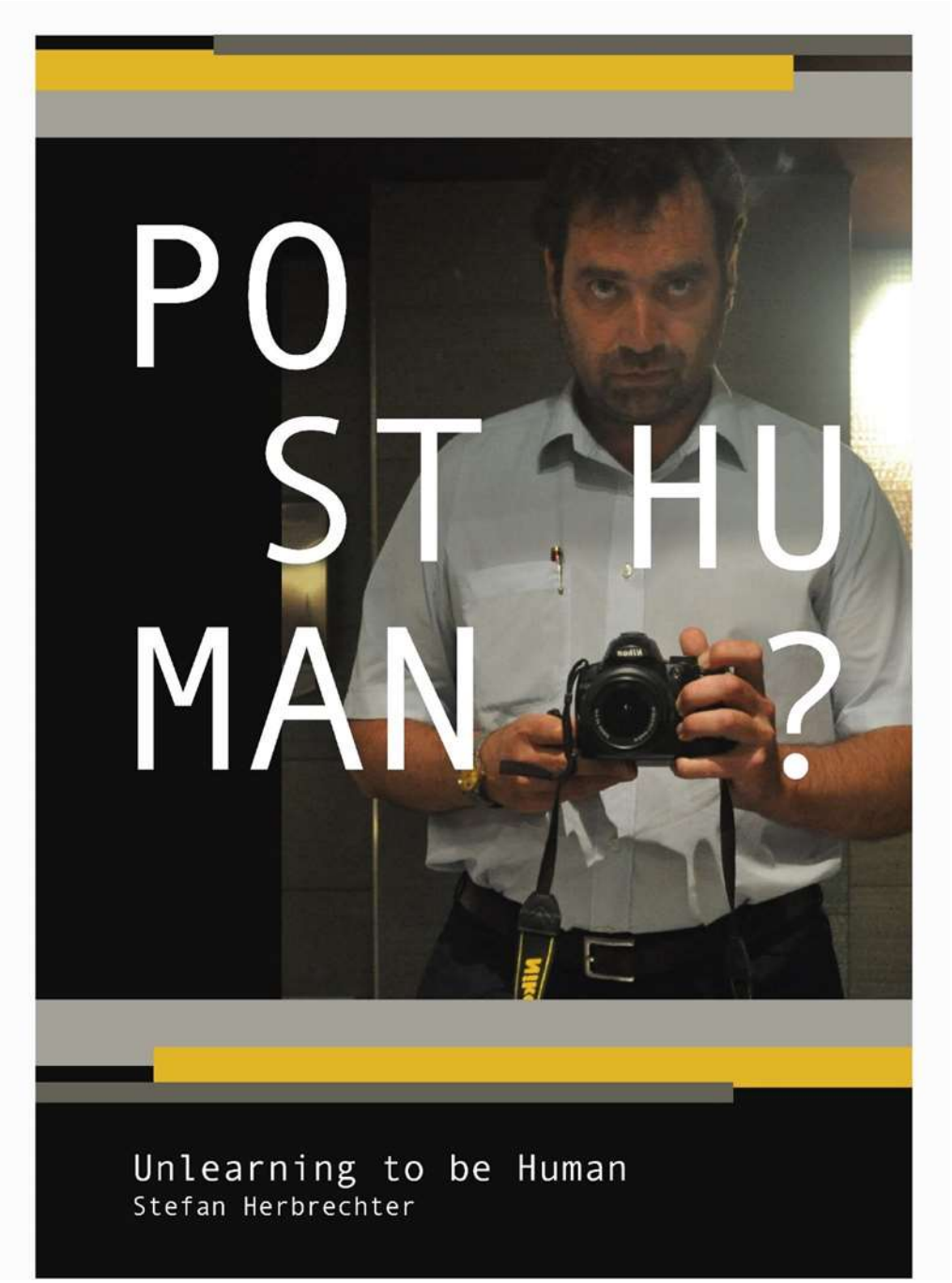

(Un)Learning to Be Human

Collected Essays on Critical Posthumanism, Volume 1

Contents:

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- *Chapter 10* is an augmented English version of a keynote presented at the *Posthumanismus. Transhumanismus. Jenseits des Menschen?* Conference held at the University of Graz, in May 2022.

