

Abstract:

This overview maps critical posthumanism as a theoretical and self-reflective discourse that has been establishing itself over the last twenty years or so. While popular notions of posthumanism and the figure of the posthuman tend to focus on technology and its current dynamic of transforming the 'human' into some 'posthuman' or even 'transhuman' state or species, critical posthumanism as a more rigorous and more 'philosophical' undertaking is concerned with what one might term the 'ongoing deconstruction of humanism' and its premises, namely humanism's anthropocentrism, essentialism, exceptionalism and speciesism. Critical posthumanism and its various denominations and spin-offs are informed by a postanthropocentric ethics, politics and ecology and look towards complex notions of embodiment and of material entanglement between humans and a 'more-than-human' world. This overview also provides an analysis of the complex temporality at work in posthumanism – i.e. it evaluates the posthuman in terms of its past, present, as well as its projected or 'constructed' futures – by foregrounding the genealogical dimension of critical posthumanism. In doing so, it also provides an illustration of the various meanings of 'critical' and 'critique' that are at work within posthumanist discourse.

Keywords:

Critique; embodiment; more-than-human; postanthropocentrism; technology

In 2013, in what was one of the first comprehensive introductions to the emerging theoretical paradigm of critical posthumanism, I offered the following preliminary definition:

[Posthumanism] is the *cultural malaise or euphoria* that is caused by the feeling that arises once you start *taking the idea of 'postanthropocentrism' seriously*. To be able to think the '*end of the human*' without giving in to *apocalyptic mysticism* or to new forms of spirituality and *transcendence* – this would correspond to the *attitude* that the phrase 'critical posthumanism' wishes to describe. The word '*critical*' here has a double function: it combines, on the one hand, openness to the radical nature of *technocultural change*, and, on the other hand, it emphasizes a certain *continuity* with traditions of thought that have critically engaged with humanism, and which, in part, have evolved out of the humanist tradition itself. The task is, therefore, to re-evaluate established forms of *antihumanist* critique, to adapt them to the current, changed conditions, and, where possible, to radicalize them. (Herbrechter 2013: 3; emphases added; the volume was originally published in German, cf. Herbrechter 2009)

At the time, this volume and its definition provided a critical analysis of the first twenty years of posthumanism as an emergent theoretical discourse and academic field of enquiry. Today, one can certainly claim that posthumanism is no longer emergent but widely discussed and 'established'. The focus of this overview is thus on what posthumanism and its critique have become and what they have been evolving into.

The definition quoted above and the positioning of critical posthumanism as a reflective theoretical discourse on the notion of postanthropocentrism will thus serve as a starting point for an evaluation

of the last ten years or so. It is worth insisting on the italicised aspects of this definition. Critical posthumanism is prompted but not determined or exhausted by ‘technocultural change’ (mostly digitalization, biotechnology, artificial intelligence). Also, by referring to the *technocultural* aspect of the changes it addresses, it stresses the case against technological autonomy (or ‘technological determinism’) even while accepting and promoting the idea of a co-evolution of technics and culture. The ‘critical’ angle of *critical* posthumanism arises out of a positioning, an ‘attitude’ or indeed an affective state *vis-à-vis* familiar ambiguities residing in well-established binaries – namely of apocalypse and transcendence, end and beginning, utopian and dystopian visions of (technocultural) progress, as well as of continuity and discontinuity, and humanism and antihumanism. Most importantly, however, it characterizes an ethical and political stance that promises to take seriously the problem of anthropocentrism and its deconstruction.

Even though this definition is still largely valid, as I would claim, the ten years since its publication have also seen some important new dynamics and perspectives, as well as a greater variety of theoretical strands relating to and developing out of the discourse of posthumanism and the figure of the posthuman. This overview is thus designed to be at once a consolidation, an extension, an account of diversification, and, indeed, by implication, also a critique of critical posthumanism and its first twenty years or so as a theoretical paradigm. There is thus both a retrospective and a synchronic mapping, as well as a more speculative forward-looking element, to this overview. It is important to stress that critical posthumanism involves both an engagement with the present (and its future projections) and a rereading of traditional Western ways of making sense of the world and ‘our’ place in it – even though it is precisely the collective nature of the pronoun ‘us’ and the possessive ‘our’ that have been and continue to be challenged. The janus-faced nature of the challenge this positioning poses (looking backwards and forwards *at the same time*) is that posthumanism is itself very much implicated in the paradigm change and the emerging new worldviews it describes. In this interventionist sense, it is very much ‘political’. However, it is worth stressing once more that this is a general feature of critique, which always begins with an analysis of the perceived state of affairs, asks how this came about and what implications this might have for the current and future decision-making process. The fact that any critique has to go through these steps (and this is where critique becomes almost synonymous with how ‘European’ philosophy has conceptualised thought as such) does not mean that critique should not itself be submitted to critique – in fact, one of the major developments around critical posthumanism is that it is having to engage precisely with such a ‘critique of critique’, especially following Bruno Latour’s provocative and controversial claim that critique “has run out of steam” (Latour 2004; taken up by Felski 2015 and many others). This has certainly reminded everyone that any critique is situated, through a specific analysis of its time (and place), and cannot therefore form a last or definitive judgment. Another way of putting this is that critical analysis is co-implicated and to some extent also co-constitutional of the *discourse* it sets out to analyse.

This is why it is vital for thinking and critique to start with differentiations or conceptual operations to make sense of what it ‘finds’ itself ‘called upon’ to analyse. It is a division that is undoubtedly questionable, as is the mystical authority (or self-legitimation) that hides behind the ‘finding’ and being ‘called upon’ ploy. No doubt this calls for vigilance and, thus, even more critique. Even the most justified critiques of critique, however, cannot help but repeat at least some of critique’s foundational gestures. The question is how problematic this really is. This is a question that I will return to at the end, in another instalment of ‘self-critical’ outlook. However, before one can get to any ‘postcritical’ stance regarding critical posthumanism it is necessary to understand what exactly is being critiqued by it. One might then, in turn, see its limitations – limitations which are also always openings, extensions, radicalisations and so on, that nevertheless only become visible once a critical

