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Science Fiction and Models of Humanity

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SCIENCE FICTION AND MODELS OF HUMANITY

EMILY HOLLAND
FRANKENSTEIN
or The Modern Prometheus
MARY SHELLEY
GALVANISM

- Attaching copper and zinc rods, and then placing the ends of said rods to different body parts in the animal bodies

- Assumption that there is an “electric fluid” created by the brain that is transmitted through the nerves to the muscles and tissues of the body

- Believed by Galvani and his followers to be the source of life that lived electrically in all human and animal tissue
ALDINI’S EXPERIMENTS

• applied Galvani’s methods onto the corpse of a criminal, murderer Thomas Forster, who had been hanged an hour before.

• “the bodies of human corpses became violently agitated and one even raised itself as if about to walk; arms alternately rose and fell; and one forearm was made to hold a weight of several pounds, while the fists clenched and beat violently the table upon which the body lay”
“With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the *instruments of life* around me, that I might *infuse a spark of being* into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet... by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; *it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs*”

(Shelley 58, my emphasis)
SYMPATHY

- Sympathy: the transference of human emotion.

- “The passions are so contagious that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts” (Hume, as quoted by Lobis in “Future of Sympathy” 301).

- “I required kindness and sympathy,” he says, and “I did not believe myself unworthy of it” (Shelley 134).
MARY SHELLEY’S MODEL OF HUMANITY

• Emotional expression
• Capability for sympathy
• Basic desire to connect
KATE WILHELM
Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang
CLIMATE CHANGE THEORIES OF THE 1960S-70S

• Geochemist David Keeling detects rise in CO2

• “it was these measurements that at last made anthropogenic global climate change a significant topic for scientific research and public consideration” (Weart 71).

• Study, “Man’s Impact on the Global Environment,” conducted by MIT in 1970
“The pollution’s catching up to us faster than anyone knows. There’s more radiation in the atmosphere than there’s been since Hiroshima—French tests, China’s tests. Leaks. God knows where all of it’s coming from. We reached zero population growth a couple of years ago,... The famines are here and they’ve been here for three, four years already, and they’re getting worse. There’s more diseases than there’s ever been since the good Lord sent the plagues to visit the Egyptians. And they’re plagues that we don’t know anything about...”

(Wilhelm 20)
In the 1950s, John Gurdon and colleagues conducted a study to see if they could produce a frog genetically identical to its donor parent.
HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

• Developed in 1962 by psychologist Abraham Maslow.

• Focuses on the individual as a:
  • Whole
  • Unique
  • Separate being
"The family used isolation for punishment. A disobedient child left alone in a small room for ten minutes emerged contrite, all traces of rebellion eradicated."

(Wilhelm 98)
“Tell me what this is,” he said. She wriggled to get loose. “Snow,” she said. “It’s snow.” “It’s a man,” he said sharply. She looked at him in bewilderment and glanced at the figure again. Then she shook her head. One by one he held the other small children up to see. All they say was snow.

(Wilhelm 190)
“No one understood the computer, Mark thought, just as no one but the Lawrence brothers understood the paddle-wheel boat and the steam engine that drove it. The younger brothers could repair it, restore it to its original condition, as long as the materials were at hand, but they didn’t know how either one worked, the computer or the boat, and if a screw was missing, none of them would be able to fashion a substitute.”

(Wilhelm 237)
KATE WILHELM’S MODEL OF HUMANITY:

• Emphasizes individuality and creativity over genetics.