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Preface: Returning to Critical Posthumanism

Arguably, what has come to be known as 'critical posthumanism' (henceforth: CPH) took off from a specific place and intellectual climate in the 1990s and early 2000s.[1] It arose out of the Cardiff Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory (1988-2018), which was one of the leading places for (British) poststructuralism and (French) Theory—a combination of Barthesian semiology, Foucauldian genealogy and biopolitics, Althusserian Marxism, Derridean deconstruction, cultural materialism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lyotard's inhumanism, Cixous' *écriture féminine*, Said's orientalism, and Spivak's and Bhabha's postcolonialism. One probably recognises poststructuralists by the way they use the notion of the subject in and of ideology, subscribe to a generalised idea of textuality and inscription, and emphasise the materialist and political dimension of representation, as well as media and communication more generally. Poststructuralism's stance has been antihumanist, in the form of an attack on the liberal humanist tradition (as the dominant ideology that interpellates human subjects as free individuals while, at the same time, aligning freedom merely with a choice of commodities and consumption with identity, with the aim of shoring up the hegemony of global and neoliberal capitalism). From the start, poststructuralism was therefore also critical of humanism's claims towards universalism, its repression of difference, and its essentialist notion of identity.

Critical posthumanism is a continuation, extension, and, in many respects, radicalization of this poststructuralist critique under new conditions. Global historical events and developments (such as the end of the Cold War, 9/11 and the global war on terror, accelerated and human-induced climate change, the 2008 financial crisis, COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and the Near East) and technological and media change (digitalisation, bio- and geoengineering) have led to shifts and transformations in theory ('after' theory) in order to be able to explain new forms of subjectivity, postanthropocentric notions of politics, ethics and justice, and new ontologies and materialisms.

[1] To be even more precise, I think it started in a PhD reading group on Lyotard's *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) around 1996. Regularly present were Neil Badmington, Ivan Callus, Simon Malpas, Laurent Milesi, and myself. Neil went on to edit a reader entitled *Posthumanism* (Badmington, ed., *Posthumanism: A Reader* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000)), arguably the first publication that *explicitly* sees posthumanism as the 'ongoing deconstruction of humanism' (see below). Of course, others had prepared the ground for this—Donna Haraway as early as 1985 in her 'Cyborg Manifesto' (in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991)); Cary Wolfe as early as 1998 in his first text on Derridean deconstruction and Luhmannian systems theory (Wolfe, *Critical Environments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)); and certainly N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), which opens up the critique of cybernetics and the question of (posthuman) disembodiment. Also, important and often unfairly neglected today is Elaine Graham's *Representing the Post/Human* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). However, it is this peculiar mix of ideas and reading practices deriving out of what could be called the 'Cardiff School' of the time that can explain the shifts from 'sign to trace', the focus on and problematisation of the idea of taking postanthropocentrism 'literally', and of how to read from a 'posthumanist' point of view, that I would claim as recognisable gestures of CPH (see Herbrechter, *Posthumanismus – Eine kritische Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009) and *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

If one is looking for an iconic figure for this post- or nonhuman turn it is probably a safe bet to look towards Donna Haraway's idea of the cyborg as a deconstructive figure. The cyborg highlights the impossibility of a radical distinction between human/animal and human/machine, both from a contemporary point of view (i.e. under technocultural and technoscientific conditions), but also genealogically (i.e. by looking back at the history of Western metaphysics, its inclusions and exclusions, its policing of boundaries; especially between the human and the nonhuman) and its practices of 'ontological hygiene' (Elaine Graham's term). CPH begins, strategically, with a critical engagement with science fictional utopian visions while, at the same time, continuing to perform a critique of humanist tradition and human self-understanding. Instead it promotes a vision of the human, 'its' environment and nonhuman 'others' that is postanthropocentric. It opposes the idea of human exceptionalism.

CPH is thus looking forward and backward at the same time in order to, on the one hand, resist the dehumanizing tendencies of late global technoscientific biopolitical capitalism and anthropogenic climate change (i.e. 'our' time), and, on the other hand, to rewrite the anthropocentrism of the humanist tradition by emphasising differences within the very category of the human (e.g. gender, age, race, species) in the search for 'multispecies justice' (Haraway's term).[2]