analysis has run its course. This overview therefore proceeds along this chronological dynamic that critique presupposes as the ‘time of critique’, while bearing in mind that consensus can neither be its starting point, nor can or should it be its ultimate outcome. In that sense, it functions as the building of a ‘platform’ or a ‘jetty’ (cf. Derrida 1990) from which to jump into the different areas that critical posthumanism covers, the issues it raises, and the transformations it produces. There is thus considerable scope for diversity and difference, sometimes even contradiction and divergence to be found in the field of ‘posthuman studies’ that the discussion about posthumanism and the posthuman have opened up. However, to achieve some (preliminary) sense of ‘orientation’, one might identify as a most likely common denominator for the various accounts, narratives, and attempts to make sense of ‘our posthuman times’ (Braidotti 2019: 1) that the phrase ‘critical posthumanism’ covers and also helps to ‘map’, a shared critique of humanism’s anthropocentrism. It is also this critique of humanism – still by far the most dominant value system in the traditional humanities and social sciences as well as more generally – which requires the large number of ‘scare quotes’ that have been appearing and will continue to do so in this overview. These diacritical signs are indeed intended to visually indicate that all of the terms they highlight have a long and problematic (critical) history that haunts them every time they are used. Language and thinking are minefields, but there is of course no viable alternative for them. They are the very ‘tools’ needed in an ongoing critique of them, which means that they are so much more than just tools. They are the fundamental ‘technologies’ that are supposed to make us ‘human’ – only that they are not uniquely human (other forms of agency also use language and thinking, so much ‘we’ now know). ‘We’ also cannot assume any consensus on what ‘human’ means (because language and thinking themselves are not about consensus, otherwise they would hardly be so central). With these cautionary comments we are already in the middle of critical posthumanism’s *raison d’être*, one might say.

The standard narrative of posthumanism and its rise goes something like this: it is a term that has been in use within academia from the early 1990s and has infiltrated a wide range of disciplines – from cultural studies, to geography, science studies, gender studies, theology and media studies (Badmington 2006: 240), philosophy, literary studies, theoretical sociology and communication studies (Bolter 2016: 1) and animal studies (Ginn 2018: 413). As a paradigm of thought and a form of ‘knowledge’ (Braidotti 2019), it can now be said to be touching virtually all traditional disciplines, sciences and ‘studies’ (from cultural studies, women studies, to posthuman studies or extinction studies), all the while transforming them into new interdisciplinary formations grouped under the label ‘posthumanities’ (Wolfe n.d.; Braidotti 2019). As Ursula Heise explains:

Since the mid-1990s... new paradigms have manifested themselves through interdisciplinary research labelled ‘x-studies’ or ‘y humanities’: disability studies, critical animal studies, and food studies, for instance, or medical humanities, digital humanities, and environmental humanities. Instead of shared philosophical foundations or clearly defined political aspirations, these new fields focus on clusters of problems and questions... (Heise 2016: 21)

Posthumanism with its renewed insistence on the question of what it means to be human certainly forms a central aspect of these ‘clusters of problems and questions’ in these new fields.

What *critical posthumanism does* in each case is that it calls into question humanist or anthropocentric understandings of what humans are (Badmington 2006: 240), or what could be called, after Lyotard (1984), the humanist metanarrative – the idea that humans share a universal ‘nature’ or a species identity (an essential ‘humanity’), that they are ‘exceptional’ and radically different from (other) animals, on the one side, and from machines, on the other side, and that they are ultimately ‘free’ subjects who can determine their own history from a position above (the rest of) nature. Posthumanism instead questions the idea that something like ‘nature’ can be clearly

distinguished from 'culture' or 'society', that a 'self' and 'identity' might be separated from the effects of 'otherness' and 'difference', that a 'body' might be extracted from its 'environment', or that there might be a strict dividing line between 'subject' and 'object' at all. While deconstructing traditional knowledge formations based on these binary or radical, mutually exclusive, and inherently gendered and racialised oppositions and their built-in hierarchies, critical posthumanism seeks to promote new ways of knowing that focus on aspects of entanglement, co-implication, hybridity and interdependence – or, more appropriately and in analogy to Karen Barad's concept of "intra-action" (Barad 2007), intra-dependence – instead of distinction and division.

In this strategic move, posthumanism builds on various precursors, most importantly on the work of 'poststructuralist' thinkers like Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, Barthes, Irigaray, Althusser, Derrida, Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari, by radicalising and extending their 'antihumanist' stance. The poststructuralists, in turn, were reacting against structuralism and its attempt to produce 'objective' and 'scientific' knowledge of humans and their cultures. They did so by promoting a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Ricoeur 1970) based on the idea that the task of critical reading and interpretation is to debunk 'myths' (Barthes 1993) or 'naturalized' and thus unquestionable beliefs and their ideological motivations. This suspicion follows a genealogy of subversive thinking that goes back to Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud and the respective humiliations of human 'narcissism' (or 'narcissistic wounds') their names stand for, as well as the humanist self-understanding of 'man' or *anthropos* more generally. In the case of Darwinian evolution, 'man' is confronted with his biological state as one primate amongst many; Marxism invalidates the notion that 'men' make their own histories and do so as free individuals; Nietzsche stands for a relativization of truth and 'man's' will to power; and Freudian psychoanalysis denies that the conscious ego is in control of its 'own' thoughts, dreams and actions. In 'posthuman times' many other narcissistic wounds have been added to these (e.g. the challenges that deep time, big data, microbiology and artificial intelligence pose to the idea of autonomous human agency). In many ways, posthumanism draws logical and ecological conclusions from this critical genealogy, in that it turns its attention to the 'nonhuman', privileges a holistic and inclusive approach to life (by seeing ontology as 'flat' or non-hierarchical) and in doing so, as the definition above explains, is bent on taking the notion of postanthropocentrism and its implications seriously.

Donna Haraway and her work on cyborgs, companion species and multispecies kinship (Haraway 1991, 2008 and 2016); N. Katherine Hayles and her rereading of the history of cybernetics through the lens of gender and embodiment, distributed cognition and symbiosis in and with new and digital media and 'code' (Hayles 1999, 2005 and 2012); or Rosi Braidotti and feminist neomaterialism that seek a new politics based on a 'posthuman' affirmation of life in all its forms (Braidotti 2002, 2006 and 2013), to name but the most obvious and influential ones, are posthumanism's (s)heroes. The strong feminist involvement in posthumanist thinking is no coincidence. It arises out of the importance of humanism's disappointing track record in terms of gender (and racial) equality despite its claim of a universal reach (i.e. an essential 'humanity' based on globally shared values). The ideal subject of humanism, 'man' or *anthropos*, in fact was always a device based on presupposed and often unexamined patriarchal, Eurocentric, white, liberal political norms. Humanism continues to underpin contemporary institutions like 'human rights' organisations, and this makes them susceptible to critique as (neo)colonial and (post)imperialist instruments effectuating the continuation of a Western or Eurocentric supremacy (Fassin 2012).

