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# Poststructuralism and the End(s) of Humanism

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While posthumanism owes many debts to antihumanist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, it tends to differ from antihumanism in one principal respect: while the antihumanists actively set out to overturn the hegemony of anthropocentrism, posthumanists begin with the recognition that “Man” is (always) already a falling or fallen figure. What this means is that posthumanism often tends to take humanism’s waning or disappearance as something of a given.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.1 Post-, Again

It is both a blessing and a curse that every generation has to re-appropriate and to re-create the world in their own image. It is a blessing because a new take on something as heavily sedimented as the history of human thought promises to bring fresh insight into what has at times become decidedly stuffy and oppressive. It allows for a fresh look at things, which often makes former problems look like rather quaint obsessions, while new tasks have appeared that impose themselves by their clear and immediate urgency. It is also a curse, however, because the repression that is involved in this re-appropriating and re-positioning inevitably produces blind spots that might condemn the next generation to fight similar battles or repeat mistakes. This has always been the

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Badmington, “Posthumanism,” in Simon Malpas and Paul Wake (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 240–1.

mixed blessing involved in learning lessons from history. The transition from poststructuralism to posthumanism is no exception here.

Coming to the discussion about posthumanism and the context “after the human” today means being caught up in this conundrum of “belatedness.” Modernity gave rise to a historical understanding based on the idea of futurity and progress as the driving forces of development. The tacit consensus ever since, coinciding with the emergence of the Enlightenment, has been that history moves “dialectically”: every subsequent generation has to perform a kind of synthesis of previous contradictions and thereby ideally produce the human civilizing progress – an assumption that still underpins much of the legitimating discourse in contemporary culture and politics.<sup>2</sup>

This consensus also constitutes the foundation of (Western) liberal humanism as the dominant, common sense understanding of how every human being, rather ironically, expresses both its uniqueness and its freedom in the hope of bringing about a better future for humanity – a powerful and difficult to dismiss idea. The dialectics of history finds its articulation both in Hegel and in Marx, and it is also at work in Freudian psychoanalysis and much of modern science. Nietzsche, on the other hand, was far more skeptical regarding the anthropocentrism and Christian morality underpinning the historiography of his time. Instead, he emphasized the human “will to power” at work in the history of mentalities.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, all these thinkers had their doubts and conflicting views about the inevitability and feasibility of the idea of human

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<sup>2</sup> It was Foucault’s influential “What Is Enlightenment?” (a reply to Kant’s famous text written in 1784) that described modernity as an “attitude” or “ethos” characterized by the “will to ‘heroize’ the present” (in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow [New York: Pantheon, 1984], 32–3).

<sup>3</sup> See especially his *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873), and *Untimely Meditations* (1873–1876).

perfectibility and about the ambiguity of the form and idea of what an end of history might actually look like. Following from these early masters of suspicion (Nietzsche, Marx, Freud), the poststructuralists and postmodernists of the second half of the twentieth century form the first philosophical (or “theoretical”) movement that takes the problem of belatedness, the end of history, including the end of “man” (the mixed blessings of “coming after” outlined earlier) as a starting point for their thinking and politics.

In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida, often seen as *the* representative of a whole generation of poststructuralist thinkers, describes how “the eschatological themes of the ‘end of history,’ the ‘end of Marxism,’ ‘the end of philosophy,’ ‘the ends of man,’ the ‘last man’ and so forth” were, in the 1950s, that is, forty years ago, our daily bread.”<sup>4</sup> Derrida had previously referred to this “endism” as a certain “apocalyptic tone in philosophy” (echoing Kant), provoked by “the reading or analysis of those whom we could nickname the *classics of the end*.”<sup>5</sup> These formed “the canon of the modern

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 14. Derrida’s target in this passage is Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), a treatise on the end of the Cold War and the triumph of western liberal democracy which, seen from a Hegelian point of view, are interpreted as the completion of history. Fukuyama later famously relativized his idea that the global reach of liberal democracy had effectively “ended” history and instead, in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2002), claimed that biotechnology and eugenics contained the potential for a new class struggle (and hence return of “history”) in the form of a division between the (bio)technologically “enhanced” and “unenanced.”

