Chapter 7:   Posthumanism 'Without' Technology, or How the Media Made Us Post/Human: From Originary Technicity to Originary Mediality

Bedrängender als die Technik selbst ist die Frage nach ihr. [Even more pressing than technology is the question concerning it.][1]

Do we not see, in this original human, that 'human nature' consists only in its technicity, in its denaturalization?[2]

What – if anything – is *technical* about originary technicity?[3]

Posthumanism as discourse

In *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (2013) I started from the premise that in order to clarify the terminology it would be crucial to distinguish between posthuman, posthumanism and posthumanist. The posthuman (noun and adjective) I would argue is best thought of as a 'figure' and has been recently analysed in all its dangers and potentials by Rosi Braidotti. Posthumanism (together with its adjective and noun: posthumanist), on the other hand, I would insist, first of all refer to a 'discourse'. This was and remains my starting point for my 'take' on posthumanism:

> A discourse is in fact the entirety of the statements and practices that relate to an 'object', which in this case would be the 'posthuman', 'posthumanity' and 'posthumanization', etc. - objects which are constituted 'discursively'. Whether this discourse is describing reality or not and whether it does so 'realistically', is of course of great importance but it is not the only aspect. Since a discourse can weave itself around a real or fictive discursive object over a long period of time by insisting, repeating and emphasizing information, this object might eventually become the centre of cultural politics, fascination and power within people's imagination and in a sense ends up 'constructing' its own 'reality'. On the other hand, a discourse usually describes something that 'actually' exists, but which only now can be described discursively for the first time so to speak. Whether the posthuman actually exists, or whether it only lives in the imagination of some cultural critics, popular scientists, prophets of technological change or marketing managers, becomes more or less irrelevant as soon as a broad public opinion starts embracing it as plausible and *believes* that something like the posthuman either already exists, that it might be in the process of emerging, or that it might have become somehow 'inevitable'. In a similar move,

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[1] Martin Heidegger, *Leitgedanken zur Entstehung der Metaphysik, der Neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft und der Modernen Technik*, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 76 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2009), p. 358; my translation.

[2] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 148.

[3] Louis Armand, in Armand and Arthur Bradley, eds., *Technicity* (Prague: Litteraia Pragensia, 2006), p. 86.

all the statements about posthumanist practices whether positive or negative contribute in some form to the emergence and existence of the posthuman and posthumanity.[4]

Furthermore, within this discourse a number of positionings, approaches and philosophical moves can be distinguished in turn. These might be said to constitute a portfolio of 'posthumanisms'. Most of these would start with the by now rather banal opening gambit, namely a return to Kant's fourth question as the foundation of philosophical anthropology: What is man? Or, translated into its more contemporary version: What does it mean to be human? And then what usually follows is an analysis of the current situation which requires a new answer to this question, and which, then, determines the project or programme of that particular 'posthumanist' agenda. So for example: whether one starts with the question, what does it mean to be human under the conditions of new digital and social media, new technologies (AI, nano, info, cogno, bio, etc.)? Or, what does it mean to be human in our current accelerated phase of globalisation (financial, geographic, cultural, social, ecological, political…)? Or, what does it mean to be human in the face of various current extinction threats, or postsecularism, or the post-Western condition, etc.? Each time, these analytical starting points and stances with their respective political and/or ethical programmes, even though they may of course intersect or indeed contradict each other, translate 'discursively' into a specific agenda, a project or a programme with their respective 'solutions'. In general, however, what they all seem to share is one aspect that not so long ago would have been referred to as 'technological determinism' or simply 'futurism'.