Posthumanism itself, however, does not go uncontested. As a political project it defines itself against two kinds of 'enemies': what we might refer to as 'neohumanisms' and 'transhumanisms'. Let us start from the (not at all unproblematic assumption) that there is a shared geohistorical position from which all of these -isms arise, namely an agreement about 'where we are now', or what situation this imaginary planetary 'we' finds itself in today (there will be less of an agreement about

the follow-up question, namely, of 'how we got there'). In Braidotti's words, one could say, the 'posthuman condition' is "positioned between the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Sixth Extinction" (Braidotti 2019: 2). In other words, (post)humanity finds itself at an important juncture within the history of late- or indeed post-modernity asking itself: where do we go from here? This sets out a (provisional) endpoint and two alternative future trajectories. The endpoint or latest stage within Western 'modernity', after the history of industrialisation, colonial exploitation and geological extraction (of oil – a carbon based economy and culture), has led to what an increasing number of geologists and climate scientists are referring to as the 'Anthropocene' (or the period that marks a time in which humans and their actions have become the most important factors of atmospheric or climate change, geological stratification or sedimentation) with all the potential implications of this for humans, nonhumans and planetary life in general (Hamilton, Bonneuil and Gemenne 2015). The human-induced 'sixth extinction' (Kolbert 2014), is the latest in a series of planetary catastrophes and upheavals that have led to fundamental changes in the composition of (biological) life on planet Earth. Each time, this has triggered a mass extinction of life forms and thus a complete reshuffling of evolutionary cards. In the fifth extinction event (believed to be caused by the impact of a giant meteorite and the dramatic changes to the global climate this brought about) the dinosaurs went extinct, which probably paved the way for the rise of mammals and primates. The sixth extinction it seems is being announced by the current dramatic loss of biodiversity, which is attributed to human-induced climate change. It threatens to be an extinction event that also poses a serious threat to human survival.

The beginning and promise of a 'fourth phase' of modernity, facing the Anthropocene as a planetary challenge, reinvigorates calls for a supposedly unified and universalised human or a return of (or to) *anthropos*. It gives rise to the idea that technological progress is our best hope of survival (whatever that form of survival might actually look like and whoever might ultimately benefit from it). Despite the fundamental differences and injustices that these enormous challenges expose – only a minority of humans have been directly responsible for anthropogenic climate change (mainly wealthy, Western nations largely governed by socially privileged white males, or 'man', and their 'extraction' practices) and the effects of environmental destruction and degradation are disproportionately felt by already-marginalised groups) – the crossroads mentioned above, seems to imply that in the face of such global threats 'we' might need a new humanism (*not a posthumanism*): a new humanism that at last will deliver on the promise of human equality. The main objection to this idea of 'making humans great again' lies in the uncertainty of how such a new humanism could possibly avoid once more excluding nonhuman others. Thus far, humanism has always in effect meant: 'humans first' (a certain analogy with recent US politics and a general antidemocratic populism may not be unintended in these formulations).

While the main bone of contention between posthumanisms and neohumanisms remains the very notion of the 'human' and its meaning, the main argument between posthumanism and transhumanism is about the role and nature of 'technology'. As already mentioned, from the perspective of *critical* posthumanism, posthumanism should not be *equated* with the rise of technoculture (Badmington 2006: 241). Critical posthumanists (even though not everybody writing about posthumanism and the posthuman would necessarily or unproblematically identify with these labels) do not belittle the impact technology, and especially digitalization, has had and is having on every aspect of human and nonhuman (co)existence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, they critique a simplistic (and predominantly utilitarian) notion of technology, which tends to see it as an almost 'fated' instrument of human development and 'progress'. This is what clearly distinguishes them from *transhumanists*, who see technological progress as the main or even only driving force of history. Within that history, the present moment is then seen as an

evolutionary turning point at which humans find themselves in the process of evolving with, or into, their successor species. What causes some confusion is the fact that transhumanists often refer to this utopian successor species as 'posthuman', while for posthumanists the notion of the posthuman remains a very much contested 'figure' that calls for critical and genealogical analysis. Posthumans – those entities, subjects or forms of agency, who have undergone radical technological 'enhancement' or some form of 'transubstantiation' (e.g. by downloading their mind into a computer) – have thus either become a form of superintelligence or, indeed, have been superseded by some further evolved form of AI. In this, transhumanist, sense, posthumans are in fact the apotheosis of a certain understanding of humanism that remains informed by Christian eschatological motifs. One might thus call transhumanism a spiritual or pseudo-religious, technognostic hyperhumanism (Davis 2015). Transhumanist visions or fantasies of disembodiment are the logical consequence of a dualist mode of (Christian, neoplatonic, Cartesian) thinking that distinguishes between body and mind, mortal flesh and immortal soul and believes in their separability. They see posthumanization, or the transformation and eventual transcendence of the human into a new posthuman species, as a technologically desirable (or indeed inevitable) outcome of history, often referred to by mystical terms like the 'singularity' (cf. More & Vita More 2013). The transhumanist techno-euphoria forms the endpoint of the trajectory of human perfectibility that goes hand in hand with a rejection of current 'meatworld' (enfleshed, 'wetware', biological or 'carbon-based') materialism. Instead, it can be said to whole-heartedly embrace 'techno-utopianism' and 'techno-idealism'. In this view, following a tradition that runs from early-Gnosticism to late cyberpunk science fiction, it seems that it is simply human 'destiny' to transcend 'nature', 'biology' and 'death' and seek immortality and perfection in some new technological (usually wrongly seen as 'immaterial') medium.

