Chapter 6:   (Un)learning to Be Human

The admittedly not entirely uncontroversial zoologist and ethologist Konrad Lorenz (1903-1989) is seen as one of the founding figures of animal psychology. In his late, and largely pessimistic, Der *Abbau des Menschlichen*,[1] Lorenz comes to conclusions about the 'human animal' that are very close to some assumptions by contemporary critical posthumanism (CPH). In the preface he writes:

> Zur Zeit sind die Zukunftsaussichten der Menschheit außerordentlich trübe. (…) Selbst wenn sie ihrem blinden und unglaublich dummen Tun rechtzeitig Einhalt gebieten sollte, droht ihr ein allmählicher Abbau aller jener Eigenschaften und Leistungen, die ihr Menschentum ausmachen. (…) Nur wenige aber betrachten den Abbau des Menschlichen als eine *Krankheit*...[2]

What differentiates CPH from Lorenz is not his analysis of the 'current situation' but his humanist cultural pessimism that forces him to see that the "*Abbau des Menschlichen*", the deconstruction of the human, is necessarily a waning of 'humaneness'. In fact, given CPH's self-understanding as a stance that promotes the 'ongoing deconstruction of humanism', including humanism's notion of the 'human' and (usually 'his') humanity (understood as 'humaneness'), this *Abbau* is indeed seen as necessary, even if it is welcomed with serious reservations. CPH is very much aware of such an *Abbau* of humanist values and the dangers of 'dehumanisation'. However, it is equally aware of the necessity of a critique of humanism's anthropocentrism, its metaphysical and Eurocentric baggage that undermines its universalist claims and its poor record as far as containing human violence is concerned. Given that the humanist notion of the 'human' and its 'humaneness' is in probably terminal crisis both from conceptual pressures 'within' its own value system as well as from technological and ecological pressures 'without', would it not be more constructive (not to say 'humane') to begin by 'unlearning' (or, deconstructing, *abbauen*) at least some of 'our' engrained humanist reflexes?

Posthumanism and Education

> It is astonishing how stupid education can make people… To most people the very idea of education connotes a bettering of the self distinct from any possible acquisition of skills… It is no wonder that people should think in this way, for they have been taught to do so by sappy movies, college catalogues, and devoted teachers and parents, not to mention centuries of humanist propaganda.[3]

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[1] Konrad Lorenz, Der Abbau des Menschlichen (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983). It was translated as *The Waning of Humaneness* in 1987. In a more Heideggerian and Derridean vein, however, the German title might also be understood as "the deconstruction of the human".

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 11. The passage translates as: "At the moment, humanity's future prospects are extremely bleak. (…) Even if humans were to stop their blind and incredibly stupid actions in time, humans will be threatened with a gradual deconstruction of all the qualities and achievements that define their humanity. (…) However, only a few consider the degradation [or deconstruction] of humanity to be a *disease*…" (emphasis in the original; the translation is mine).

[3] Daniel Cottom, *Why Education Is Useless* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 2, 18.

Education needs to change, of that almost everybody is certain. Under the impact of a global pandemic, politicians, policy makers, educationalists, parents and children are realising that educational systems were ill prepared for such adverse conditions. However, the initial discussion quickly got side-tracked into a blame game about lacking investment and inadequate teacher training, bad technical equipment and obsolete humanist values and standards. If anyone mounted a half-hearted critique of and resistance to calls for more digitalisation, blended learning, flipped classrooms, Zoom teaching, and so on, it was mainly stubborn liberal humanists with an ingrained technophobia. Basically, the current war about '*Bildung*' is being waged mainly over form, or technical media, and much less over content, one might say. Is distance learning able to replace analogue human-to-human and face-to-face interaction in a classroom? Should robots replace teachers?[4] How much technology is good for pedagogy? These are the questions currently exercising invested citizens and governments.

Posthumanist education, in this context, is usually associated with a technoeuphoric approach, embracing technological possibilities and promises of enhancement, networking, distributed cognition and participatory (media) culture. Henry Jenkins's report on digital media and learning was an early case in point, even though it did not specifically engage with posthumanism at the time. It was strongly emphasising the opportunities of participatory (media) culture afforded by digital and social media and thus equipping students with the necessary media literacies, cultural competencies and social skills "for full involvement".[5] The potential benefits of this shift included "opportunities for peer-to-peer learning" (sometimes also referred to as 'peeragogy'), "a changed attitude toward intellectual property, the diversification of cultural expression, the development of skills valued in the modern workplace, and a more empowered conception of citizenship".[6] The emphasis was on an "ecological approach, thinking about the interrelationship among different communication technologies, the cultural communities that grow up around them, and the activities they support"[7] that would enable participants to understand themselves as 'produsers' rather than media consumers. Games and simulations, sampling and remixing, multitasking, using distributed intelligence, awareness of the affordances of technical media and media platforms – would all require "multimodality"[8] and "transmedia navigation" awareness, so much so that one might speak of a general shift or "disruption".[9] Even though this is just one, if prominent, example, digitalisation by and large works well with a utilitarian technological drive towards adapting students' abilities to changed media technological needs. It usually involves an extension or revision of the arch-humanist notion of 'literacy' to new domains opened up by technological change and economic requirements – a revised adaptation process of the future workforce to new socio-economic conditions based on new technological 'possibilities'. In that sense, this kind of digital agenda forms a continuation of modern educational policy based on

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[4] Cf. Neil Selwyn, *Should Robots Replace Teachers? AI and the Future of Education*, Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

[5] Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. xiii.