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Some Statements and Truisms about Neo-Logisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seisms,” trans. Anne Tomiche, in David Carroll (ed.), *The States of ‘Theory’: History, Art, and Critical Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 63–94.

apocalypse (end of History, end of Man, end of Philosophy, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger)” (*Specters* 15), as taught by the influential Alexandre in 1930s and 1940s Paris, who helped produce an entire generation of French Neo-Hegelians (among them, Bataille, Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault). Derrida, however, also insists on the other, sociohistorical side that was responsible for this apocalyptic tone and for the ubiquitous endisms of the time (which have been proliferating ever since): “It was, *on the other hand and indissociably*, what we had known or what some of us for quite some time no longer hid from concerning totalitarian terror in all the Eastern countries, all the socio-economic disasters of Soviet bureaucracy, the Stalinism of the past and the neo-Stalinism in process ... .”<sup>6</sup> Derrida insists on contextualizing the movement of “deconstruction” he inaugurated (and which is often, problematically, seen as a synonym for poststructuralism) within these two dimensions, one philosophical, the other political. Thus, for poststructuralists and their late followers, the idea of the “end of man,” the “last man,” or, indeed, “after the human” bears a certain *déjà-vu*, as Derrida explains, “those with whom I shared this singular period, ... for us, I venture to say, the media parade of current discourse on the end of history and the last man looks most often like a tiresome anachronism” (*Specters* 15).

Ignoring this dynamic of belatedness usually leads to the idea that, in relation to posthumanism and the posthuman, poststructuralism plays merely the role of a precursor that has done its job but now needs to be overcome in turn. This idea is often expressed in the following way: while the “antihumanism” of the poststructuralists was

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<sup>6</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, 15. Derrida’s comment was originally made at a conference entitled “W(h)ither Marxism” organized by the University of California Riverside in 1993, which was concerned with the survival of Marxism after ideological discreditation following the fall of the Soviet empire and what, in the 1990s, looked like the unstoppable “triumph” of capitalism and liberal democracy.

a springboard for the kind of radical critique of humanism that posthumanism today represents, this now needs surpassing, extending, radicalizing, and so on. We can see the specters of the Hegelian dialectic raise its head again, especially since the antihumanism often attributed to “poststructuralists” such as Althusser, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard was, in fact, already a highly contested inheritance of structuralism.<sup>7</sup> It was Ferdinand de Saussure and his structuralist followers like the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss who believed that language and its principles could be made transparent and applied to all meaning-making systems (from anthropological kinship to fashion),<sup>8</sup> while the generation following them were already much more skeptical of both the empirical applicability and the metaphysical presuppositions on which a structuralist idea of language – as a conventional, rule-based, and abstract system of representation – relied.

The outlined logic of surpassing and belatedness thus already applies to the relationship between structuralism and its critical inheritors, as well, of course, as to any previous schools of thought and their predecessors and successors. As Robert Young explains:

“Post-structuralism” is an “umbrella term” which involves a  
“displacement” and is more of “an interrogation of structuralism’s

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<sup>7</sup> This is made very clear in John Sturrock’s influential *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), which still remains one of the best introductions to poststructuralist thinking, together with Catherine Belsey’s *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980) and *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> The rolling out of structuralist linguistics as a model towards the humanities and social sciences in general is usually referred to as the “linguistic turn.” For a useful overview see Colebrook, “The Linguistic Turn in Continental Philosophy,” in Alan D. Schrift (ed.), *Poststructuralism and Critical Theory’s Second Generation* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 279–309.

methods and assumptions, of transforming structuralist concepts by turning one against another". However, it is not about "origin" or a "Fall" from it: Structuralism as an origin never existed in a pre-lapsarian purity or ontological fullness; post-structuralism traces the trace of structuralism's difference from itself.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the same complication also applies to the relationship between posthumanism and humanism. It is, in fact, the awareness of the problematic genealogical relationship between humanism and posthumanism to which the "critical" in the phrase "critical posthumanism" refers.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore necessary to submit the idea of the posthuman (in the sense of "after the human") to a poststructuralist critical "reading."