Critical posthumanism is much more ambivalent about technology, its origins, its ends and our relationship to it, and it directly critiques the belief in human exceptionalism and perfectibility that underlies much transhumanist thought (Zylinska 2018). Even though science fiction is also an important reference point for many *posthumanists*, especially more recent, ecologically-informed and -minded, posthumanisms are in fact not so much focused on a (technological) future. There has always been a way of reading science fiction not as a discourse focused on the future but as a critique of the present (and its extrapolations in the form of thought experiments and speculation. In fact, posthumanism interrogates (often playfully, creatively and subversively) the ambient and deliberate erasure of the boundary between science fiction and science fact, or 'science faction' (cf. Herbrechter 2013) on which many transhumanist scenarios are actually based. Technology is not seen by critical posthumanism as an autonomous force of history – it is always the product of a specific time, context and selection process – and neither does it perceive humans as sovereign subjects *vis-à-vis* technological development or objects. Instead, the human relationship to technology is co-constitutional or 'originary' (Stiegler 2008-2011; Bradley 2011) and 'prosthetic' (Wills 1995), or 'entangled' (Hansen 2000; Barad 2007). However, it is an originary entanglement that does not imply another form of exceptionalism: nonhuman animals use technologies, too. It is also undecidable whether technology is 'natural' nor 'cultural' under these circumstances. One might even say, there are posthumanisms that might function 'without' technology (Callus & Herbrechter 2007), not in the sense that they are technophobic or that they repress the impact of technology, but rather in the sense that they use a non-teleological notion of technics or the 'technical'. There is nothing deterministic or inevitable about technology despite its undeniable transformative social and environmental impact. In this sense, posthumanism is not an exclusively future-oriented discourse but should be understood more generally as a synchronic and diachronic questioning of the humanist concept of the 'human' and the 'ongoing deconstruction of humanism' (Badmington 2000).

The best way to understand posthumanism like most –isms (feminism, Marxism, liberalism, materialism and so on) is therefore that it describes, explains, regulates and produces knowledge about that to which it adds a qualifying suffix. Feminism is about the contested ground of what it means to be ‘woman’; Marxism is the debate around how best to interpret the writings of Marx; liberalism addresses the political and philosophical argument about what constitutes freedom; materialism interrogates matter and its ontological significance (Coole and Frost 2010), and so on. Adding the prefix ‘post-’ to these discourses, first of all, merely signals that they are no longer quite capable of defining their object, and that the consensus they seem to presuppose or to secure is no longer viable. Posthumanism, in this sense, speculates about what it means to be no longer (quite) human (at least in a Western humanist, anthropocentric sense). All these –isms, in short, represent (social) discourses (cf. Parker 1992; Herbrechter, 2013: 36ff): the entirety of the statements and practices that relate to an ‘object’, which in the case of posthumanism is the ‘posthuman’, as well as its derivations ‘posthumanity’ and ‘posthumanization’. This object is constituted ‘discursively’, which means through describing it as a social reality. The most basic level of this discursive construction or formation says: there is such a thing as the ‘posthuman’, so what is to be done about it? What does it mean? In this sense, what starts off as a positioning – ‘after the human’ or ‘no longer humanist’ – requires a continued rereading or reinterpretation of an existing perceived state of affairs, world view or ‘reality’, followed by an alternative, more accurate, convincing, more ‘realistic’ understanding that harnesses change and is more ‘comprehensive’ and more ‘persuasive’ in its representation of ‘where we are’, or provides a better map for future orientation. The important thing to remember is then that discourses both describe and intervene in and to an extent also produce what they posit as their ‘reality’ and which they present as such to their ‘subjects’. Discourses, as Althusser might have put it, want to recruit people and they address or interpellate them accordingly (Althusser 1971). In short, they are eminently political and by definition, therefore, also partial and questionable, which means that they are contested both from within and from without, namely by other discourses. They are subject to power struggles over who has the best or most powerful explanations, who makes the most convincing, resonant and opportune truth claims (or in academic and scientific contexts, ‘funding claims’).

The conceptual object around which posthumanism is constructed – the ‘posthuman’ – is basically a metonymy. It functions like a ‘figure’, as in a rhetorical figure, or a powerful image (Haraway 1991: 8-11). It ‘finds’ this figure and turns it into the central aspect of the reality it helps constitute. The posthuman thus becomes at once the most fundamental anchoring device as well as the most powerful conceptual resource. It helps, for example, to track figurations or indeed *pre*figurations of the posthuman ‘across the ages’ (from angels to zombies, and chimera to cyborgs) and leads to the ‘discovery’ of *prot*oposthumanisms in every period within the ‘history of ideas’, from classical antiquity to postmodernism, or even in ‘prehistoric’ or ‘deep time’. It exposes the iterative limits of the Western cultural imaginary, and brings it into contact with figurations of the human that at once resist and confirm the purported obviousness of what it means to be human. If posthumanism had a clear idea about what the posthuman really was and meant then the argument would probably swoon come to an end, people would lose interest and move on. If this initially sounds like a strong reason for rejecting posthumanism, it is worth remembering that *all* discourses function like that, including the very humanism posthumanism is grafted upon, and which has never really been able to explain and establish any general agreement about what its most coveted and mysterious figure or concept, i.e. the ‘human, ‘really’ meant or was. This drifting state of the human is in fact one of the main points of criticism and motivations for a posthumanist critique in the first place. ‘We’ have no idea who we ‘really’ are and the one constant in humanist attempts to carve out an ‘exceptional’ position for the human in this world is, on the one hand, to emphasize the differences between humans and their others (i.e. humans can do this, machines and animals cannot... even though all of

these differences that traditionally served as markers of ‘radical’ difference have had to be substantially relativized), and, on the other hand, to reify difference by saying that the human is that which always differs from itself, that which cannot be pinned down. Humans are those creatures who are constantly reinventing themselves, because they are notoriously ‘underdetermined’ – which is one of the founding gestures of renaissance humanism (cf. Pico della Mirandola 2016). Seen from this vantage, one might derive the idea that ‘we have never been human’ (Wolfe 2007: xi).

Questioning whether the posthuman actually *exists*, whether it is a figure that remains fundamentally, ontologically, ‘futural’, as something that humans are becoming, might or will become, or whether it is something that humans have always been – which then prompts a genealogical search that will inevitably find similar figures in human and prehuman history – is an essential part and source of power for the legitimation of posthumanism as a discourse, especially in its self-reflexive mode (i.e. *critical* posthumanism). The more discussion about the posthuman and posthumanism emerges the more established and the more ‘real’ they become. Entire academic and scientific careers depend on this process, as does funding and influence on political decision-making (and hence the possibility of actually bringing about its anticipated reality). This is not a cynical or nihilistic claim that implies that everything is a ‘construct’ and that any way of making sense of the world is as good as any other – it merely means that reality, including scientific claims about it, are always contested and cannot or should not form the end point of any discussion. Crucially, this is not to be misconstrued as an attack on science – nobody will deny the universal truth of gravity to take the example that is usually referred to in this context (cf. the so-called ‘science wars’; Latour 2005) – it is an investigation into the truth-finding processes of science and the privileged role they play within social discourses that help secure the power of institutions and their politics.