[6] *Ibid*., p. xii.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 88.

[9] Pauline Van Mourik Broekman, , Gary Hall, Ted Byfield, Shaun Hides and Simon Worthington, *Open Education: A Study in Disruption*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

a renewed alliance between the liberal subject now future-proofed for a transhumanist world-to-come.

Posthumanism, as I have been arguing, lies entirely elsewhere. Technology, in the discussion about how humanist education should be, is a red herring. It is not, at least not predominantly, about cyborgs (1990s), data and algorithms (2000s), digital, social and open media (2010s), or artificial intelligence (2020s). These media-technological developments are without doubt important. And they rarely fail to captivate – money, attention, headlines. Posthumanism, at least in its 'critical' variety, however, is about the place of the human on this planet, human responsibility, and the relation to nonhuman others. It is about ecology, ethics and politics. It is about constructions of the future and genealogies of the past. It is about a changing world picture, away from centuries of humanist anthropocentrism and towards multispecies social justice.[10] It is about new answers to an old question: what does it mean to be human? Have we ever been human? Will we ever be? Should we be? How does one learn to be (a) human? Or should not one rather unlearn to be human in the ways in which dominant discourses have defined this so far?

Education has always been key to humanism and thus it is no surprise that it should continue to be so for posthumanism understood as the contemporary critique of humanism. Humanism, as Michael Bonnett writes, is "that broad perspective that assigns to human beings a special place in the greater scheme of things, setting their nature and interests at the centre of study and policy".[11] It is based on Enlightenment values, following Kant, that connect humanness with a process of progressive liberation from self-incurred tutelage, through the use of reason, with the aim of producing an elevation above nature, which is expressed in cultural and scientific achievements. This same system of values, however, also realises itself in modern, rational and colonial domination, conquest, exploitation and extraction of natural resources, including indigenous populations and nonhuman others. Humanism, thus understood, is from its beginning a pedagogical process positing, and addressed to, a very specific form of 'liberal humanist subjectivity'. It is a subjectivity in tune with the self-perception of an individual who learns to embody certain (gendered, racial, national, social…) identities that modern societies 'construct' and privilege or set as normative and thus as worth aspiring to. The 'decentring' (one might say, *Abbau*) of this liberal humanist subject was begun in earnest in the second half of the 20th century by theoretical and philosophical formations like poststructuralism, postmodernism, and deconstruction. This decentering continues today due to the emergence of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism under radically new technological, ecological, and social conditions and due to new global challenges like climate change, depletion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and extinction threats. These developments are all signs that humanism "as a guide to human being" and as a "basis for education" is no longer adequate as an explanation of how we (humans) "should be in the world".[12] One could say that humanism fails humans (and nonhumans) in the classroom by establishing hierarchies and exclusions: it claims to teach humans to become (more) human by embodying a universalist ideal which it claims is shared by all humans and which differentiates them, or makes them unique and exceptional to other (nonhuman) animals and

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[10] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
[11] Michael Bonnett, "Retrieving Nature: Education for a Post-Humanist Age", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37.4 (2003): 707.
[12] *Ibid*.

machines. This universal norm which it also tends to see as human 'nature' or its 'essence' (and which is thus at its core timeless and self-evidently 'true') is nevertheless clearly historically locatable and culturally specific – it is a 'Western', more specifically 'European', ideal based on a canon of philosophical, literary and artistic works, Enlightenment values, modern science and rationalism, and liberal bourgeois capitalism extended through colonialism, imperialism and globalisation. Minorities, including women, non-white and indigenous populations, have only recently gained some 'access' to this 'timeless' community of planetary 'humanity'. However, arguably the most problematic humanist feature is that it is based on the necessary exclusion of nonhuman others, especially nonhuman animals, which should of course be treated 'humanely' but which are nevertheless radically different and inferior in value – which also always leaves open the possibility for 'animalising' certain humans and treating them as 'lesser' or 'deficient' and legitimating either their 'education' and 'cultivation' (i.e. colonialism) or further repression (i.e. racism, slavery, genocide). Ultimately, humanism is based on an appropriative notion of nature in contradistinction to culture, which is supposed to keep the former in check and which legitimates its exploitation by humans.