In other words, CPH thus understood is the ongoing deconstruction of humanism and certainly not the idea that we can or will soon be able to simply leave that humanist tradition behind. It is even less the phantasm of some kind of transhumanist transcendence of the human or the preparation for some superhuman intelligence. This is why it is so important to differentiate between posthumanism (and posthumanist) as a discourse and the posthuman as a figure. Posthumanism as a discourse (in the Foucauldian sense) produces knowledge about questions like: who or what comes after the human?, or: have we ever been human?, and: under what conditions does it make sense to speak of 'humanity' at all? It proceeds by finding, constructing, and proliferating alternative posthuman figures and practices. It shows that we have never been human in the way that traditional humanism (or indeed transhumanism) want to make us believe. Instead, it starts from the assumption that there is no human essence that makes 'us' fundamentally different from other nonhuman animals and other others, including technical and inorganic ones. It is predicated on a process of becoming human 'otherwise'—a process one might call posthumanisation—and which is originary, in the sense that 'we' have always been in the process of becoming (with) other(s). Deflecting—deconstructing—humanism is the only way to open up a future that promises justice to both humans (their unquestionable achievements and future development) and nonhuman others (their differences, their alterities but also their undeniable similarities).

[2] Cf. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

Introduction: Critical Posthumanism – Ten Years On

What I offered as a definition in 2013, in what was one of the first comprehensive introductions to the emerging theoretical paradigm of CPH, can still serve as a useful starting point into what has been proving to be a long and ongoing learning or rather unlearning process:

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

At the time (written in its original German version in 2009 and translated by myself into English in 2013), this volume and its definition provided a critical analysis of the first twenty years of posthumanism as an emergent theoretical discourse and academic field of enquiry. Today, one can certainly claim that posthumanism is no longer emergent but widely discussed and established. This preface focuses on what posthumanism and its critique have become, what they have been evolving into.

CPH – it is worth stressing again – is prompted but *not determined by* recent technocultural change (i.e. mostly digitalisation, biotechnology and artificial intelligence). The reference to the techno*cultural* aspect of the changes CPH addresses is meant to stress the case against technological autonomy (or technological determinism) even while accepting and promoting the idea of a co-evolution of technics and culture. The critical angle of *critical* posthumanism arises out of a positioning, an attitude or indeed an affective state *vis-à-vis* familiar ambiguities residing in well-established binaries – namely of apocalypse and transcendence, end and beginning, utopian and dystopian visions of (technocultural) progress, as well as of continuity and discontinuity, and, of course, humanism and antihumanism. Most importantly, however, it characterises an ethical and political stance that promises to take seriously the problem of anthropocentrism and its deconstruction.

Even though the definition is thus largely still valid, the ten years or so since its publication have also seen some important new dynamics and perspectives, as well as a greater variety of theoretical strands relating to and developing out of the discourse of posthumanism and the figure of the posthuman. The aim of this preface is therefore that of a consolidation, but also of an extension, an account of diversification, and, indeed, by implication, also a critique of

[3] Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 3.

CPH and its first twenty years odd as a theoretical paradigm. There is thus both a retrospective and a synchronic mapping, as well as a more speculative forward-looking element. It is important to stress that CPH involves both an engagement with the present (and its future projections) and a rereading of traditional Western ways of making sense of the world and 'our' place in it – even though it is precisely the collective nature of the pronoun 'us' and the possessive 'our' that have been and continue to be challenged. The janus-faced nature of the challenge this positioning poses (looking backwards and forwards *at the same time*) is that posthumanism is itself very much implicated in the paradigm change and the emerging new worldviews it describes. In this interventionist sense, it is very much political. However, it is worth stressing once more that this is a general feature of critique, which always begins with an analysis of the perceived state of affairs, asks how this came about and what implications this might have for the current and future decision-making process. The fact that any critique has to go through these steps (and this is where critique becomes almost synonymous with how European philosophy has conceptualised thought as such) does not mean that critique should not itself be submitted to critique – in fact, one of the major developments around CPH is that it is having to engage precisely with such a critique of critique, especially following Bruno Latour's provocative and controversial claim that critique "has run out of steam".[4] This has certainly reminded everyone that any critique is situated, through a specific analysis of its time (and place), and cannot therefore form a last or definitive judgment. Another way of putting this is that critical analysis is co-implicated and to some extent also co-constitutional of the *discourse* it sets out to analyse.

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

There is, today, considerable scope for diversity and difference, sometimes even contradiction and divergence to be found in the field of 'posthuman studies' that the discussion about posthumanism and the posthuman have opened up. However, to achieve some (preliminary) sense of orientation, what one might identify as a most likely common denominator for the various accounts, narratives, and attempts to make sense of 'our posthuman times',[5] and that

[4] Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern", *Critical Inquiry* 30(2): 225-248; taken up by Rita Felski in *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) and many others). See also my contribution on "Critique" to the *Genealogy of the Posthuman* (2020); available online at: criticalposthumanism.net/critique (accessed 31/10/2023).