## 2.2 Post-Structural-ism

One of the most important points that poststructuralism, following structuralism, makes is that meaning is irreducibly plural. Meaning does not reside *in* language but actually arises out of the selection and combination of signs. "Post-", for example, is a prefix that derives its meaning through difference from other prefixes, in particular "pre-", and from an entire syntax of prefixation. This is the presupposition without which no meaning can be assigned. What "post-" actually means, following Saussure, is the result of "negative" difference (it acquires its meaning through all it is *not*).<sup>11</sup> It means "after",

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Young, *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981), 1.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) for an extensive explanation of *critical* posthumanism.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida goes on the critique Saussure's notion of difference and the binary opposition on which it relies by introducing the neologism "différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*,

that is, *not* “before,” while both “after” and “before” themselves have a number of additional meanings. They are part of an endless chain of signifiers, each evoking plural meanings (semiosis).

The suffix “-ism” (as opposed to, for example, “-ity” which denotes a period or a state, such as “modern-ity”) refers to a “discourse” (in the sense of a “set of ideas,” a doctrine, like *Marxism*, *feminism*, but also *humanism* and *posthumanism*, of course).<sup>12</sup> A discourse is probably best understood as an attempt at making meaning cohere around a central term (in the case of structuralism, the term “structure”; while *post*structuralism would be the discourse that is precisely no longer based on the idea of “structure”). This does not mean, of course, that there is agreement about what that central term (i.e., structure) actually means. If a (temporary) consensus can be established, however, it can provide a focal point, a perspective from which it may be possible to try and make sense of the “world” or establish (a) “reality.”

The reason I put “world” and “reality” in “scare quotes” is that poststructuralists do not believe (this is undoubtedly their Kantian legacy) that there is such a thing as a world or a reality that can be perceived “as such,” that is, independently from an observer or, to use the more usual term, reality always is a reality *for* a “subject.” Let me stress right away – because this is a common misunderstanding of poststructuralism – that this is not the same as saying that there “is” no world or no reality (which would be a radically nihilistic claim). It is merely a question of availability and “realism” (which, itself, is a discourse that claims the opposite, namely that it *is* possible to see reality as it *really is*, that is, a discourse for which the detour through a representation of reality is

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trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). See further discussion later.

<sup>12</sup> On the poststructuralist notion of discourse, see Herbrechter (36–8 and *passim*).

not problematic). For poststructuralists, representation (linguistic, in the narrow sense, but also perceptual in the widest sense) is not transparent: it is not just a means to an end (that is, to give or see reality as it really is), but is something that needs to be foregrounded and analyzed. Since we can only ever have representations of reality instead of reality itself (think of all the ways in which people would disagree about what something really is, such as “climate change”),<sup>13</sup> what critical thought needs to focus on is the *politics* of representation, that is, who says what about “x.” Since all claims about reality are contingent, it is no surprise that they are highly contested, which is saying nothing else than that reality is socially constructed, shared, or negotiated. What poststructuralists are suspicious of are truth claims about reality: in this sense they are anti-realist, because these are usually powerful claims that position subjects within a discourse that uses ideology.<sup>14</sup>

Ideology is a set of beliefs that underpins a specific discourse:<sup>15</sup> humanism, for example claims that there is such a thing called “the human” and that humanism as a discourse can produce important knowledge about its “object” (i.e., the human) or even has the power to explain what it means to be human. Usually this is a claim based on exclusivity and essence: there is something like a human nature or a special set of abilities that differentiate the human from nonhuman animals, inanimate objects, or supernatural entities. Since this nature is exclusively human it gives rise to certain

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<sup>13</sup> This is the main bone of contention poststructuralism and its followers have with object-oriented ontology and speculative realism. See further [Chapter 13](#) in this volume, and the note on correlationism below.

<sup>14</sup> See further [Stuart Hall](#), *Representation*, 2nd edition, ed. [Jessica Evans](#) and [Sean Nixon](#) (London: Sage 2013), 1–59.

<sup>15</sup> See further Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation,” trans. [Ben Brewster](#), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971), 121–73.



exceptionalism or a central position of the human – anthropocentrism. From a poststructuralist point of view, what is interesting here is that the human is both the subject of the discourse called humanism (and its long history through classical to Renaissance, Enlightenment, and modern secular versions) as well as its object. Humanism, as a discourse, claims to have access to the essential and universal, that is timeless, truth of which all humans and all things human partake. It is a discourse that positions humans as subjects in a very particular, circular, or tautological way. Humans are those entities that through self-reflection must come to know who and what they are by accepting that they share an essential nature that separates them from everything else.