In this sense, posthumanist education must begin with a questioning of, and a challenge to, the quasi monopoly humanism has been exercising over education. And from that vantage point, it is therefore often, wrongly in my view, equated with 'posteducation', or with an attack on education as such. William Spanos's *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (1993) must be one of the first texts to acknowledge this tendency. Spanos describes the "shattering" of the humanist curriculum by the protest movement of the 1960s and the "complicity of truth and power, of knowledge production and the dominant sociopolitical order" exposed by the Vietnam War and the subsequent calling into question of the "discourse of disinterestedness" by theoretical discourses that have come to be called "postmodern" or "poststructuralist", but which he decided to call "posthumanist".[13] Spanos returned to his argument in a long article in 2015 pointing towards the "dehumanizing work" of the "global free market" and the neoliberalisation of the university together with the threats these pose to the survival of the humanities.[14]

The same threat of "dehumanization" also exercised John Knight in his intervention to a volume entitled *After Postmodernism* (1995). However, Knight argues that "to equate mass schooling with a humanistic education is almost certainly to commit an oxymoron".[15] Knight, like many at the time, and in fact ever since, laments that (humanistic) education "is replaced by the (re)production of flexible human units of production/consumption" – a "disappearance of the (human-educational) referent" that he names "posthuman".[16] While traditional humanism and (postmodern or poststructuralist) antihumanism still depend on a previous knowledge of humanism, what Knight understands as "posthumanism" is a (Baudrillardian)

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[13] William V. Spanos, *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xiv.

[14] William V. Spanos, "Posthumanism in the Age of Globalization: Rethinking the End of Edcuation", *Symploke*, 23.1-2 (2015): 37.

[15] John Knight, "Fading Poststructuralisms: Post-Ford, Posthuman, Posteducation?", in: Richard Smith and Philip Wexler, eds., *After Postmodernism: Education, Politics and Identity* (London: Falmer Press, 1995), p. 24.

[16] *Ibid*.

"simulacra", or "posteducation"[17] that fully embraces the ("post)ethos of the universal market and its (de)valuing of the individual to the status of commodity" without any place for "human emancipation" and "very little place for the human".[18] It is probably true to say that Knight's perception has become the central tenet of the critique of posthumanism as a theoretical discourse colluding in the neoliberalisation and globalisation of education. And to a certain extent I would agree that this is in fact so, if posthumanism is understood, as it very often still is, as 'technocentric'. As Knight explains: "The availability of technologies (the metaphor itself is significant) for transforming schooling intersects with the need for flexible and multiskilled workers for a (presumed – this is an item of faith) post-Fordist situation in industry and with presses for economies in the public services".[19] The "posthuman world" envisaged by "emergent corporatist forms of posteducation"[20] that Knight foresaw has indeed led to a certain 'dehumanisation' but not necessarily in the apocalyptic way Knight and many others believed. What has in fact disappeared in the process is the ideal addressee of a humanistic education, as well as the consensus about the universal reach of humanism as a discourse and political and ethical value system. And this is not an entirely bad thing in my view.

Around the same time, other voices like for example that of Gert Biesta, saw the legacy of poststructuralist antihumanism much more favourably, namely as an opportunity for a "pedagogy without humanism".[21] The focus here was on the social interaction or "transaction" at work in pedagogical settings and the critique of the "asymmetry" this usually presupposed, i.e. between the subject-supposed-to-know and the subject to knowledge. Largely following Foucault, Biesta saw the intersubjective transaction and the subject formation through interpellation or "positioning", and thus the "production" of the individual, as the result of "power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces".[22] Biesta's search for a pedagogy "without humanism", like Foucault's earlier critique of humanism, is not so much an attack on subjectivation as such but is rather aimed at the ideological obfuscation that seeks to disguise pedagogical transaction through a metaphysical world picture and its values, which are standing in the way of 'true' emancipation and freedom. It is precisely in confusing education with humanisation, for example, that one prevents a questioning of what it actually means to be human and a challenging of anthropocentrism, or as Biesta provocatively asks: "Who designs the entrance exam for humanity?"[23] There is no fixed "norm of what it is to be human" and thus pedagogy can and should not offer any "anthropological comfort".[24] At the same time, however, the focus on the "singularity" of every subject formation, which then translates into (human) identity as task rather than as normative given, also implies a critique of the "instrumentalization and dehumanization" of the kind of (post)education that Knight perceived as the main threat arising out of the vacuum left behind, once the consensus about humanism in education has disappeared.

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[21] Gert Biesta, "Pedagogy Without Humanism: Foucault and the Subject of Education", *Interchange*, 29.1 (1998): 1-16.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

This is where CPH has its role to play in reforming contemporary educational, still predominatly humanist, theory, policy and practice. It represents a posthumanism that is mindful of the contemporary and accelerated postanthropocentric drift, but that at the same time is also critical of its technological determinism with its emphasis on artificial intelligence and its focus on technological solutions, as well as the instrumentalisation of education as such. In an educationalist setting, posthumanism arrived surprisingly late and there are still relatively few attempts at thinking through its pedagogical and curricular implications.[25] In the manifesto, "Toward a Posthumanist Education",[26] a number of educators and educational researchers identify three ways in which posthumanism can transform educational thought, practice and research:

> First, it forces us to reckon with how resolutely humanist almost all educational philosophy and research is. Second, it allows us to reframe education to focus on how we are always already related to animals, machines, and things within life in schools at the K-12 and university levels. Third, building on and incorporating these first two insights, it enables us to begin exploring new, posthumanist directions in research, curriculum design, and pedagogical practice.[27]

The aim of posthumanist education is thus to break up the anthropocentric foundations of virtually all versions of education that tacitly or openly presuppose that the 'world' or all 'things' exist in relation to or 'for' humans, in the sense that the world is 'ours' to explore and exists only insofar as it exists for humans.[28] Consequently, Snaza and his colleagues call upon "everyone – and everything! – implicated in the 'anthropological machine'[29] of education to begin experimenting with forms of thinking, teaching, learning, and interacting that seek to create distance between us and humanism".[30]