It is worth bearing in mind that neither technological determinism nor futurism had a particularly good press in the second half of the 20th Century. Today, however, both seem to have become an integral part of posthumanist discourse. Technology and future in fact could be named as the key words, and arguably even the transcendental signifieds of most posthumanisms. However, there is also a whole critical spectrum of more or less self-reflexive engagements regarding technology and future – and as a result, there is almost a world of difference within attitudes to and theorisations of, or the 'putting-into-discourse-of' technology (what Mark Hansen refers to as 'technesis'),[5] and the question as to what extent humans might 'use' technology or are 'being used' by it (instrumentalism), or who comes first, the 'human' or the 'tool' and to what extent they might have mutually constituted themselves (interactionism). This is partly expressed in the use of concepts and distinctions between technics, technique, technology and technicity. The same is true for futurism and conceptualisations of the future, which also comes in a whole spectrum of versions, from utopian to apocalyptic, and very often science fictional modes, which ironically bracket the most essential aspect of the future, namely 'futurity' as such, understood

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[4] Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Anaylsis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 36-37.
[5] Mark Hansen, *Embodying* Technesis: *Technology Beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

as the radical openness and alterity of the 'to-come' (or as Derrida put it, in *Specters of Marx*, the *arrivant*).[6]

This is related to the fact that the term 'post-human-ism' requires one further problematisation. Whenever a 'post' is involved, as in posthuman, posthumanism, posthumanity, posthumanisation, etc., the Derridean 'postal principle' is already at work – and thus we are already in a system of relays, postings, and ambiguities between 'befores' and 'afters', one-upmanship, anxieties of influence, impossible legacies and repressed origins, etc. In fact, this applies to posthumanisms even more so than to previous postisms, since the stakes the term raises clearly attain ontotheological levels – it is 'our' very 'nature', our 'being' and our 'survival', in short our very 'we' of humanness and humanity that is at stake in posthumanism. This is then definitely the time, it seems, as Foucault, Agamben, Esposito and many scientists and ethics committees have been telling us, when the only form of politics and ethics available are *bio*politics and *bio*ethics. However, since the post in most posthumanisms also involves a more or less open connection to futurism there is also usually some time travel involved. The prospect of radical change in the (not so distant) future – the closeness and interdependence of science and fiction in posthumanist discourse was one of my main objects of analysis in *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*.

Ironically, following the strange dialectic of posting which opens up both the beginning and end of what is being 'posted', the notion of posthumanism also opens up the present or recent (as well as the not so recent) past as an important side-effect. Not only are the beginnings and endings of humanism and the human increasingly blurred, but one could also say that the acceleration of technological and medial change, with its outbidding of futurist scenarios in both theory, science and mediaculture, now threatens to annihilate both futurity and historicity, at the same time. The ubiquitous use of two phrases testifies to this, namely 'we have always already been x' and 'we have never been x'. As strategically useful and necessary as the critical stances behind the always already (e.g. we have always already been 'technological') and the never (e.g. we have never been human) might be, they come at a certain price of (more or less deliberate) ideological opacity, I would argue. In the context of post-human-ism, however, they threaten, as Claire Colebrook has rightly pointed out, the very possibility of an acting historical 'human' subject when it is historically, geopolitically and ecologically most needed:

> Rather than celebrating or affirming a posthuman world, where man no longer deludes himself with regard to his primacy or distinction, and rather than asserting the joyous truth of ecology where life is finally understood as one vast, self-furthering interconnected organic whole, we should perhaps take note of the violent distinction of the human. For some time now, humans have been proclaiming their capacity to render themselves figurally extinct. All those claims for man's specialness, for the distinction of reason, for human exceptionalism have given way to claims for unity, mindfulness, the global brain and general

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[6] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994).

ecology. Alongside the actual threat humans pose in terms of contributing to an envisaged sixth wave of extinction, we are witnessing a virtual or imagined extinction.[7]

Colebrook, accordingly, sees popular posthumanism as a 'reaction formation' – a delusion manifested in extinction and 'species angst':

> But this sense of human absence is not only delusional; it is symptomatic and psychotic (…). Nowhere is this symptom of reaction formation more evident than in the discourse of post-humanism: precisely when man ought to be a formidable presence, precisely when we should be confronting the fact that the human species is exceptional in its distinguishing power, we affirm that there is one single, interconnected, life-affirming ecological totality (…) the more numerous and intense the extinction threats appear to be, the more shrill becomes the cry that we have now become benevolently post-human. As the imminence of extinction looms large we shift into a myopic immanence, declaring that there is no life or world other than the one we know and give to ourselves.[8]

To recontextualise this for my purposes here, one could say that futurism and technological determinism tend to downplay historical (human) agency as 'weak', 'distributed', 'complex', or 'entangled' at a time when agency seems to be more urgent than ever. What is one to do under these presumably already posthuman or at least emergingly posthumanist conditions? One question that arises out of this is whether there is a different way of being 'posthumanist' – or, in short, how to be a *critical* posthumanist?