[5] Rosi Braidotti's phrase, in *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), p. 1.

the phrase 'critical posthumanism' covers and also helps to map, is a shared critique of humanism's anthropocentrism. The standard narrative of posthumanism and its rise goes something like this: it is a term that has been in use within academia from the early 1990s and has infiltrated a wide range of disciplines – from cultural studies, to geography, science studies, gender studies, theology and media studies,[6] philosophy, literary studies, theoretical sociology and communication studies[7] and animal studies.[8] As a paradigm of thought and a form of 'knowledge',[9] it can now be said to be touching virtually all traditional disciplines, sciences and all kinds of 'studies' (from cultural studies, women studies, to posthuman studies or extinction studies), all the while transforming them into new interdisciplinary formations grouped under the label 'posthumanities'.[10] As Ursula Heise explains:

> Since the mid-1990s… new paradigms have manifested themselves through interdisciplinary research labelled 'x-studies' or 'y humanities': disability studies, critical animal studies, and food studies, for instance, or medical humanities, digital humanities, and environmental humanities. Instead of shared philosophical foundations or clearly defined political aspirations, these new fields focus on clusters of problems and questions…[11]

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

What *critical* posthumanism *does* in each case is that it calls into question humanist or anthropocentric understandings of what humans are,[12] or what could be called, after Lyotard,[13] the humanist metanarrative – the idea that humans share a universal 'nature' or a species identity (an essential 'humanity'), that they are somehow 'exceptional' and radically different from (other) animals, on the one side, and from machines, on the other side, and that they are ultimately constituted as 'free' subjects who can determine their own history from a position above (the rest of) nature. Posthumanism instead questions the idea that something like 'nature' can be clearly distinguished from 'culture' or 'society', that a 'self' and 'identity' might be separated from the effects of 'otherness' and 'difference', that a 'body'

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[6] Neil Badmington, "Posthumanism", in: Simon Malpas and Paul Wake, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 240.

[7] Jonathan Bolter, "Posthumanism", in Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Robert T. Craig, eds., *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons), p. 1.

[8] Franklin Ginn, "Posthumanism", in: Lynn Turner, Undine Sellbach and Ron Broglio, eds., *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 413.

[9] Cf. Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, *passim*.

[10] Cary Wolfe, "About Posthumanities", series blurb (not dated); available online at: https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/series/posthumanities# (accessed 02/12/2020);
and Braidotti, *Posthuman Knoweldge*, *passim*.

[11] Ursula K. Heise, "The Environmental Humanities and the Futures of the Human", *New German Critique* 43(2): 21.

[12] Badmington, "Posthumanism", p. 240.

[13] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

might be extracted from its (technical, biological, social etc.) 'environment', or that there might be a strict dividing line between 'subject' and 'object'. While deconstructing traditional knowledge formations based on these binary or radical, mutually exclusive, and inherently gendered and racialised oppositions with their built-in hierarchies, CPH seeks to promote new ways of knowing that focus on aspects of entanglement, co-implication, hybridity and interdependence – or, more appropriately and in analogy to Karen Barad's concept of "intra-action":[14] intra-dependence – instead of distinction and division.

In this strategic move, CPH builds on various precursors, most importantly on the work of 'poststructuralist' thinkers like Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, Barthes, Irigaray, Althusser, Derrida, Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari, by radicalising and extending their antihumanist stance. The poststructuralists were reacting against structuralism and its attempt to produce 'objective' and 'scientific' knowledge of humans and their cultures. They did so by promoting a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'[15] based on the idea that the task of critical reading and interpretation is to debunk 'myths'[16] or 'naturalised' and thus unquestionable beliefs and their ideological motivations. This suspicion follows a genealogy of subversive thinking that goes back to Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud and the respective humiliations of human narcissism (or 'narcissistic wounds') their names stand for, as well as the humanist self-understanding of 'man' (or *Anthropos*) more generally. In the case of Darwinian evolution, 'man' is confronted with 'his' biological state as one primate amongst many; Marxism invalidates the notion that 'men' make their own histories and do so as free individuals; Nietzsche stands for a relativisation of truth and 'man's' will to power; and Freudian psychoanalysis denies that the conscious ego is in control of its 'own' thoughts, dreams and actions. In 'posthuman times' many other narcissistic wounds have been added to these (e.g. the challenges that deep time, big data, microbiology and artificial intelligence pose to the idea of autonomous human agency). In many ways, CPH draws logical and ecological conclusions from this critical genealogy, in that it turns its attention to the 'nonhuman', and privileges a holistic and inclusive approach to life (by seeing ontology as 'flat' or non-hierarchical). In doing so, as the definition above explains, it is bent on taking the notion of postanthropocentrism and its implications seriously.