The manifesto was followed by a volume edited by Snaza and John A. Weaver, *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (2015), that stakes out the major areas in which posthumanism has been making inroads into (humanist) education and which have led to reconfigurations of it. Snaza and Weaver ask: "What would a world be that did not insist on human superiority or

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[25] Cf. e.g. Jon A. Weaver, *Educating the Posthuman: Biosciences, Fiction, and Curriculum Studies* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2010), Helena Pedersen, "Is 'the Posthuman# Educable? On the Convergence of Educational Philosophy, Animal Studies, and Posthumanist Theory", *Discourse*, 31.2 (2010): 237-250, Herbrechter, "Posthumanistische Bildung?", *Jahrbuch für Pädagogik* (2014): 267-282, Herbrechter, "Posthumanist Education?", in: Paul Smeyers, ed., *International Handbook of Education*, vol. 1 (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), pp. 727-745, Jeremy Knox, *Posthumanism and the Massive Open Online Course: Contaminating the Subject of Global Education* (New York: Routledge, 2016), and Brad Petitfils Petitfils, *Parallels and Responses to Curricular Innovation: The Possibilities of Posthumanistic Education* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
[26] Nathan Snaza, et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 30.2 (2014): 39-55.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[29] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).
[30] Snaza et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", p. 51.

dominance and that did not disavow the human's ecological entanglements?"[31] The greatest challenge, they suggest, apart from escaping the predetermination of "learning outcomes" that close off "wonder in the face of the world"[32] and thus radical change, as well as the compartmentalisation of knowledge into "disciplines", is to acknowledge the agency of knowing in nonhuman subjects.[33] The key in stopping, jamming, maybe even disassembling the anthropological machine of (humanist) education, continues to lie in a focus on subjectivity and on thinking "about how meaning is generated *among* subjects (although this word will have become untrustworthy)".[34] Extending subjectivity beyond the traditional humanist and anthropocentric human exclusivity to nonhuman others (animals, machines, things, plants, environments, the planet etc.) is not just a new and more inclusive learning process, or a generalised animism (although this may be a good start);[35] it is first and foremost an *un*learning process. In other words, the decentring of the human(ist) subject does not 'automatically' lead to a pluralisation of other voices and agencies, it must be accompanied and motivated by an active process of deconstruction, of undoing, or unlearning. This can of course be achieved by changes to curriculum content, but it should also involve new practices of learning that are no longer aimed at an individual human subject, taught, assessed and 'produced' according to a combination of institutional and economic requirements.

Un-learning

> A posthumanist education goes beyond a humanist (or modernist) education by thinking through the complex relations between humans, nonhuman animals, and machines.[36]

Snaza himself opens up the avenue of 'unlearning' when he says that "if posthumanism has taught us that we have become 'human', it also asks us to un-learn to be human".[37] For education to cease to be a form of humanisation (in the sense of humanism's anthropological machine) however, it is not enough to reimagine the world 'without humans' although this can undoubtedly serve as an initial 'eye-opener' in the classroom or elsewhere. It is necessary to understand how learning to be a human works in the first place and then, through a patient and thorough working-through and rewriting process, to 'un-learn' it. The 'un' in 'unlearning' does not function as a simple negation, instead it signals deconstruction. Like the 'un' in Freud's '*unheimlich*',[38] it at once makes strange and familiar; it is a sign of the return of the repressed and a symptom of repetition-compulsion.

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[31] Nathan Snaza and John A. Weaver, eds., *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 3.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[34] Snaza et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", pp. 51-52.

[35] See my "Interlude 2 Animism without Humans, or Belief without Belief", *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 81-111.

[36] Marla Morris, "Posthumanist Education and Animal Interiority", in: Snaza and Weaver, eds., *Posthumanism and Educational Research,* p. 43.

[37] Nathan Snaza, "Departments of Language", *Symploke*, 23.1-2 (2015): 105.

[38] Éamonn Dunne, "Learning to Unlearn", in: Aidan Seery and Éamonn Dunne, eds., *The Pedagogics of Unlearning (London: Punctum*, 2016), p. 20.