Critical Posthumanism, or Posthumanism 'Without' Technology

One could start to balance things out by attempting to 'unthink' the nexus that seems to inform most posthumanisms, namely the essential (and essentially modern or even modernist, one might add) link between technology and the future. And indeed, one could distinguish within posthumanist discourse between posthumanisms 'with' and posthumanism 'without' technology. The posthumanisms with technology tend to be futurist(ic), the ones without tend to be 'originary' (or 'anamnetic'), which means they are trying to recover, problematise, and rewrite 'origins' (mainly origins of the human and origins of technology), and in the process, attempt to open up the possibilities of other futures, or futures of the other. This is not unrelated to the entire discussion about modernity and the postmodern and to what Lyotard proposed in 'Rewriting Modernity', and would thus translate into a project one might call 'rewriting humanism' or even 'rewriting humanity':

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[7] Claire Colebrook, "Introduction: Extinction. Framing the End of the Species", in: Colebrook, ed., Extinction (Open Humanities Press – Living Books About Life, 201), n.p.; available online at: http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org/books/Extinction (accessed 9/11/2023).
[8] *Ibid*.

> Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity, and first of all modernity's claim to ground its legitimacy on the project of liberating humanity as a whole through science and technology. But (…) that rewriting has been at work, for a long time, in modernity itself.[9]

In this vein of rewriting, Ivan Callus and I attempted to show in what we called a 'thought experiment', namely to think a posthumanism without technology, if that were possible, that a posthumanism *without* technology would of course not only involve the most obvious modern technologies but also the notions of 'technics' and '*tekhne*', in the Heideggerian, 'poietic', sense, in general; and this would in the end lead to the total 'divestiture' of the human:

> For a posthumanism without technology, if it is to be rigorous, must envisage not only a 'posthumanism without instrumentum' – and hence a tool-less, machine-less and ultimately unmediated condition (itself unthinkable) that would render talk of 'cyborg synthetic ecstasy' (Wills…), 'downloaded consciousness' (Moravec…) or 'the prosthetic aesthetic' […] utterly meaningless – but concurrently a 'posthumanism without poiesis' – and hence a negation of everything inherent to the potential of the human. The posthuman condition thus envisaged, deprived of bringing-forth and all possibility of advent-ness, and of invention and *inventio*, would constrict both expectation and event. In both 'withouts', in both of these despoliations of the essential, what must follow is the voiding or at any rate the denaturing of the human. The posthuman, according to this view, could only really occur in the time of the exhaustion of the human and of its capacity for bringing-forth. Independently of whether the object of bringing-forth be truth, poetry, instrumentum, or idea, such a posthumanism without technology would be the most devastating experience of divestiture. There could be no emergence in this extreme experience of the end – only the unrelieved perpetuity of stasis.[10]

The end of the human thus necessarily throws us back to the question of the origin – a question that Bernard Stiegler explores in his series *Technics and Time*, which is an attempt to work through the forgetting of technics in Western Metaphysics since Plato. Stiegler uses the myth of Epimetheus – Prometheus's 'idiotic' brother – who was given the task to distribute properties to the animals, and who forgot to keep something for humans, so that his brother had to go and steal fire from the gods. This moment of originary appropriation of technics as the constitutional rupture between humans and animals through technology also corresponds to the beginning of a process of exteriorisation. The necessary technical supplementation of the human, or the human's origin in default, or his default of origin is, what Stiegler refers to as 'the fault of Epimetheus'.[11] In a deconstructive reading of Leroi-Gourhan's account of hominisation, Stiegler connects the idea of originary technicity with that of the

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[9] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 34.
[10] Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3.2/4.1 (2006): 19.
[11] Stiegler *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, p. 16.