It is in this discursive sense, then, that the posthuman and posthumanism have managed to capture the attention of the academy and increasingly the wider ‘public’ (e.g. through popular science magazines, science fiction films, ‘docufiction’, social media and so on). There is now an ‘ambient’ posthumanism promoted by powerful corporations like Google, pioneer figures like Elon Musk, institutions like the Singularity University that are increasingly called upon to advise government administrations, and which are promoting a clearly *transhumanist* version of posthumanism based on the idea that increased technological progress can only be a good thing and that it will help ‘us’ take the ‘natural’ next step to becoming (more) ‘posthuman’. There is, however, also a posthumanism that questions this belief and provides alternative, more ‘sustainable’, more ethico-ecological interpretations of the posthuman – which is one of the ways of reading the ‘critical’ in critical posthumanism (cf. e.g. Morton 2017). In many ways, critical posthumanism brackets the question of whether the posthuman is a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ thing, or whether it is likely to ever exist. It is self-reflexive and thus wants to keep the figure of the posthuman open, but it also wants to contextualize, historicize and politicize it. In this sense, it is a specific discursive strain within the discursive field or formation around the posthuman, aimed at constructing a critical observer position, even though it is fully aware that this cannot be done from an independent or disinterested remove. In this sense, there is no ‘metahumanism’ just like there has never been a ‘metalanguage’, or some vantage point ‘outside’ from which to evaluate the question ‘disinterestedly’.

Critical posthumanism does not deny the transformative potential of the posthuman, but it also investigates the undeniability that surrounds it. It does so, first of all, by looking at some of the discursive gestures or practices and methodologies that are being employed within posthumanist discourses, and it also speculates about the need for new, more ‘creative’ and more inclusive – more-than-human – forms of knowledge production in this regard. It is precisely in this context that the positioning (or ‘posting’) of the prefix ‘post-’ has to be seen in all its problematic ambivalence. What one should have learnt from the discussion around postmodernism and the postmodern (Lyotard

1992) is that this prefix and what it aims to do to or to perform on what it 'posts' comes with its very own aporetic dynamic. The claim that something is reaching or has reached its end (or should finally do so) is not a claim like any other, and especially not where such a well-established discursive formation as humanism is at stake. This is even more complex, since humanism upholds the notion of an 'essence' or 'truth' of our species, which is supposed to lie in 'our' shared humanity based on human 'nature' (which, however, always remains to be defined). There is no question, however, that the notion of humanity has a concrete history and that, in fact, it is the effect of a combination of humanism as an ideological discourse and modernity as a socio-historical formation. Humanism and humanist tradition (which dates back at least to Neoplatonic Christianity and the Renaissance with its rediscovery of Greek and Roman Antiquity as sources of knowledge) has had a quasi-monopoly as far as the question 'what is (hu)man?' is concerned. To position oneself 'after' such a powerful tradition – post + humanism – means to embrace a conscious ambiguity that translates into two possible forms of accentuation: the undeniable experience that a certain humanism has reached its end (i.e. *posthumanism*); and the certainty that this humanism, because of its own plurality, shapeshifting force and slipperiness cannot just be classified without remainders and repressions but instead needs to be 'worked through' in a critical and deconstructive sense (hence the other form of accentuation: *posthumanism*). In both cases a simple supersession of humanism and its legacy is formally impossible since posthumanism necessarily 'repeats' humanism in its posting gesture. In this sense the critical detachment that the prefix 'post-' promises is complicated by the fact that its root and thus its category is and remains *humanism and *human. Posthumanism cannot be a simple negation of humanism or a simple supersession and annihilation of it – an 'overcoming'. It can only be by a reworking, critique, deconstruction, rewriting of its roots onto which it is 'grafted'. This is only a problem, however, for those who think the history of ideas should work in radical 'breaks' and supersession. While this certainly does not preempt any possibility of an eventual, 'real', break, it foregrounds the idea that even 'discontinuity' (or 'disruption') still depends on (or 'repeats') to some extent the existence and persistence of that which is being discontinued. Making sense of time (and change or transformation) necessarily depends on comparing and contrasting, on extrapolation, including 'reverse teleologies' (i.e. the idea that with hindsight, the 'present' was bound to be the outcome of the 'past'). It relies on narrative techniques like flash forward and flash back and the like. In short, reading and critique are always aimed at coherence even where there may not by any and even while one may be actively looking for discontinuity and breaks.

Critical posthumanism – that narrative that tries to provide a critical commentary on the transformations the discourse of posthumanism and the figure of the posthuman announce – is no exception to this. At one further (critical) remove, critical posthumanism is inevitably in the business of making sense, of negotiating claims, of analyzing presuppositions and implications, of projecting scenarios into the future by extrapolating from the past. It is ultimately invested in a model of sedimentation and residue, in short, a 'geological' and 'genealogical' project. What critical posthumanism thus combines in its thinking (or that which constitutes its own critical continuity) is the technologically induced process of posthumanization it tracks (i.e. the process of humans becoming 'other'), which is a process that needs to be taken seriously, and which needs to be radically thought through with all its implications, its potential and its dangers. At the same time, however, critical posthumanism also engages creatively and speculatively in conceiving entirely other forms of posthumanization (among them, importantly, those that downplay the role of technology, or a posthumanism 'without' technology), or 'posthumanisms' that are much 'older' but maybe just as radical, and which need to be (re)articulated by focusing on more general and more underdetermined notions like that of the 'nonhuman' or the 'inhuman', as the initial crisis within humanism itself and the precedence of nonhuman others (Lyotard 1991). Critical posthumanism is thus 'parasitical' in its relation to the various humanisms it deconstructively inhabits.