"Unlearning the hidden curriculum" is thus a "crucial component of the learning experience", as Alan Wald already suggested in "A Pedagogy of Unlearning" (1997).[39] Wald was writing in the context of the institutional racism in the humanities curriculum of the 1990s while following in the footsteps of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1979) and bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress* (1994),[40] but his argument in my view also applies to the 'hidden speciesism' of all humanist education when he says that "[i]f a pedagogy is to lead to empowerment, in the sense of a student's gaining control over the forces shaping his or her life, one must develop courses that allow students who choose to do so to reassess the superficial and misleading paradigms brought into the classroom as a consequence of 'the hidden curriculum'".[41] In a similar vein, in the context of queer studies, Jack Halberstam, commenting on his *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), writes that "unlearning is an inevitable part of new knowledge paradigms if only because you cannot solve a problem using the same methods that created it in the first place".[42] Halberstam, too, evokes the notion of wonder, namely "the curiosity, the sheer wonder, of not knowing on the path of transformation" that daring to unlearn promises to achieve.[43] For Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, it is "thinking decolonially" that implies such a *Learning to Unlearn* (2012),[44] while Éamonn Dunne invokes Jacques Rancière's "ignorant school master" (Rancière 1987)[45] and Barbara Johnson's paradoxical "teaching of ignorance"[46] to the same effect, as the hardest pedagogical task of "unteaching something to your students" and to "suspend knowledge".[47] Unlearning, in the sense of creating or at least accepting working with an 'enabling ignorance', despite its undeniable risks, is the only way of keeping the horizon of knowledge and futurity open, as opposed to masterful 'explication' which, perversely, always risks placing and keeping the student in a relationship of dependence and acceptance. This is the 'lesson' Rancière attributes to Joseph Jacotot, the 'ignorant schoolmaster', who 'taught' his Dutch students to 'self-teach' themselves French without him speaking any Dutch, and thus without being able to 'explain' the task. "Explaining" as Rancière explains – which attests to the difficulty of "unteaching" as a practice – is the blindness at the centre of teaching,[48] because it creates a dependence based on an infinite and unbridgeable regress of a distance (of an advance in knowledge) between the teacher and her students. In fact, and this may be almost too obvious a claim, it is the problem of subjectivity in education as such, in that a student needs to be addressed or positioned (as a subject to knowledge and learning) by a subject-supposed-to-

[39] Alan Wald already suggested in "A Pedagogy of Unlearning: Teaching the Specificity of U.S. Marxism", in: Amitava Kumar, ed., *Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Public Sphere* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 127.

[40] Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [1970] (London: Penguin, 1993), and bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[41] Wald, "A Pedagogy of Unlearning", pp. 133-134.

[42] Jack Halberstam, "Unlearning", *Profession* (2012): 10.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[44] Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012).

[45] Jacques Rancière, *Le maître ignorant* (Paris: Fayard, 1987).

[46] Barbara Johnson, "Teaching Ignorance: *L'Ecole des Femmes*", *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982) : 165-182.

[47] Éamonn Dunne, "Love Foolosophy: Pedagogy, Parable, Perversion", *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 45. 6 (2013): 625-626.

[48] Rancière, *Le maître ignorant*, pp. 11-12.

know in order to start the learning process in the first place. Rancière's reading of Jacotot's practice characterised it as a prime example of unlearning of "*apprendre à désapprendre*".

Learning – as opposed to "learnification" – is in fact inherently unpredictable as Dunne writes:

> Learning begins when knowledge gets suspended. Good teachers are teachers who suspend knowledge, who open up the abyss. They're the ones that know that counselling Enlightenment values of self-reliance and autonomy initiate an inescapable double bind. "Listen to me but don't listen to me". "Listen to me: Think for yourself!" *Sapere aude*. Some instruction![49]

Subjectification through interpellation, or addressing, is about power, not about equality. The subject interpellated by the representative of the knowledge institution is everything but free, even when it, ironically, or maybe even cynically, is interpellated as a 'free individual' (the classic case of a liberal humanist subject and prime target of CPH) – it is for your best, in your own interest, that you should learn to learn... As Rancière explains, it is not a question of forgetting this 'scene of teaching' but of "unexplaining" it:

> Un-explaining in general means undoing the opinion of inequality. Undoing it means undoing the links that it has tightened everywhere between the perceptible and the thinkable. On the one hand, the un-explanatory method unties the stitches of the veil that the explanatory system has spread on everything; it restores the things that this system has caught in its nets to their singularity and makes them available to the perception and the intelligence of anybody. On the other hand, it returns their opacity, their lack of evidence, to the modes of presentation and argumentation which were supposed to cast light on them.[50]

It is hard not to hear in this passage the echoes of Althusser, Rancière's own teacher, and his designation of education as an "ideological state apparatus" with its central power mechanism of subjectification through interpellation in this comment.[51] A posthumanist education worthy of its name and time will have to primarily unlearn this aspect, this mechanism, of the anthropological machine, bearing in mind however that there is no simple escape from subjectification, neither through decentring the subject, nor through its repositioning, nor through pluralisation, i.e. the proliferation of (human and nonhuman) subjectivities. However, it would certainly be a good start to problematise the idea of a subject and its positioning as well as to speculate on and actually 'perform' alternative notions of subjectivity and thus extend them to non-traditional forms of agency like objects, animals, environments, networks etc.

Addressing the Posthumanist Subject

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[49] Dunne, "Learning to Unlearn", p. 20.
[50] Jacques Rancière, "Un-What?", in: Aidan Seery and Éamonn Dunne, eds., *The Pedagogics of Unlearning* (London: Punctum, 2016), p. 35.
[51] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation1970]", trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 121-173.