prosthesis, the 'de-fault' of origin and the 'emergence' of exteriorisation. Hominisation thus 'happens' through technological exteriorisation, but the important aporia that arises here lies in the fact that it is an exteriorisation 'without' origin, without any 'previous' interiority. Here is the central paragraph taken from a chapter entitled "Who? What? The Invention of the Human":

> There is no anticipation, no time outside of this passage outside, of this putting-outside-of-self and this alienation of the human and its memory that 'exteriorization' is. *The question is the very ambiguity of the word 'exteriorization'* and the hierarchy or the chronological, logical, and ontological preeminence that it immediately induces: if indeed one could speak of exteriorization, this would mean the presence of a preceding interiority. Now, this interiority is nothing outside of its exteriorization: the issue is therefore neither that of an interiority nor that of an exteriority – but that of an originary complex in which the two terms, far from being opposed, compose with one another (and by the same token are posed, in a single stroke, in a single movement). Neither one precedes the other, the origin being then the coming into adequacy [*con-venance*] or the simultaneous arrival of the two – which are in truth the same considered from two different points of view. We shall later name this structure the *complex of Epimetheus*… The prosthesis is not a mere extension of the human body; it is the constitution of this body *qua* 'human'.[12]

After this complication of the 'default of origin' which constitutes the idea of originary technicity, we are now at a point where we can say that the post- of posthuman, or indeed posthumanism as a whole, in fact, becomes almost a misnomer and turns into a near synonym of the prefix 'proto-'. Posthumanism without technology and 'originary technicity', depending on one's chronological focus, might indeed be understood as a kind of 'proto-humanism'. The impossible origins of the human one could thus say lie *before* the human, with all the semantic implications of the preposition 'before' – one of which would correspond to the idea of 'proto' (this would coincide, in French, with the preposition and adverb '*depuis*', which can express spatial as well as temporal originarity).[13]

By way of further illustration, we can relate this idea to Mikhail Epstein's focus on the 'proto-' in his *The Transformative Humanities*:

> A 'post-post-postmodern' culture suddenly views itself as a proto-global, proto-virtual, proto-biotechnic, proto-synthetic one. Everything that the previous generation perceived under the sign of the 'post-', this generation views as 'proto-'; not as a completion, but rather as a first draft of new cultural forms.[14]

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[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153; cf. also David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[13] cf. also Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, pp. 172-173. I further explore the temporality of the 'before' in my *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[14] Mikhail Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 28.

To follow this logic to its conclusion, however, the ultimate and unsurpassable 'proto' and the horizon of anthropomorphism is the idea of the 'pre-' or 'proto-human' – 'before' technology, 'before' memory, and 'before' humanity. What, indeed, one might ask, remains once all of these are 'unthought', so to speak. Who is this 'human-without' (as Martin Crowley called 'him', following Jean-Luc Nancy, in *L'Homme sans*)?[15]

3. Posthumanism and the Media, or from Originary Technicity to Originary Mediality

As we have seen, in the vicinity of the protohuman and the thought experiment of a reverse process of hominisation – the 'unthinking' or total divestiture outlined above – lies the argument of 'originary technicity' as well as the idea of 'ancestrality' (both in Richard Dawkins's[16] and Quentin Meillassoux's[17] sense). The idea of originary technicity, ever since Richard Beardsworth first used the phrase to spell out the implications of Derrida's "spectralizing effect of the originary supplement", has been gaining in currency and conceptual appeal. It has, in fact, helped to fuel precisely the kind of 'always already x and 'never x' game outlined above and has thus contributed to the shrinking of history (and the human), or the compression of time and space that accounts for the current and ubiquitous feeling of acceleration and the idea of the 'phasing out' or 'dephasing' of the human. However, to be fair, this is a stance that Beardsworth had already characterised as "irresponsible":

> Within such a perspective, or its opposite (the prioritization of the technical over the human), one is not considering either the human or technics according to the constitutive relation '*between*' the human and the non-human. Today such lack of consideration is politically blind and irresponsible.[18]

My argument, following Beardsworth here, would be that for all its compelling persuasiveness and postanthropological subversiveness there is something missing in the idea of 'originary technicity'. The Derridean logic of the originary supplement that triggers the entire process of 'auto-immunitarian' (Western) metaphysics would be incomplete without its own deconstructive 'virus'. Deconstruction is inscribed from the beginning in this process (which means that it literally always escapes, predates, provokes the notion of origin).This unlocatable originary supplement is that which in

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[15] Martin Crowley, *L'Homme sans – Politiques de la finitude* (Paris: Lignes, 2009).