As Neil Badmington (2000) explains, the ambiguity built into the notion of posthumanism is already at work in the radical plurality of meanings of humanism itself. While the 'antihumanism' dominating the second half of the 20th century portrayed humanism as a conservative and old-fashioned ideology of Western 'common sense', there is also a humanism associated with secular and scientific traditions that is seen, not without some justification, as progressive. It is therefore no surprise that from the point of view of modern science, which has been critical of humanism since from the beginning, the idea of a posthumanism might look somewhat belated. On the other hand, in pro-humanist secularist circles there will be strong moral opposition to the very idea of a posthumanism, understood as an (unwanted) break with a humanist cultural tradition that is itself seen as progressive and radical and for which any kind of posthumanism would only constitute an attack or backlash against hard-won values like freedom from premodern irrationalism, or a regression in terms of Enlightenment ideals of progress and reason. Critical posthumanism is aware of this complex dynamic. On the one hand, it needs to show that humanism despite all its accompanying undeniable cultural progress, as an ideology, has come to be criticized for its merely apparent and superficial claims towards universality while tacitly assuming and promoting the specificity of its (Western, liberal, bourgeois, capitalist) normativity. One might say therefore that humanism was never as progressive as it made itself out to be; and, as has become clearer at least since WWII and the ongoing process of decolonization and the gradual weakening of Western imperialism, it is now increasingly met with opposition and resistance, in a globalized, multipolar world (Davies 2008). On the other hand, if one really is to break with a five-hundred-year-old tradition like humanism, which still enjoys considerable power and support, one has to make sure to protect and if possible appropriate and continue to make accessible the transformative potential that already exists *within* this tradition and avoid giving in to naïvely utopian claims and promises of 'revolutionary' change. Which means that a critical posthumanism requires an intricate political and ethical positioning, namely one which signals to the techno-prophets that their attitude despite all apparent utopian radicalism has a long history that needs to be remembered and worked through; and a position which reminds the skeptics that humanism never was as humanist as it claimed to be and that the current technological challenge merely represents the logical outcome of a process of posthumanization with which humanism has always been complicit and which it itself helped to create. The task of this kind of tightrope-walk, as Badmington explains, is to look both back and forward at the same time, and to 'assist' humanism in its own self-deconstruction, so that 'we' will not be forced to repeat its mistakes.

As a first summary, then, one might say that critical posthumanism is a theoretical approach within the humanities and social sciences, which, arguably, are transforming into what one might call the 'posthumanities'. It maps and actively engages with the 'ongoing deconstruction of humanism'. It differentiates between the figure of the posthuman and its present, past and projected avatars, like cyborgs (Gray 1995), but also monsters, zombies, ghosts or angels (Graham 2002) and their 'posthuman bodies' (Halberstam & Livingston 1995). It is also a social discourse (a material network of texts, practices, values, identities) which negotiates the pressing question of what it means to be human under the current conditions of globalization, technoscience, late capitalism and climate change. The prefix 'post-' (in analogy with the discussion of the postmodern and postmodernism) has a double meaning: on the one hand, it signifies a desire or indeed a need to somehow *go beyond* humanism (or the human), which calls for some scepticism, while on the other hand, since the *post-* also necessarily repeats what it prefixes, it displays an awareness that neither humanism nor the human can in fact be overcome in any straightforward dialectical or historical fashion (for example, in the sense: after the human, the posthuman). The qualifying term 'critical' in the phrase 'critical posthumanism' gestures towards a more complicated and non-dialectical relationship between the human and the posthuman, as well as their respective connection with the nonhuman (Grusin 2016)

and the inhuman (Brewster, Joughin, Owen & Walker 2000). Posthumanism in this critical sense functions more like an anamnesis and a rewriting of the human and humanism, a process of 'rewriting humanity', in analogy with Lyotard's notion of the postmodern project of 'rewriting modernity' (Lyotard 1991). In this process, critical posthumanism asks a number of questions that address the complications which arise out of this critical rewriting: how did we come to think of ourselves as human? Or, what exactly does it mean to be human (especially at a time when some humans are apparently quite enthusiastically embracing and promoting the idea that we are becoming, or might already to some extent, have become posthuman (e.g. most transhumanists)? What are the motivations for this *posthumanizing* desire, when did it start and where does it come from? What are its implications for the future relationships and interdependence with nonhuman others (e.g. the environment, nonhuman animals, machines or technology, but also any form of spiritualism)?

The adjective 'critical' in 'critical posthumanism' can thus be said to signify a number of things. It refers to the difference between a more or less *uncritical* or popular posthumanism (e.g. in many science fiction movies or popular science magazines) and a philosophical, reflective, or 'theoretical' approach (which is nevertheless inseparable from some of the transformative creative and technological practices the posthuman inspires), and which investigates the current forms of 'our' postanthropocentric desires – the yearning for the inhuman, the other, or for self-transformation. This desire articulates itself, on the one hand, in the form of an anticipated transcendence of the human condition, often imagined in various scenarios of disembodiment and metamorphosis (Clarke 2008); on the other hand, it finds its expression in a more 'ecological' rather than simply 'technological' (maybe an 'ecotechnical') form where this desire can imply a (rather suspicious) attempt by humans to 'argue themselves out of the picture' precisely at a time when climate change caused by the impact of human civilization calls for urgent, responsible and more altruistic, *human* action.

The other meaning of 'critical' in 'critical posthumanism' concerns a re-evaluation or even a reinvention of some humanist values and methodologies (including the very question of what critique is and does), and which, in the face of a fundamental transformation provoked by digitalization and the advent of ubiquitous computing and digital media platforms, appear to have become obsolete, or out of touch with new practices, identities, communities, cognitive patterns and knowledges and which are therefore in urgent need of revision (esp. critical methodologies which are related to traditional forms of literacy, reading, thinking and analysis). The question that is raised here is how to remain critical in the sense of developing reading and analytical techniques, forms of conceptualizations and subjectivities that are both self-reflexive and aware of their own genealogies (i.e. able to stay critically connected with humanist traditions, or 'stay with the trouble', as Donna Haraway (2016) calls it, and which seem to threaten literal, literary and textual approaches in particular), in a time that is increasingly characterized as both 'post-truth' and 'post-critique'. For core disciplines in the traditional humanities like literature and philosophy this means that not only their humanistic knowledge base but also their main addressee, the humanist subject who is in need of '*Bildung*', is fast disappearing and/or is being more and more 'decentred'.

