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New Subjects for the Posthuman Future

Like much recent critical theory, science fiction has made substantial efforts to (re)think the idea of “the subject” in the framework and under the shaping pressures of technoculture. I am interested here in the critical defamiliarization at work in some sf stories that self-consciously take up the idea of the “posthuman,” particularly through the literalization of familiar critical-theoretical metaphors such as “the construction of the subject” and “the end of Man.” My presentation will outline how several recent sf stories have imaginatively figured the posthuman – as clone, as cyborg, as artificial intelligence, as networked consciousness – as signifier of potentially radical transformations in how we might conceive of the subject, imagined as the “new” subject of postmodern technoculture. In speculative futures by David Marusek, Cory Doctorow, Justina Robson, and Geoff Ryman, “subject,” “subjectivity,” and “embodiment” become estranged signifiers, recalling the theoretical estrangements at work in the discourses of contemporary Cultural Studies.