[16] "Backward chronology in search of ancestors really can sensibly aim towards a single distant target. The distant target is the grand ancestor of all life, and we can't help converging upon it no matter where we start – elephant or eagle, swift or salmonella, wellingtonia or woman" (Richard Dawkins, *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgramage to the Dawn of Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), p. 12).

[17] "The arche-fossil enjoins us to *track* thought by inviting us to discover the 'hidden passage' trodden by the latter in order to achieve what modern philosophy has been telling us for the past two centuries is impossibility itself: *to get out of ourselves*, to grasp the in-itself, to know what is whether we are or not" (Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 27.

[18] Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 147.

turn causes the history of remediations that posthumanism today is working through, so that history at last might open up to the entirely other future in which the relationship between human and *techne* might no longer be understood in any purely instrumental or interactionist way.

What I would like to point out, however, is that there is no necessity for this unknowable, out-of-time origin 'before' humanity, to be in any way 'technical', neither in the Heideggerian nor Stieglerian sense. I think, taking Derrida's notions of originary supplement and arch-writing in a predominantly technical sense (as Stiegler does in focusing on the history of hypomnemata, in his three volumes on *Technics and Time*, for example) would still in my view amount in the end to a metaphysical reappropriation of the present. It is still what you could call a 'retrospective teleology', explaining progress and evolution retroactively. In short, it would risk misunderstanding deconstruction by turning technics and the idea of originary technicity into the new historical horizon for contemporary 'post/human' agency.

Again, it was Beardsworth who already recognised this danger and consequently foregrounded the originary '*dédoublement*', the 'always already' at work in radical alterity itself – the always presupposed radical alterity 'before' the distinction between the human and the nonhuman, 'before' the human and its technical other – who or which (and this ambiguity is constitutive) nevertheless always precedes and gives rise to their very distinction 'in the first place' (which is basically another interation of Derrida's 'originary supplement'). Beardsworth refers to this as the Derridean logic of the promise as the supplement to every origin:

> [I]f time is from the first technically organized, if access to the experience of time is only possible through technics, then the 'promise' must be *more originary* than 'originary technicity'. Even if they are inseparable – and what else is the law of contamination but this inextricability? – they are not on the same 'ontological' level. There are, consequently, 'two' instances of 'radical alterity' here which need articulation and whose relation demands to be developed: the radical alterity of the promise and the radical alterity of the other prior to the ego of which one modality (and increasingly so in the coming years) is the technical other. While inseparable, both these instances cannot be originary, without making the concept 'originary' nonsensical.[19]

What we have here is an early deconstruction of the concept of originarity even before the idea of originary technicity became so central to posthumanism. This, from a critical posthumanist point of view, forms an opportunity to think the originary differently, by envisaging another conceptuality of origin, namely as that of a 'relation' or mediation between human and nonhuman others, whether technical or not.

This would prompt a return to earlier philosophies of relation and mediation. As Pierre-Jean Labarrière, in line with a long list and a whole scholastic tradition of philosophers before him, writes in *Le Discours de l'altérité* (1983): "In the beginning

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[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

[is] the relation".[20] Labarrière was Derrida's main interlocutor in an exchange about the notions of alterity and alteration, in 1984, published in *Altérités*.[21] Its main topic was the articulation of a number of important distinctions: "The Other and the others… Difference and différance… Alterity and alteration… The Other as Other and as relation… The logic of the break (or of interruption) and the logic of mediation…".[22] In Labarrière's work, the logic of alteration or mediation involves the idea of being-towards, of irreducible movement and transit, whereas the logic of interruption is underpinned by ontological self-identity, which leads to two very different and equally problematic attitudes towards alterity (human, nonhuman, spiritual, secular…). He recognises this in the closing discussion in which Derrida and Labarrière almost seem to come to an agreement when they ultimately conclude that *différance* is (nothing but) a "relation":