Studies of literature's 21st-century extensions and remediations, for example, are having to engage with the broader resonances of the idea that the literary is currently being overtaken by processes of digitalization, globalization and technology-and-media driven change. In this, arguably, 'post-literary' and maybe even (textually) 'post-literate' climate, a critical posthumanist approach needs to be both aware and wary of the contemporary desire to leave the humanist apparatus of literacy and its central institutions like literature behind, with all its social, economic and cultural-political implications, its regimes of power and its aesthetics. Critique, however, is not the same as resistance,

and an increasing part of the academy and the (theoretical) humanities in particular have been embracing this new context to form new, interdisciplinary alliances with the sciences and their own critical commentaries (e.g. the so-called 'critical science studies', informed by Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory, speculative realism, or new (feminist) materialisms (Rossini 2006; Alaimo & Hekman 2008; Kirby 2017) – all allies of critical posthumanism with shared affinities despite their many differences). The emerging 'posthumanities' are thus having to engage with the positive but also the problematic aspects of the transformative potential that a new dialogue or alliance between the humanities, the social sciences and the sciences contains. The focus on the posthuman as a discursive object, on posthumanism as a social discourse and on posthumanization as an ongoing historical and ontological process of transformation, allows the humanities, social sciences and the sciences – to create new encounters and test new hypotheses that may lead to greater political and ethical awareness of the place of the human, the nonhuman and their entanglement, especially in connection with pressing issues like climate change, the depletion of natural resources, the destruction of biodiversity, migration, terrorism and global insecurity, or current and future biopolitics.

What is thus at stake in critical posthumanism is a rethinking of the relationship between human agency, the role of technology and environmental and cultural factors from a post- or non-anthropocentric perspective. Postanthropocentric posthumanities are still about humans and their cultures but only in so far as these are placed within a larger, ecological, picture, as can be seen for example in the proliferation and institutionalization of a variety of alternative 'humanities', like the medical humanities, the environmental humanities, the digital humanities. The digital humanities, for example, are informed by critical posthumanism in the sense that they address the role of new and converging media with their social and cultural implications, as well as their proliferation of digital and virtual realities and their biopolitical aspects (e.g. by investigating new forms of surveillance and commodification, the construction of new subjectivities and the merging of bio- and media technologies in the form of 'biomedia'; cf. Thacker 2004). It is becoming increasingly clear that the scale and the complexity of global challenges like anthropogenic climate change, human overpopulation, the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, intensified automation and virtualization, and so on, require new forms of social, political, ethical, and ecological ways of thinking that can help ensure the survival not only of the human species but, also, the survival of multiple ways of being human, as well as the survival of other species, environments and ecosystems, and the survival of life in general.

Critical posthumanism thus draws together a number of aspects that constitute 'our' early twenty-first-century reality and cosmology – our 'posthuman condition' – and, at the same time, links these back genealogically to their beginnings and prefigurations within humanism itself (cf. Herbrechter & Callus, 2005 and 2012). The function that a genealogical understanding of posthumanism and approach to the posthuman serves is to refer back to the question of the post- and to what extent this signals continuity, or discontinuity – a break, overcoming, succession or indeed anamnesis, rewriting and deconstruction – as outlined above. Apart from asking *what* is the posthuman?, it also focuses on *when* is the posthuman?, what cultures does it belong to? This is why an important aspect of the criticality of critical posthumanism lies in its genealogical dimension. Genealogies are about ancestors, lineages, progeny and the knowledge they produce. They are historical in the sense that they trace past developments to investigate how 'things' have become the way they 'are' (or, at least, were thought to be at a certain time). Following Nietzsche and Foucault, genealogical analyses focus on the social and historical production of systems of knowledge, power and discourse. Their underlying methodology is to expose what is regarded as obvious, natural or unchangeable and to reveal it as constructed in the sense that it is the result of historical and political (or, one could say,

cultural evolutionary, maybe even 'epigenetic') selection. Genealogies, however, are not about uncovering absolute truths or origins but are instead interested in the processes of knowledge production as such. While for Nietzsche, truth famously was a 'mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms' (Nietzsche 1976: 46-47), Foucault is primarily interested in the (human) subjectivities that specific discourses and social practices afford (Foucault 2013: 208). According to Foucault, individuals are subjected to power by mechanisms of control and dependence that are closely aligned with identity and self-knowledge, which means that they are subject to processes that involve identification and embodiment (i.e. 'technologies of the self'; Foucault 1988) or indeed resistance to them, and which are not necessarily seen as coercive but, under modern, liberal conditions, as 'choice'.

The discursive knowledge that is inevitably perspectival, historically and culturally situated – and thus specific – recruits and positions subjects for whom this knowledge is supposed to make sense. Foucault is therefore specifically interested in the processes of legitimation as well as in their disruptions, discontinuities, contradictions and exclusions in order to create possibilities for an articulation of alternative, 'subjugated' knowledges. Consequently genealogy is about transformation and change provoked by 'denaturalization' (cf. Barthes 1993). A genealogical approach, in this sense, is necessarily critical in that it questions accepted truths, institutional power, strong notions of identity, normality and reality, by emphasizing the power struggles that have led to their establishing and legitimation. In doing so, it opens up possibilities for counter-memories and alternative narratives. In short, by stressing historical contingency, genealogies begin to show alternative possibilities of how 'things' could have been otherwise or might still develop differently in the future. In connection with posthumanism and the posthuman, both Donna Haraway's re-reading of the cyborg figure from a feminist materialist point of view (Haraway 1991) as well as N. Katherine Hayles's recovery of the lost histories of cybernetics and technological embodiment in *How We Became Posthuman* (Hayles 1999) can be said to be genealogical in this sense.

This kind of genealogical approach in general has been very influential in transforming the theory and practice of historiographies that are often associated with new historicism and cultural materialism or postmodernism. Genealogy, however, is not predominantly an interpretation of the past through a present-day perspective. Its aim instead is to produce 'histories of the present', or 'effective histories' that start with contemporary problems or current issues (Dean 1994). Writing history is here understood as a process of producing power-knowledge that is based on selection and exclusion, narrativization and emplotment, as well as subject-positioning (cf. White 1989, 2003). Genealogy is an analysis of the specific connections of subjectivity, truth, knowledge and power, i.e. the 'discursive formations' at work in historiography and its political legitimation. This is exactly what is at stake in critical posthumanism's 'rewriting' of humanism and the reopening of the question of what it means to be human (today).

Foucault's 'antihumanism' most famously expressed itself in the image of 'man', as a construct of humanism and the 'human sciences' (or, the humanities) and thus as a recent historical figure that is about to disappear 'like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea' (Foucault 1973: 387). The apparent apocalyptic of this statement should not detract from the fact that Foucault's aim was a genealogical rereading of the 'history of humanity' in the sense of 'the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic of life' (Foucault 1984: 86). Foucault's genealogical method in producing effective histories is strategic in that "it introduces discontinuity into our very being – as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself" (88). In this sense, it remains pertinent for a critical posthumanism in three ways: "First, [as] a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, [as] a historical ontology of ourselves in

relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, [as] a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents” (Foucault 1984: 351). Critical posthumanism, however, importantly and significantly extends the remit of Foucault’s framework by addressing its residual anthropocentric bias and by including nonhuman forms of agency and subjectivity.

