

# Imagining Non-Speciesism

**Michelle Westerlaken**

School of Arts and Communication (K3)

Malmö University, Sweden

Nordenskiöldsgatan 1, 211 19 Malmö

michelle.westerlaken@mau.se

What will a world that rejects speciesism (oppression and exploitation on the grounds of belonging to a certain species (Singer, 2009/1975)) be like? How will we understand ourselves in relation to other animals in this world? How will we engage with one another in such a society? What kind of animal encounters can still take place? These are fundamental questions to think-with in the attempt to imagine a world that does not regard other animals as lesser beings.

However, in our current frameworks for thinking about speciesism, we mainly know what we do not want. It remains challenging to envision what the alternatives actually look like or how they can be described. The language we have, to articulate our thoughts about oppression in general, is often focused on the systems we wish to counter or reject: words like non-speciesism, post-colonialism, post-humanism, or post-capitalism. It is important to give problems a name in order to recognize them as problems (Ahmed, 2017). However, this is also where we encounter the limits of our thinking-with these kinds of words. We come up against something we cannot resolve, because we do not use a framework for thinking beyond the problems we encounter. Following a feminist design theory perspective, in this talk I will use the term ‘multispeciesism’ to articulate a ‘worldview’ (Redström, 2017) (or a ‘concept’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994/1991)) that we can philosophize with and appropriate to actively design alternative less-speciesist futures.

I attempt to articulate this ‘multispeciesist worldview’ further by curating stories of our engagements and encounters with animals that are just big enough to inspire alternative ways of thinking but do not attempt to explain or define our relationships with other beings once and for all. They consist of stories of surprises, joy, play, and unexpected responses we get from interacting with other animals (Haraway, 2016), they involve intense moments of caring for other species (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017), they consist of deliberate practices of self-fashioning and restructuring our lives (Foucault, 1988; Gibson-Graham, 2008), and they encompass constructions of hopeful or possible utopian narratives (Le Guin, 2016; Zylinska, 2014).

Ideas of alternative futures do not arise out of nowhere: they are inscribed in the present (Berardi, 2017). I suggest that by collecting and curating a collection of less-speciesist instances that we share with other animals we can actively construct the raw material that can inspire alternative futures. A few examples:

but there is  
a pigeon  
sleeping over  
there

Let's drink some water  
at the fountain

then let's drink on the other side  
so she does not wake up





fracing a fly that was stuck behind the window



Enjoying the view  
of the Hong Kong Skyline  
together with a bird

## Academic Bio

Taking a critical approach to our current treatment of animals in society, Michelle Westerlaken – A 3<sup>rd</sup> year PhD Student at Malmö University – researches how the design of artefacts that mediate playful, joyful, or surprising encounters between animals and humans can inspire us to imagine alternative – non-speciesist – futures. Her research draws from theories from fields including interaction design, posthumanism, and critical animal studies. For more info see: her [personal website](#) and google scholar page [publications](#).

## References

- Sarah Ahmed. (2017). *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Franco 'Bifo' Berardi. (2017). *Futureability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*. London, UK: Verso.
- Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. (1994/1991). *What is Philosophy*. London, UK: Verso.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Edited by Martin L. H., Gutman, H. and Hutton P. H. London, UK: Tavistock Publications.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2008). Diverse economies: Performative practices for “other worlds”, *Progress in Human Geography*, pp. 1-20.
- Donna J. Haraway. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ursula K. Le Guin. (2016). A non-Euclidean view of California as a cold place to be. (Part III: Essays). In *Utopia*, by More, Thomas, London, UK: Verso Books, pp. 161-194.
- Maria Puig de la Bellacasa. (2017). *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in more than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Johan Redström. (2017). *Making Design Theory*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Peter Singer. (2009/1975). *Animal Liberation*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Zylinska, Joanna. (2014). *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*. London, UK: Open Humanities Press.