> Derrida said earlier that there was, on the one hand, a logic of mediation, always situated inside an explanation of the homo-geneous, which, in the end, never leaves the economy of the same behind; and, on the other hand, a logic of interruption which alone would enable one to account for the other as other. As far as I am concerned, I try to link them, and to understand mediation as perpetually originating (in) itself, at the centre of itself, in this signifying interruption by which alone it is a production of meaning.[23]

Just in parenthesis, there are in this passage, of course also many echoes of a certain positioning between Derrida and Deleuze, and the notion of mediation/alteration is indeed clearly related to the Deleuzian (or rather Spinozian) notion of 'becoming'. What I would like to stress, however, is that one could use Labarrière's starting point to reread the idea of originary technicity not so much, or at least not exclusively, along the lines of a logic of interruption (i.e. of failed or impossible self-identity), but, following the logic of mediation, as what I would like to call 'originary mediality', or: in the beginning was mediality.

I would further like to think of this foregrounding of the logic of mediation or remediation as another kind of supplement, or a 're-medial' turn, more originary even than what Mark Hansen refers to as the 'medial turn':

> It is precisely because media contaminates thinking at the same time as it makes thinking possible that we can affirm (…) that media determines our situation: by giving the empirical-technical infrastructure for thought, by specifying a certain technical materiality for the possibility of thinking, media remains an ineliminable, if unthematizable, aspect of the experience that gives rise to thought.[24]

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[20] Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Le Discours de l'altérité* (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 15 ; my translation.

[21] Jacques Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, eds, *Altérités* (Paris: Osiris, 1986); translated in Stefan Herbrechter, ed., *Alterities*, special issue of *Parallax* 33 (2004).

[22] Labarrière, in Herbrechter, *Alterities*, p. 1.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[24] Mark Hansen, "Media Studies", in: Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 352.

To remediate and remedy the danger of a return in this passage to an opposition between thinking and its technical or media 'channel' or expression, I would argue, from a paleontological point of view, similar to Labarrière above, that it was the medium – which in itself is not a 'thing' but a process, a becoming or a mediation – that made 'us' human, and, which, in the 21st Century seems now set to make us somehow posthuman, so the current narrative goes at least. Hominisation in this way would in fact be synonymous with a long history of 'remediation', following and extending Bolter and Grusin's approach. As they explain in "The Double Logic of Remediation", with reference to new media and a focus on the contemporary:

> We will argue that these new media are doing exactly what their predecessors have done: presenting themselves as refashioned and improved versions of other media. Digital visual media can best be understood through the ways in which they honor, rival, and revise linear-perspective painting, photography, film, television, and print. No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media.[25]

Taking into account the logic of (re)mediation, Stiegler's account of technicity would thus have to be substituted with an equally far-reaching history of human (and nonhuman) mediality, with a special emphasis on human (and nonhuman) agency as alteration, mediation or transformation.

Stiegler hints at this himself when he speaks of "the already-there" of epiphylogenesis in a passage where he returns to the idea of the "invention of the human" (double genitive):

> The 'paradox of exteriorization' led us to say that the human and the tool invent each other, that there is something like a technical maieutics. Consequently, the vector of epiphylogenetics, at the dawn of hominization, is flint (…). Epiphylogenesis, a recapitulating, dynamic, and morphogenetic (*phylogenetic*) accumulation of individual experience (*epi*), designates the appearance of a new relation between the organism and its environment, which is also a new state of matter. If the individual is organic organized matter, then its relation to its environment (to matter in general, organic or inorganic), when it is a question of a who, is **mediated** by the organized but inorganic matter of the *organon*, the tool with its instructive role (its role *qua* instrument), the *what*. It is in this sense that the *what* invents the *who* just as much as it is invented by it.[26]

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[25] J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 14-15.
[26] Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, pp. 175-177; my bold type.