The other important advantage of seeing critical posthumanism as a genealogical venture is that it creates an antidote to understanding posthumanism as an exclusively futural or future-oriented discourse. Instead, it adds an investigation into posthumanism’s ‘prefigurations’, tracks ‘posthumanism across the ages’, discovering what one might call ‘early posthumanisms’ or ‘proto-posthumanisms’. In fact, it is possible and necessary for a ‘rewriting’ of (the history of) humanity to work through the idea of human self-identity from its paleoanthropological beginnings in deep time right through to its past and contemporary ‘constructions of the future’. Humanism and anthropocentrism go back to the Renaissance, but they also affect the worldviews of Greek and Roman Antiquity and the Middle Ages of course. Retroactively, via the concept of the Anthropocene, they also throw us back into ‘deep time’ and a time ‘before humanity’, as well as catapulting us forward into a speculative time ‘without humans’ either in the form of an evolutionary (technological) successor species or in the sense of apocalyptic scenarios of human or planetary extinction events (Grusin 2018). There is thus a growing literature on posthumanism and its relevance, prefiguration, genealogy throughout human and nonhuman time, from ‘classical’ posthumanism (e.g. Bianchi, Brill & Holmes 2019), to medieval (cf. the journal *Postmedieval* 2010ff; and works by Cohen (2003) or Steel (2011)) and early modern posthumanism (from early works on renaissance animal studies by Fudge (2000, 2004 and 2006) to posthumanist readings of Shakespeare in Herbrechter & Callus (2012), early thinking about machines and computers in Rhodes and Sawday (2000) and Sawday (2007), to overviews like Campana & Maisano (2016)), as well as the Enlightenment (Landgraf, Trop and Weatherby 2019) and beyond. Together these approaches to a prefigurative and genealogical understanding of posthumanism and the posthuman make for a rich tapestry that pays tribute to the fact that “if the limits of the human have always exercised both our thinking and our esthetic practices, then some aspects of what is now termed ‘posthumanism’ and ‘the posthuman’ go as far back as the beginning of the human itself” (Clarke & Rossini 2017: xv). However, if all these early posthumanist prefigurations do not add up to a new comprehensive ‘history of the posthuman’ this is because every single rereading also affects and remediates the whole idea of periodization and succession as such.

One of the main reasons why critical posthumanism can thus be called ‘critical’ is precisely because of this affinity to a genealogical understanding of critique. As Foucault explains, critique is “genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” (Foucault 1984: 46). This means that genealogies are critical precisely because they operate as denaturalizing critiques of ideas and practices that hide the contingency of human life behind formal ahistorical or developmental perspectives. For Foucault more specifically, “genealogies are usually histories of present subjectivities, for their critical impact depends on people still being immersed in the beliefs and practices that they denaturalize” (Bevir 2008: 263). It is in this sense that critical posthumanism, explicitly or implicitly, understands itself as a critical denaturalization of (liberal) humanist subjectivity or, again, as an ‘ongoing deconstruction of humanism’. In doing so, genealogy and critical posthumanism both “explore the conditions of possibility of contemporary beliefs and practices” and “uncover the historical contingencies that made it possible for people today to think and act as they do” (Bevir 2008: 272). Genealogical critique understood in this way aims to open up what Bevir refers

to as “novel spaces for personal and social transformation” by loosening the hold on us of “entrenched ideas and institutions; it frees us to imagine other possibilities” – which is precisely what the ‘figure’ of the posthuman signals (cf. Braidotti 2013), namely a counter-memory to the humanist tradition of anthropocentrism. In this sense, importantly, genealogy can be understood as ‘effective’ history, namely as a history that is opened up and oriented toward the future.

To conclude, one might say that critical posthumanism proceeds genealogically in the sense that it contextualizes and investigates figures of the posthuman and discourses on posthumanism by placing them within “theoretical and philosophical developments and ways of thinking within modernity” (Herbrechter 2013: vii). Its ultimate aim is to re-evaluate the ‘human’ (esp. its exceptionalism, anthropocentrism, its ‘nature’), and in doing so, it challenges the legitimation (the power-knowledge apparatus) of humanism and its late heirs. It seeks out discontinuities and counter-memories from which to tell the story of the human and its others differently, without, however, underestimating the power of the human desire for self-surpassment and perfectibility. While this is undoubtedly a political stance, critical posthumanism’s *raison-d’être* is ultimately an ethical one. It is motivated by care – care for different human and nonhuman ways of beings. In this sense, whoever cares about human beings and their past, present and future might want to engage *critically* with humanism’s anthropocentric ideology. Critical posthumanism is genealogical as well as critical because it begins with a current problem, an urgency – the insistence of the ‘posthuman’ in all its forms. Its objective is to write effective histories that would do justice to “the cultural malaise or euphoria that is caused by the feeling that arises once you start taking the idea of ‘postanthropocentrism’ seriously ... and to think the ‘end of the human’ without giving in to apocalyptic mysticism or to new forms of spirituality and transcendence” (Herbrechter 2013: 3), to return to the definition with which this overview began.

It can thus be said that it is, in fact, the *desire* of the posthuman that is both the subject and object of critical posthumanism’s critique. It is a desire that constitutes ‘us’ and a desire that ‘we’ nevertheless cannot trust. In this sense, it is worth insisting that critique can never be ‘detached’, since it is necessarily involved, or entangled, with that which it critiques, or in other words, critique is complicit with this/its desire. A sympathetic understanding of critique, ever since Kant, however, will stress the fact that it has never just been the work of pure negativity to shore up the human against any hybridization with nonhuman others, as Bruno Latour claims (1993), but that as a practice (i.e. critical thinking) it has always been and remains capable of dealing just as well with ‘matters of fact’ as with ‘matters of concern’ (Latour 2004); or, in other words, that it is, in its generosity, both analytical and speculative, creative, dismantling and (re)assembling, motivated by scepticism and care, all at the same time. It is in this spirit that critical posthumanism still *cares* about the human; but this is a care that cannot exist at the expense of nonhuman other, and one that necessitates an urgent pluralisation and critique of Western normativity. It dismantles ‘our’ self-understanding, but not without reassembling ‘the social’ in postanthropocentric terms. It analyses and distrusts ‘our’ humanist reflexes and legacies with a view to speculating about alternatives and creating different futures.

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