The curious thing about a subject, however, is that it is always in an ambiguous position with regard to power, discourse, and ideology. For a poststructuralist, what is particularly suspicious is humanism's paradoxical claim that a human (subject) is essentially human but, at the same time, needs to be *told* so, that is, humans need to be "humanized." What is even more suspicious is that this claim is usually made in conjunction with a liberal discourse that presupposes that the human is essentially free to make a choice about his or her self, in this sense: you are essentially human if you choose to be so; if you act against your supposed "nature," you are essentially "inhuman," a "monster."<sup>16</sup> The discourse based on this contradiction – a free human subject that needs to be reminded that it has a free choice (usually between good and evil) – is what poststructuralists refer to as "liberal humanism," its main target.

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<sup>16</sup> See further, Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

A few words need to be added about the middle part of post-*structural*-ism. The central idea that structuralists presuppose is that the way people make sense of things is by internalizing a system of rules which allows them to map what otherwise would be a chaotic mess. So, for a structuralist, meaning is produced through an interplay or mapping between a concrete formal manifestation (a recognition) and some underlying pattern or “structure.” Let us stick with the example of a map. In order to make sense of a territory that you do not know through which you need to find your way, you look for landmarks. These are signs you have previously encountered, whose meaning you now project onto the new territory: there is a river, there is a mountain, there is a valley, there is north, there is south, etc. So, you are applying an underlying structure onto which you map the new territory. The particularity and the newness of the territory arise from the differences it presents to the structures you “recognize”: this specific new mountain looks similar to all the mountains you know, but it is also different because its peak looks like, say, a face. You apply your previous knowledge of mountains and humans to make sense of the differences that, in a sense, you have helped to establish or create. This works for a geography as well as for other discourses. You presuppose an underlying, structured system of what the “human” (for example) is about, what it can do, and apply this structure once you encounter beings that are at once similar to the kind of humans you know but are also significantly different from what your structural knowledge provides: for example, a different skin color or “type,” a human with qualities that are usually associated with nonhuman “others” (such as a chimera or a cyborg), and so on.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> What to do with this “difference” remains an eternal stumbling block for humanist ideas of “universalism” and continues to be a highly contentious issue, particularly with

The critique that poststructuralism applies to this way of making sense – which nonetheless remains the standard way of making sense – is that this idea of underlying structure manifests a depth-surface model that is highly problematic if you think it through. This is precisely what the “post” of poststructuralism signals, and this is also where (Derridean) deconstruction comes in.<sup>18</sup> If that underlying structure, let us call it a systematic knowledge about “humanness,” is a model or “territory” onto which concrete humans, nonhumans, and also posthumans have to be mapped (or to which they have to be compared), as a model it is at the same time both the origin and end point of the meaning thus produced, both essence and truth.

If you want to make that structure present, if you want to find out what it really is, you will realize that its ultimate meaning will always escape you, because every manifestation of a human is always different from its idealized type. This means – and this is the Derridean move that is captured by the neologism “différance” – that the full meaning of any structure and any essence must always be deferred, while constantly differing from itself, that is, producing and proliferating differences or meanings. One therefore never arrives at a stable structure that could once and for all establish the meaning of what it is to be human (or posthuman, for that matter). This fact would not be revolutionary or problematic if there were not constant attempts to pretend or claim otherwise by some people, philosophers, scientists, but also politicians, that is, that they *do* know what things really mean once and for all (again, this is not a nihilist or populist

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regard to race (see [Chapter 14](#)), gender (see [Chapters 3](#) and [12](#)), and species (see [chapter 7](#)).

<sup>18</sup> See especially Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (eds.), *The Languages of Criticism and The Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 247–72.

argument that no safe meaning can ever be established, but a challenge to absolute truth claims). Humanists usually think they know what it means to be human (or at least tend to be confident about what is not human), posthumanists – and this is the point of its “post” – are less sure.