I am emphasising the word 'mediated' in this passage because, here, Stiegler himself presupposes what one could call an originary process of mediation, before even the emergence of any originary technicity – a process of mediation before any who and what can be distinguished, but which is, at the same time, originarily constituting the 'rupture' between any who and what, as Tracy Colony comments:

> According to Stiegler, the difference between the general time of life and the specific temporality that defines the human as such is to be understood as a rupture. This passage from the nonhuman to the human is understood as the moment life first becomes mediated through an external technological inscription via which time first becomes temporalized.[27]

One again, in this commentary on Stiegler, the word 'mediated' appears as if almost inevitably. It is this originary *mediation* (which in fact, is probably merely another synonym of Derridean *différance*) that I am interested in here.

In order to bring this aspect into clearer focus, it is important not to forget or repress the distinction between technics and medium, which today seems to have been almost but erased: the intensive technicity of contemporary media tends to hide the originary mediality of things technical. Techniques, technologies and technomedia would again have to be understood as expressions of irreducible and originary processes of mediation (or alterations between 'other' and 'self'). To reread the history of metaphysics as a repression of technics would thus only address half the problem, if it did not also tackle its underlying forms of mediality, of which orality, literacy and digitality would only be the most obvious and substantial stages ('*dispositifs*', or apparatuses, as one might say, following Foucault, Agamben, but also Gregory Ulmer).[28] Indeed, what the logic of alteration/mediation addresses is the underlying teleology of any history of technics and hominisation. Technicity necessarily reconstructs the past from the present point of view of global media-technological society in the sense: that it believes that the underlying desire of a history of technics is to find out how we became this high-tech species we are today? Originary mediality, on the other hand, stubbornly stays originary in this context. Its largely unarticulated and unarticulable pre- or protoconscious processes of becoming are not organised along the lines of succession, they are so to speak always 'co-present' in (technical) *différance.*

The account of *How We Became Posthuman* offered by Hayles would therefore also have to be rewritten, not only along the obvious originary technical lines of 'we have always already been posthuman', or (with a Latourian twist) 'we have never been human', but by taking into account the logic of originary mediation/alteration: what makes us human/posthuman/inhuman/protohuman are the specific available processes of mediation which lie outside any notion of subjectivity (in fact, they are what gives rise to historically, materially and technically specific subjectivities), but

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[27] Tracy Colony, "Epimetheus Bound: Stiegler on Derrida, Life, and the Technological Condition", *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011): 74.
[28] This aspect is further explored in Chapters 7 and 8 of this volume, in the context of 'posthumanism and education'.

which are cannot be reified as phenomena or objects. Even more importantly, neither do they 'disappear'. The specificity under which contemporary new, digital and social media return us to the idea of originary mediality lies precisely in their foregrounding of their own logic of mediation/alteration and their downplaying of the logic of interruption and self-identity. They seem to facilitate a form of mediation 'outside' modern ideas of society, politics and representation. In this sense, the term 'social media' might in fact be a misnomer and should arguably be replaced with 'a-social media'. Digitalisation, virtualisation and biomedia point towards a return to almost pre- or proto-ontological, ancestral or archaic forms of alterity with their respective forms of mediation. They might thus have the power to raise the stakes not only in a technoteleological or technofuturistic sense but also in a media-ecological sense – i.e. they foreground the question: how to live 'with', 'in' or 'through', and maybe 'worst' of all 'for' media. This is underpinned both by the move towards 'deep time' and 'media archaeology' in contemporary media theory or media philosophy.[29]

Postscript: Posthumanism and the Future of the Humanities

In this move towards deep time and media archaeology also lie, to my mind, the main institutional implications and challenges for the humanities (calling for the 'humanities-to-come' or, indeed, the 'posthumanities') – if the humanities do have an institutional future at all that is.