> To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people.[52]

In a move similar to Simone de Beauvoir's famous expression that one is not born a woman but becomes or is 'shown' how to behave as one, one could argue that one is not born human (at least not in the humanist sense) but is strongly 'encouraged' to behave as one, or to embody this (species) 'identity'. It is a learning process that involves developing subjectivity to be able to connect with others through language, culture, media, and technologies. CPH implies that technological and ecological change poses challenges to humanism's anthropocentric model of subjectification; 'posthumanising' developments like digitalisation, cyborgisation, artificial intelligence, as well as anthropogenic climate change, or bioengineering require new conceptualisations of subjectivity and new narratives out of which subjects can construct identities, and which are different from traditional (liberal humanist) understandings of what makes a 'me', human. One could thus say that CPH involves an unlearning and relearning process as far as human identity is concerned. Un- and relearning to be human differently passes through undoing traditional and constructing new subject positions. It is therefore important to look closely at the actual subject positions posthumanism or postanthropocentrism provide or 'afford'.

In fact, there is no reason why Althusser's basic conception of the subject should not also apply under posthumanist conditions, provided one take into account Althusser's antihumanist 'blindspot'. While Althusser seems to have had a quite specific 'ideal' addressee in mind in his description of the "little ideological theatre" of hailing (which undoubtedly involves a human, French-speaking, probably white, probably male who is being interpellated by probably a policeman), alternative, less ethno- and anthropocentric scenes of interpellation under posthumanist conditions are not only imaginable but have always been available.[53] The interpellation mechanism as such is by no means suspended under new techno-, or eco-cultural or new, digital and social media conditions. Humans (and nonhumans) can be interpellated by a whole variety of social actors: machines, animals, things, etc. Furthermore, subjectivity is, to extend Catherine Belsey's argument, without doubt not only linguistically and discursively but also technically, environmentally, maybe even epigenetically constructed.[54] If machines, animals, things, environments, and media can each function as interpellators of humans as well as nonhumans, then, in turn, they are also constantly being addressed by humans and, provided they can all be attributed with some subjectivity, which means that when machines address machines, animals, things, etc., or when animals address… etc., aspects of subjectivity are always potentially involved. Therefore, far from any end to subjectivity, posthumanist conditions rather imply a proliferation of subjectivity, ideology, address or forms and instances of interpellation and thus also 'agency'.

Although CPH's critique of humanism often focuses on scientific and technological challenges, there are aspects that apply even 'without' technology. A post- or non-anthropocentric

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[52] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 32.

[53] Cf. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971); Suzanne Gearhart, 'Interpellations: From Althusser to Balibar', in: Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, eds., Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)Resitibility of Theory (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2004), pp. 178-204.

[54] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 61.

worldview according to which we no longer see 'ourselves' as the central meaningful entity and form of autonomous agency in the universe, challenges 'our' ingrained habit to anthropomorphise everything that comes into human view. This may have become visible and seemingly inevitable thanks to 20th and early 21st-century technological development, however, CPH has also been proceeding genealogically, i.e. has been un- or recovering previous or parallel connection points with non-anthropocentric knowledges, beliefs and subjectivities. Donna Haraway's work on companion species, for example, provides such a theoretical framework for non-anthropocentric posthumanist forms of address and subjectivities. In her *When Species Meet* (2008), she explains that: "human beings are not uniquely obligated to and gifted with responsibility; (…) animals in all their worlds, are response-able in the same sense as people are".[55] Haraway's notion of "response-ability", which she, in this particular context, restricts to the interaction between companion species and the proliferation of subjectivities this implies, poses a number of political and ethical challenges. Haraway's suggested framework for dealing with these challenges is a "multi-species flourishing": "Now, how to address that response-ability (which is always experienced in the company of significant others, in this case, the animals)? (…) multi-species flourishing requires a robust nonanthropomorphic sensibility that is accountable to irreducible differences".[56] Haraway's answer to this challenge lies in a new (posthumanist, post-anthropocentric) ecology: "We are face-to-face, in the company of significant others, companion species to each other. That is not romantic or idealist, but mundane and consequential in the little things that make lives".[57] One could argue that from a posthumanist point of view, Haraway's ecology should probably be extended to all kinds of social actors (human, animal, machine, collectivities, and networks) in the way advocated by Bruno Latour and actor-network-theory,[58] or object-oriented-ontology, as well as new feminist materialism more generally.[59]

For posthumanist education – unlearning and relearning to be human (otherwise) – the proliferation of subjectivities and their connection through postanthropocentric stories or narratives in a "post-human landscape":

> …repositions childhood [or becoming-human more generally] within a world that is much bigger than us (humans) and about more than our (human) concerns. It allows us to reconsider the ways in which children [or humans] are both constituted by, and learn within, this more-than-human world.[60]

The realisation of this involves a 'decentering' (or, an unlearning) of humanist subjectivity or self-understanding, but also a "recentering", according to Brad Petitfils, since, "especially in an age of exponential innovation, how are young people supposed to understand their 'decentred' selves if they cannot first have a reasonable understanding of themselves in

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[55] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 71.

[56] *Ibid*., pp. 89, 90.

[57] *Ibid*., p. 93.

[58] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[59] Cf. Jessica Ringrose, Katie Warfield and Shiva Zarabadi, eds., *Feminist Posthumanisms, New Materialisms and Education* (London: Routledge, 2019).

