we can even see the continuation of the hippies' animistic and cosmologic approach to technology, things, organisms, as well as to lifelike objects, and materials, because there:

*SLIDE 14 (see Appendix)*

Sleeps a song in things abounding.

*SLIDE 15 (see Appendix)*

The problem and the danger of this pre-history and its continuation is that it is about a mentality of drug-based psychedelic existence, enveloped in enchantment, bedazzling, and techno-animistic ritualisation. Remember the insights by media scholar Marshall McLuhan, who directly connected this new mentality and existence to the effects of technology:

*SLIDE 16 (see Appendix)*

*Coming from an audio track, spoken by an artificial voice, quoting McLuhan's interview with the Playboy from 1969*

**artificial voice:** Man turns on his consciousness through drugs just as he opens up all his senses to a total depth involvement by turning on the TV dial. [...] LSD [...] gives the potential of instant and total involvement, both all-at-onceness and all-at-oneness, which are the basic needs of people translated by electric extensions of their central nervous systems out of the old rational, sequential value system (McLuhan 1969).

*SLIDE 17 (see Appendix)*

**Fanny Cybertron – the Avatar:**

Drug-taking, psychedelic aesthetic, as well as rituals had been seen as a tool for reprogramming brains in the 1960s, bringing them to a holistic understanding of existence and switching them to their technological environment, enabling a better life and world. The hippies did with drugs what today's synthetic biologists are doing in a technocratic way by redesigning the material codes of life, and what you are doing, in your smooth manner, by your stories and practices of active matter. Your story is just another costume for an animist-posthuman mentality, hiding technocratic regimes.

In order to enable resistance to your ideas, I will tell you MY story. Please, don't close your eyes, but look at the pictures attentively:

*SLIDE 18 (see Appendix)*

*Text by Fanny Cybertron – the Avatar, coming from an audio track, spoken by an artificial voice*

**artificial voice:** In the 1960s a new era of cybernetic, self-organizing systems began, which were no longer concerned with the emphatic idea of the "human being". Instead, they were looking for givers of data and processors of information. Artists, young hippies, or techno-inventors started to re-inscribe humans into these disinterested systems by hiding the anthropo-related degradation within a discourse of humans becoming an integral part of a biological and technological environment in which we are all one. In this situation also formerly dead objects were redefined as self-organized, active, and smart things being able to do creative work (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). This turn enabled an interaction between humans and

things by upgrading them and degrading humans at the same time. This move culminated in the 1990s in an animistic view of matter in the gestalt of technical things, inventing them as active and communicative, as well as enlivened and enspirited (Gold 2007). Nowadays we find the continuation of this history in the idea of active matter and the discourse of a multi-layered entanglement of different parts as state of being. In this process, we once again see the nobilitation of things and matter, as well as of technology, effectuating a well-being in a world-order of relationism. The happy side-effect is that humans still play a role as part of the bigger whole.

But be careful! This history hides the technocratic regime of techno-human co-operativity, laying the veil of camouflage over the fact that it is about a nonhuman system performing humans in a techno-logical way. Its effect is a new form of what was once called biopolitics, understood as: optimizing life. Nowadays, we have to deal with a kind of necropolitics, which leads humans toward a naturalized acceptance to dissolve into a higher and more holistic order beyond their control; and to die for it. The advantage of this shift is that there will be no fights in situations of crisis, as e.g. climate collapses, as humans of all nations and cultures believe in the same paradigm of a new hyper-relationism. This is the technocracy of self-organization.

This techno-animism is only possible within a culture of fascination, in which bedazzling humans in a druglike existence strengthens the credibility of the promise of saving the earth and bringing anti-bourgeois and anti-technocratic orders of society and politics. This effect is very convenient as it becomes necessary that the new status of humans as giver of data and processor of information must be sold as an enrichment. This bedazzling by the mentality of all-one-ness hides the fact that some are more equal than others, controlling and regulating how infrastructures function and what algorithmic processing looks like. This condition is beyond a critical reflection because as long as technology is connected to the idea of being able to design, engineer, and produce a better world, it is untouchable.

**The End**

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## Appendix



## Credits:

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