A discussion of poststructuralist, post-Saussurean linguistics would not be complete, however, without a discussion of the role of narrative. Signs do not occur in isolation: as soon as you perceive or think of a sign (a picture, a word, a landscape, a face, an object), meanings and associations come rushing in: experiences you have had, but also new connections that you make depending on context. In order to create some sense of continuity, let us call this “identity.” In order to temporarily arrest this meaning and make it meaningful for someone (an “I,” which also implies a “you,” an “us,” a “them,” a “world,” and so on), you need to give this meaning a sequential order. This is what narrative does. It helps you make sense of time and, in doing so, it establishes cause and effect, the basic operation of what philosophers refer to as “rationality” (enabled by the faculty of “reason” that is supposed to be innate, or natural, to every member of the human species, which in turn sanctions the most fundamental claims on which humanism, anthropocentrism, and exceptionalism depend). A discourse like humanism strives to create consensus about what it means to be human by establishing a consensus about how we became, are, continue to be, and will further develop as humans. In short, it takes the indefinite number of individual (human) stories and ways of making sense of (human) identity and turns them into what Lyotard, following Wittgenstein, called a “*grand récit*” or a powerful “metanarrative.”<sup>19</sup> A metanarrative is

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 34ff.

a narrative that appropriates a variety of smaller narratives and it is designed to legitimate central social values like freedom, individuality or, as in the case of humanism's metanarrative, what it means to be human.

Another, decisive, complication in the term "post-human-ism" is an ambiguity about what the post in posthumanism precisely wishes to post (to critique, to project, to "end"). There is a posthumanism that projects the end of *humanism*, the discourse; and there is a posthumanism that anticipates the end of the *human*. I would prefer to call the second variety, the desire that lies behind the idea of an overcoming of the *human*, "transhumanist."<sup>20</sup>

## 2.3 Poststructuralism and Posthumanism

*Critical* posthumanism appropriates, continues, and rewrites the legacy of poststructuralism while being aware of the problematic of dialectical overcoming and the ambiguity of the gesture of posting as described above. As a result, the main challenge is not to overcome (certainly not the human, maybe somewhat more humbly, *humanism*) but to submit to deconstruction the entire humanist philosophical tradition,

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An "incredulity" toward metanarratives is often seen, following Lyotard, as the central tenet of postmodernism (see further [Chapter 3](#) in this volume).

<sup>20</sup> For the distinction between post- and transhumanism see Herbrechter (40ff.). Transhumanism is not so much a break with humanism (especially not with its anthropocentrism) but a continuation and projected achievement of human perfectibility (usually claimed to be achievable by way of technological and moral enhancement or transcendence into a new "species," that is, cyborgs and AI. See [Chapter 6](#) in this volume. Transhumanist technotopias of enhancement or replacement usually come at the expense or rejection of human "embodiment" (see further [Chapter 4](#) of this volume).

worldview, and set of values that have come to dominate Western culture, arguably from its beginnings.

More specifically, what posthumanism extends and complicates are poststructuralist notions of subjectivity, writing, and alterity. The problems that a posthumanist thinking, or a thinking “after the human” faces, all refer back to the questions raised by poststructuralism’s antihumanist stance. These problems are most clearly articulated in some emblematic poststructuralist debates, like Foucault’s idea of the end of man, Derrida’s reprise in his “The Ends of Man,” the discussion around the “death” of and the question of who might come after the subject, as well as Lyotard’s notion of the inhuman.<sup>21</sup>

The main reason why poststructuralism is seen as antihumanist is that it treats the humanist subject as a ghost-like figure, as a misconception that is about to disappear. A very brief history of the modern (liberal humanist) subject would read like this: Descartes believed that by doubting everything but his own ability to doubt he could infer the existence of a thinking subject (*ego cogito ergo sum*). Kant raised the stakes by making the subject the center of experience and thereby excluding the object (or the “thing as such”) from (human) ontological investigation (a position that, under the name of “correlationism,” has become the main target of speculative realism and

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* ed. R.D. Laing (New York: Pantheon, 1970). Derrida, “Some Statements.” Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections of Time*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). Eduardo Cadava, *Who Comes After the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Again, there is a significant overlap between poststructuralism and postmodernism in this context (see Chapter 3). One way of distinguishing poststructuralism from postmodernism might be simply “pragmatic” in that the former is the more “philosophical” while the latter tends to be a broader, “sociological” way of making sense of modernity.

object-oriented-ontology).<sup>22</sup> Both Nietzsche and Freud are associated with a critique of the modern, Kantian or transcendental notion of subjectivity; however, it is structuralism in the first half of the twentieth century and poststructuralism that has accelerated the “decentering” and “death” of the (unified, self-centered, conscious) subject. Posthumanism partakes in the still-ongoing deconstruction of this subject by critiquing subjectivity’s inherent anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. In this respect, the title (and motto) of this volume – after the human – echoes the title of a landmark collection of essays figuring the who’s who of poststructuralism at the time it appeared, Eduardo Cadava’s edited volume *Who comes after the subject?* Who (or what) comes after the subject is the poststructuralist version of the posthumanist question: who (or what) comes after the human(ist subject)? And, which forms of agency does posthumanism afford?