[60] Africa Taylor, Mindy Blaise and Miriam Giugni, "Haraway's 'bag lady story-telling': Relocating Childhood and Learning within a 'Post-Human Landscape'", *Discourse*, 34.1 (2013): 49.

relation to the posthumanist world in which they live?"[61] In a concrete educational context one might thus, according to Petitfils, "help students decenter themselves and understand the implications of their digital and virtual lives",[62] and help them "recenter" by making them see "their own primordial essence as these formative years of posthumanity emerge".[63] The recentering, however, even though it may be triggered by media-technological change and directed against its dehumanising (postbiological, or transhumanist) possibilities, is first of all a relearning of human *animality*, or 'humanimality, one might say, or indeed a resistance to human 'deanimalisation' (i.e. opposed to transhumanist phantasies of disembodiment). It is illusory and harmful to both human and nonhuman animals to believe that humanity might be able (through technology) to escape its own animality. The 'anthropolgcial machine', far from guaranteeing an exclusion of animality by creating a radical difference between humans and animals, constantly reinscribes the very continuity it seeks to deny. Instead of the (humanist, or transhumanist) desire of postbiological 'deanimalisation' (i.e. getting somehow rid of our biological 'substrate') it is important to stress the 'animal side' of the unlearning and relearning process of becoming human,[64] especially in these current techno-centred and techno-euphoric times with their fantasies of disembodiment. In practice, this involves an emphasis on human and nonhuman biological entanglement and the evolutionary and ecological continuity between human and nonhuman animals and their changing environments.

Animals in School – Zoomimesis and Rewilding

> For a bird's flight to be an epiphanic event, the human being must see itself in the flight: there must be an overlapping between the human being and the bird – the emergence of a bird-shaped man, or a reflection of the human in the bird.[65]

One of the most basic questions CPH asks of (humanist) education is "must an educated being be a human being?"[66] Since CPH extends 'being' to all kinds of nonhuman entities, it also produces all kinds of ontologies. Even though technology is seen by many posthumanists as 'originary' to human (and many nonhuman animal, even plant) ontologies, there is at least an equally good and arguably even more urgent case of (re)acknowledging the originary character of animality in anthropogenesis. Rather than seeing animality as a primordial state of humans and their bodies that education as a main 'anthropotechnics'[67] must seek to overcome, being (with) animals can and should be seen as a necessary condition for (re)learning to be human, thus acknowledging "human-animal co-constitution and mutual

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[61] Brad Petitfils, "Researching the Posthuman Paradigm: The 'Subject' as Curricular Lens", in: Snaza and Weaver, *Posthumanism and Educational Research*, p. 33.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[64] Cf. Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

[65] Roberto Marchesini, *Over the Human: Post-Humanism and the Concept of Animal Epiphany*, trans. Sarah de Sanctis (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp. 95-96.

[66] Robert D. Heslep, "Must an Educated Being Be a Human Being?", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 28 (2009): 329-349.

[67] For the notion of 'anthropotechnics' see Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

reconfiguration [as] being inextricably bound together in vanishing ecosystems", as Helena Pedersen writes.[68] Animals are thus not only good to 'think' with, they are also essential for learning, as Pedersen explains:

> Nonhuman animals enter systems of knowledge production in multiple ways, and on several levels. They may interrupt and disrupt "our" familiar formations of knowledge and alert us to knowledge forms for which we (as yet) have no name. They may challenge preconceived boundaries between subjectivity/objectivity, inside/outside, and center/periphery in knowledge production, and they may, literally and figuratively, eat away at the artifacts that are simultaneously products and signifiers of knowledge...[69]

In other words, "our commonality with all (other) animals is cause for wonder".[70] Animals may help us 'unlearn' to be humans in a humanist sense and 'relearn' to be human differently, postanthropocentrically, posthumanistically, in exploding "the anthropocentric conceit that the world or cosmos is as it is for us only".[71]

If unlearning to be human involves "jamming" the anthropological machine,[72] especially in the sense of rethinking the relationship between human and nonhuman animals through the construction of alternative, posthumanist and postanthropocentric subjectivities, then one might also speak of a need for 'rewilding' education. Humanism traditionally sees education as a refinement, or a purification process of 'deanimalisation', or, in short a 'de-' or 'unwilding' of the 'barbaric' and 'uncultivated' human. By the same token, negligence, a slip in standards, a decline in humanism's central apparatus, i.e. 'literacy', usually means giving in to a 'natural' process of *Verwilderung* (going feral, returning to some original state of 'savageness' or 'barbarity').[73] Current ecological thinking, on the other hand, is strongly advocating 'degrowth' and 'rewilding' both as a "pathway to compassion and coexistence".[74] The 'unwilding' that modern education has caused, according to Bekoff, has produced an "animal deficit disorder", which leads to a lack of connection with nature more generally.[75] Even though nothing may or should replace the first-hand experience of "nature, nonhuman animals, and our shared

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[68] Helena Pedersen, "Is 'the Posthuman' Educable? On the Convergence of Educational Philosophy, Animal Studies, and Posthumanist Theory", *Discourse*, 31.2 (2010): 246; see also Pedersen's *Animals in Schools*: *Processes and Strategies in Human-Animal Education* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2010).

[69] Helena Pedersen, "Education Policymaking for Social Change: A Post-Humanist Intervention", *Policy Futures in Education* 8.6 (2010): 686.

[70] Nathan Snaza, "Reductionism Redux: The Continuity Between Humans and Other Animals", *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 10.1 (2013): 27.