There is today a widely recognised need for the humanities to 'open up' towards questions of technicity and mediality, to engage dialogues with the sciences, social sciences, and all kinds of praxes and cultures which, together with the economic and financial assault on the humanities, comes along as an almost irresistible call for the humanities to engage with the contemporary, to be forward-looking, in short 'relevant' (in a more or less utilitarian, economic and instrumentalist sense). However, one could argue that this also points towards an increased need for the humanities to resist their own processes of 'posthumanisation' and 'deanthropocentring'. In fact, who else would *care*, in the sense of creating and defending the possibility for resistance – even without knowing exactly what needs to be resisted nor defended (as yet) – than the humanities? This is why there is a clear positioning *vis-à-vis* this process, which I have been referring to under the label 'critical posthumanism' (CPH). The 'critical' in CPH, precisely, insists on this aspect of resistance – which should not be misinterpreted as conservative or nostalgic or, indeed, 'neohumanist' in any sense. Instead, 'critical' refers more to the idea of a much needed rereading of the 'critical tradition'. It seems that this critical tradition today finds itself threatened in its very humanist foundations. Humanism, just like posthumanism, in this sense is to be understood as a discursive formation as well of course, with associated cultural practices, ethical imperatives, institutions, subject positions, ideologemes, behaviours, forms of capital, habitus etc. The 'critical' in CPH signals the responsibility

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[29] Cf. Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); and Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

to inherit this tradition and to adapt it to the changing circumstances of digitalisation, virtualisation, ecologisation – in short, posthumanisation. It argues for new readings informed by forms of resistance which already exist within humanism itself. 'Reading' is meant here both in a literal and figurative sense. The very humanist notion of reading which finds itself threatened under the emerging apparatus of 'electracy' (to use Greg Ulmer's, mostly forgotten, term),[30] or, as I would prefer to call it, 'mediality', is in crisis. This constitutes both: a threat to the humanist-philological notion of reading, but also a triumph (in Paul de Man's sense, following on from what he had to say about the 'resistance to theory')[31] in the form of a generalisation. Extending the notion of reading to virtually all phenomena and cultural practices (which constituted the very project of cultural and media studies, or theory more generally) comes at the price of necessarily reimporting and extending humanist-philological reading practices. CPH is thus trying to do the impossible (but I also believe the absolutely necessary) in providing an ongoing deconstruction of this humanist-philological critical tradition, including its very foundation ('always already') in crisis and criticality, while, at the same time, engaging with the futurism and technological determinism – the 'post-' of 'posthumanism' and its discourse – by taking it seriously, namely 'literally'.

What does this mean in practice, or in 'applied' research terms, which is the current language of combined commercial and state funding regimes of the corporate university? An analysis of the genealogy and the archeology of the posthuman, the process of posthumanisation, the role of technics, technique and technology, as separate form their mediality, seem to me to remain the inevitable starting point for a humanities or even posthumanities approach. This comes even before any politics of interdisciplinarity and involves keeping open while also transforming the conditions for what should have always been informing the humanities anyway, namely 'radical imaginaries' – or, to use Derrida's phrase, the 'university without condition' with its fundamental principle of 'fictionality', without which no democracy would be thinkable.[32] One might capture this mode of analysis with the phrase 'constructions of the future', both in the active sense of subjects constructing their futures (but of course not under the conditions of their own making), but also in a critical sense of analysing futures in the process of their construction (i.e. in the face of the alterity and radical futurity of the 'to-come'). This futural aspect is closely related to the protection as well as the opening up of the (human) 'archive' and the very history of the transformations of archivisation and mediality, at work in Derrida and Stiegler. This also goes hand-in-hand with the already mentioned histories and archaeologies of remediations (human and nonhuman, pre-, proto- and posthuman) and their environments, socialities, as well as their materialities and embodiments.

From a *critical* posthumanist point of view the kind of media-(post)-anthropology I have been advocating here would in fact transform the humanities maybe not so much into the post- but rather the 'inhumanities' (in Lyotard's sense of the

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[30] Gregory Ulmer, *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy* (New York: Longman, 2003).

[31] Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

[32] Jacques Derrida, "The University Without Condition", *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 202-237.

'inhuman').[33] Most importantly, and this has been the main argument here, this would involve an awareness and analysis of the originary *mediality* between and giving rise to the human and the nonhuman, the organic and the inorganic etc., and the specific processes of mediation that continue to produce their differences and transformations.

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[33] Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (1991).