The idea of “coming after” the (human) subject, in this sense, takes up Foucault’s image of “man” being “an invention of recent date,” which might be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (386–7). Instead of premature apocalypticism, Foucault’s notorious phrase the “end of man” can be understood in a critically historical rather than jubilantly nihilistic sense. Foucault’s disenchantment with the human figure points towards the historicization of the human as an object of investigation, a shift that is likely to exceed any framework of philosophical anthropology and the “humanities” more generally. This historicization of the *figure* of the human (which refers to an entire generation of “antihumanists”) remains somewhat incomplete. It is here that

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<sup>22</sup> Quentin Meillassoux defines correlationism as “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (*After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier [London: Continuum, 2008], 5). See further Chapter 13 in this volume.

posthumanism indeed represents a radicalization and a relocation of the human in the sense that it transcends any dialectical historicization through which the human is neither the absolute subject of historicism (its “end”) nor merely one “object” out of many. Instead, any discourse striving to create consensus about what it means to be human has become the central target of posthumanist critique.<sup>23</sup>

This critique, however, is already well underway in Derrida’s influential interview “Eating Well,” where he speaks of the “fable of the subject” as an anthropocentric “fiction” that traditionally has denied any form of subjectivity to the nonhuman (the animal, the machine, the object).<sup>24</sup> In this sense, any discourse which tacitly presupposes the subject as a *human* subject is committed to what Derrida refers to as a “sacrificial” idea that sanctions directly or indirectly the instrumentalization of the nonhuman by the human (an ideology Derrida names “carno-phallogocentrism” (“Who Comes” 113)), which not only serves the legitimation of “meat-eating virility” in Western cultures but also, in the age of biotechnology, is related to the commodification of life in its multiplicity of forms more generally (115). Today’s so-called posthuman condition (the proliferation of cyborgs, generalized biopolitics, the critique of speciesism, the Anthropocene or human-induced climate change) therefore does not coincide with the liquidation of the subject but rather with the pluralization of subjects, including the proliferation of nonhuman subjectivities.<sup>25</sup> The “nonhuman turn” that

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<sup>23</sup> See Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Eating Well’, or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in Eduardo Cadava (ed.), *Who Comes After the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 96–119.

<sup>25</sup> For more detailed discussions, see [Chapter 7](#) on Animals and [Chapter 11](#) on Biopolitics.



posthumanism and its critique of anthropocentrism have provoked in the (post)humanities has an important precursor in Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the "inhuman," which prompts within posthumanism the need to acknowledge all those ghosts, all those others that have been repressed as part of the process of humanization: animals, machines, objects, as well as gods, demon, and monsters of all kinds.<sup>26</sup>

In summary: what poststructuralism bequeaths to posthumanism is the fact that "after the end of man" or "after the human" also need to be understood as *before* the human. In between the crises of finality and renewal, there is "our" current chance to rethink the human, to think the human otherwise. This is the ambiguity inhabiting every "post-," posthumanism in particular. In other words, what poststructuralism, or simply the legacy of "theory," reminds posthumanism is the continued need for theorizing, for "theory after theory."<sup>27</sup> In this sense, poststructuralism survives in the work of many thinkers who have been instrumental to the development of (critical) posthumanism, notably Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, Bernard Stiegler, Claire Colebrook, Karen Barad, Vicki Kirby, Robert Esposito, and Cary Wolfe, to name but the most obvious. What precisely persists is a kind of critical instinct (which is of course also much older than poststructuralism), namely that in between (human) identity and (human) difference there is an otherness that both produces and undermines this very opposition of identity and difference. The posthuman, nonhuman, more-than-human, as well as the after-the-human, are names

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Grusin, *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). In his influential "A Postmodern Fable" Lyotard raises the important question of posthuman embodiment. See also Lyotard's *The Inhuman*, and Elaine Graham *Representations of the Post/Human*.

<sup>27</sup> Jane Elliott and David Attridge, *Theory After 'Theory'* (London: Routledge, 2011).

for this irrepressible invasion of the other into the supposed self-sameness of the human.