[71] Delphi Carstens, "The Politics of Animality and Posthuman Pedagogy", in: Vivienne Bozalek, Rosi Braidotti, Tamara Shefer and Michalinos Zenbylas, eds., *Socially Just Pedagogies: Posthumanist, Feminist and Materialist Perspectives in Higher Education* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 63.

[72] Cf. Matthew Calarco, "Jamming the Anthropological machine", in: Calarco and Steven DeCaroli, eds., *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 163-179.

[73] Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, "Rule for the Human Zoo: A response to the *Letter on Humanism*", *Environment and Planning D*, 27 (1999): 12-28.

[74] Marc Bekoff, *Rewilding Our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence* (Novato: New World Library, 2014).

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 122-26.

home",[76] and as loaded and problematic as the word and concept of 'nature' may be, pedagogical practice informed by posthumanist theory can and should contribute to a more general ecological awareness of education as "bewildering", as Nathan Snaza puts it.[77]

In sum, the main paradox of any humanistic education lies in the fact that it both presupposes the human – education is only possible or available for humans – and promises to 'produce' the human and, in doing so, to safeguard (its) 'humanity'. As Snaza explains:

> In conceiving of the human as both an ontological given (a being) and the result of a particular process of education, education structurally introduces the necessity of intermediate concepts: the less human, the less than fully human. In order to justify the pursuit of humanization, educators must approach their pupils as not yet or not fully human (otherwise there would be no need for education). This structural gap between the not yet fully human animal and the human that is education's *telos* allows for dehumanization to become a fundamental political fact of modernity.[78]

This is therefore education's participation in the workings of the anthropological machine – a machine that reproduces what it seeks to overcome by repression. And this is precisely what needs to be unlearned.

The actual encounter with the (nonhuman) animal, the 'wonder' and strange empathy this may cause in the best circumstances, should produce an "attention away from issues of cultivating human-centred knowledge, skills, and aptitudes".[79] In doing so, it actually returns us, according to Roberto Marchesini, to our evolutionary 'zooanthropological' condition (based on the fundamental evolutionary continuity between human and other animals), in the sense that we learned (we had to learn) to be human, by observation and imitation of (other) animals.[80] What Marchesini calls "zoomimesis" – human imitation of animals and its influence on human (techno)culture – is a dialogic learning process guided by interaction with nonhuman animals and the world more generally. In and through mimesis, Marchesini argues, "the subject discovers a new existential dimension, capable of undergoing an irreversible conversion in itself", it involves a "dialogue with an alterity".[81] This encounter with the non-human animal "is a slow and painful metamorphosis, one that excites us but also exposes us to vertigo, broadening our horizon but also increasing our vulnerability since it moves us away from our species-specific gravitational centre.[82] Suspending anthropocentrism in this encounter means unlearning "centuries of humanist propaganda", as the first epigraph by Daniel Cottom claims.[83] In such an encounter there is always a risk and a chance of 'dehumanisation' – a pedagogical moment *par excellence*, in its radical and non-instrumentalisable "uselessness", as Cottom says – before the postanthopocentric 'relearning' process can begin and posthumanist subjectivities may arise.

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[76] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

[77] Nathan Snaza, "Bewildering Education", *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 10.1 (2013): 40.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[79] Tyson E. Lewis, "The Pedagogical Power of Things: Toward a Post-Intentional Phenomenology of Unlearning", *Cultural Critique*, 98 (2018): 122.

[80] Roberto Marchesini, "Zoomimesis", trans. Jeff Bussolini, *Angelaki*, 21.1 (2016): 175-197.

[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 188, 189.

[82] Marchesini, *Over the Human*, p. 100.

[83] Cottom, *Why Education Is Useless*, p. 18.

PS: Even though the above argument does make frequent reference to practice, I am aware that it will leave the 'practitioner' with a desire for examples of 'applied' posthumanist or postanthropocentric 'unlearning' unsatisfied. In other words, and in terms of educational praxis, is any of this doable in or relevant for school – leaving aside the fact that most of the academic discourse produced on education seems to tacitly assume the university as the ideal teaching situation and institution; and equally leaving aside that this discourse, even if understood as and based on 'educational research', is usually produced by people who are working quite far removed from the daily teaching practice in primary and secondary schools, where nevertheless most of the postanthropocentric 'unlearning' process would have to occur for it to really make a difference. There is the possible connection point of teacher training, of course, where future teachers could be taught how to teach 'posthumanistically' – in fact, a lot of the initiatives aimed at digital learning seem to be aimed at just that, even though they tend to, ultimately, work towards an ideal of a posthuman rather than a posthumanist teaching scene, i.e. teaching 'without' humans, instead of humans teaching other humans about how to overcome their anthropocentric bias. This is not an argument against digital learning platforms or against the need for schools to prepare their students to become critical (digital, social or new) media 'produsers', but the question really is to what extent the current set up of educational institutions will be able to embrace the idea of a postanthropocentric unlearning. Many educational policy makers would probably argue that school curricula have already been eroded too much by the imperative to digitally transform them. How to avoid a backlash under these circumstances, i.e. back to good old humanist values of '*Bildung*' in the face of existential threats is a major challenge.