***The Employees*, Olga Ravn**

Dear co-readers,

This short, fascinating book directs our thoughts in a subtle, discreet, and intangible manner towards many of the “big” questions in our lives.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts about the book and am here enclosing some questions that came to my mind as I was reading it. The page numbers refer to the English version published by Lolli.

1)      Critics have said the book is about what it means to be human – do you agree? Why / why not?

2)      How do you visualize the “Space Odyssey” of the ship and its crew?

3)      The book questions the nature of life. Is working the same as living? Are you defined through your functions? Or through your death?

4)      An overall question: what is the difference between the humans, the humanoids, and the objects?

5)      P.13: why are the objects merely “them” – do they have no names, no identity?

6)      P. 14: how are the objects ideal? What does it mean to be one◊ we, a language shared? (also p. 33)?

7)      We jump right in – and we don’t know what anything is about (except for the intro) – is that confusing, does it open your eyes, does the structure help clarify the content?

8)      Statement (st.) 002, p 16 explains some of the framework of the operation. What do you think is going on? What is their fate? (also cf st. 081, p.72)

9)      St.014 on p. 18 makes it clear that there is a distinction between man and machine. Why does this “entity” feel close to “them,”?

10)   What do you think the “add-on” is and why is it there? St.015 p.19 / st.054 p. 54 / st.064 p. 62.

11)   St. 011 p. 20 seems to ask if we are all part of a program without feelings and senses. How do images arise? And how do you get “cleansed” for the room (p.21)?

12)   St. 019 p. 23 seems to sum up the ultimate question about the relationship between humans and robots / cyborgs / androids (see definitions at the end of the questions). What is it to be living / alive? Also pp. 25, 26, feelings p. 29, pp. 36, 37, 42, 60, 62, 87, 74, 87.

13)   St. 024 p. 28 – what is the purpose of the hunters? Is this the way forward for humanity – finding new species?

14)   St. 031 p. 33 gives a comment about work and how it affects man / machine – how is it relevant for us today? Also st. 056 p. 55, st. 99 p. 88.

15)   St.037 p. 37: is life merely defined by death? Also p. 42.

16)   St. 038 p. 40 – is this the start of life-defeating alienation? Sadness also seems to prevail like missing shopping (st. 041 p. 44) – so how is being human defined? P. 45, emotions? p. 60.

17)   As we move through the book, it seems the questions about origin, content, and context become more pressing, e.g. st. 049 p. 49 – why is it important to maintain distinctions between the categories? St. 057, p. 50.

18)   What do you think the bio-draperies are? St. 054 p.57 / st. 114 p. 92

19)   Throughout the book, the questions of being productive come up a lot e.g. st. 067 p. 64. What is being produced, and what is the point? St. 113 p. 94 / st. 134 p. 105 / p. 129.

20)   In the interviews, there is a gradual, subtle change in the attitudes of the employees. When do you notice that something is amiss? St. 068 p. 66 / st. 071 p. 69 / st. 081 p. 72 / st. 076 p. 73 / st. 078 p. 76 / st. 83 p. 79 / st. 89 p. 83 / st. 91 p. 84 / st. 118 / p. 97.

21)   St.080 p. 77 raises the question of nourishment and what we need to feel alive. Is that spiritual element connected to the skin ailments that erupt? Pp. 81, 82, st. 106 p. 90 st. 179 p. 126, p. 129.

22)   Are the humanoids becoming a threat – and if yes, why? St. 89 p. 83 / st. 92 p. 85 / st. 97 p. 86 – And is it because they are becoming more human? St. 104 p. 89 / st. 102 p. 91 / st. 115 p. 93 / st. 118 p. 97.

23)   What is happening to the humans and why? Is it a general breakdown? St. 120 p. 99 / st. 127 p. 101.

24)   What happens in the canteen, and how does it move the action forward? St. 129 p. 104 / st. 118 p. 97 / ◊ st. 134 p. 105 ◊ st. 138 p. 106 – dismantling the humanoids ◊ conflict st. 140 p. 107: discontinuing the humans, st. 175 p. 123.

25)   The objects seem to be caught in the middle of the conflict. What is the significance? St. 148 p. 108 / st. 172 p. 121 / st. 178 p. 125.

26)   Why do the humans choose termination? St. 158 p. 110 – and no date – a very human element! St. 159 p. 114. Explain the despair and longing.

27)   What went “wrong” with the humanoids? St. 160 p. 112-14. Is the distinction between humans and humanoids being erased? St. 163 p. 116 / St. 169 p. 120.

28)   What happens at the end, and how does that inform the whole book?

**References (among many, many others) you might find interesting:**

*Aniara*, by Harry Martinson, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aniara>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aniara\_(film)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aniara_%28film%29)

*Robot Stories*, by Isaac Asimov, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot_series>

*He, She, and It* by Marge Piercy, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He,\_She\_and\_It](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He%2C_She_and_It)

A **humanoid** ([/ˈhjuːmənɔɪd/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA/English); from English *human* and [*-oid*](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/-oid#Suffix) "resembling") is a non-[human](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human) creature or being, or a [robot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot), with human form or characteristics. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanoid>

A **cyborg** ([/ˈsaɪbɔːrɡ/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA/English))—a [portmanteau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portmanteau) of [***cyb****ernetic*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybernetics) and [***org****anism*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organism)—is a being with both [organic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organic_matter) and [biomechatronic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biomechatronic) body parts. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyborg>

An **android** is a [robot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_%28robot%29#cite_note-Van_Riper_10-1) or other artificial being[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_%28robot%29#cite_note-Prucher2007-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_%28robot%29#cite_note-Stableford2006-3)[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_%28robot%29#cite_note-Wilson2006-4) designed to resemble a [human](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human), and often made from a flesh-like material. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android\_(robot)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_%28robot%29)

As always, please send me an email if you have any questions, comments, or concerns. aschmidt2@wisc.edu

I look forward to seeing you on October 12.

Nete Schmidt