Donna Haraway and her work on cyborgs, companion species and multispecies kinship;[17] N. Katherine Hayles and her rereading of the history of cybernetics through the lens of gender and embodiment, distributed cognition and symbiosis in and with new and digital media and 'code';[18] or Rosi Braidotti and feminist neomaterialism that seek a new politics based on a

[14] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
[15] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
[16] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [1957] (London: Vintage, 1993).
[17] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), and *Staying With the Trouble Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[18] Hayles, *How We became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), and *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

'posthuman' affirmation of life in all its forms,[19] to name but the most obvious and influential ones, are CPH's (s)heroes. The strong feminist involvement in posthumanist thinking is no coincidence. It arises out of the importance of humanism's disappointing track record in terms of gender (and racial) equality despite its claim of a universal reach (i.e. an essential 'humanity' based on globally shared values). The ideal subject of humanism, 'man' (or *Anthropos*), in fact was always a device based on presupposed and often unexamined patriarchal, Eurocentric, white, liberal political norms. Humanism continues to underpin contemporary institutions like 'human rights' organisations, and this makes them susceptible to critique as (neo)colonial and (post)imperialist instruments effectuating the continuation of a Western or Eurocentric supremacy.[20]

However, CPH itself does not go uncontested. As a political project it defines itself against two kinds of 'enemies': what one might refer to as 'neohumanisms', on the one hand, and 'transhumanisms', on the other hand. Let me start from the (not at all unproblematic assumption) that there is a shared geohistorical position from which all of these -isms arise, namely an agreement about 'where we are now', or what situation this imaginary planetary 'we' finds itself in today. There will already be significantly less of an agreement about the follow-up question, namely, of how we got in this position or predicament. In Braidotti's words, one could say, the 'posthuman condition' is to be "positioned between the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Sixth Extinction".[21] In other words, (post)humanity finds itself at an important juncture within the history of late- or indeed post-modernity, asking itself: where do we go from here? This sets out a (provisional) endpoint and two alternative future trajectories. The endpoint or latest stage within Western modernity, after the history of industrialisation, colonial exploitation and geological extraction (of oil – a carbon based economy and culture), has led to what an increasing number of geologists and climate scientists are referring to as the 'Anthropocene' (or the period that marks a time in which humans and their actions have become the most important factors of atmospheric or climate change, geological stratification or sedimentation) with all the potential implications of this for humans, nonhumans and planetary life in general.[22] The human-induced 'sixth extinction' wave,[23] is the latest in a series of planetary catastrophes and upheavals that have led to fundamental changes in the composition of (biological) life on planet Earth. Each time, this has triggered a mass extinction of life forms and thus a complete reshuffling of evolutionary cards. In the fifth extinction event (believed to be caused by the impact of a giant meteorite and the dramatic changes to the global climate this brought about) the dinosaurs went extinct, which probably paved the way for the rise of mammals and primates. The sixth extinction it

[19] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), and *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); see also Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms. Ontology, Agency and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

[20] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A History of Present Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[21] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowldege*, p. 2.

[22] Clive Hamilton, Christope Bonneuil and Franç Gemenne, eds., *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[23] Elisabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Macmillan, 2014).

seems is being announced by the current dramatic loss of biodiversity, which is attributed to human-induced climate change. It threatens to be an extinction event that also poses a serious threat to human survival and maybe complex life forms more generally.

The beginning and promise of a 'fourth phase' of modernity, facing the Anthropocene as a planetary challenge, reinvigorates calls for a supposedly unified and universalised human or a return of (or to) *Anthropo*s. It gives rise to the idea that technological progress is our best hope of survival (whatever that form of survival might actually look like and whoever might ultimately benefit from it), but it also exposes fundamental differences and injustices that these enormous challenges: only a minority of humans have been directly responsible for anthropogenic climate change (mainly wealthy, Western nations largely governed by socially privileged white males – or the 'man' of humanist discourse – and their 'extraction' practices); the effects of environmental destruction and degradation, however, are disproportionately felt by already-marginalised groups. For many, the crossroads 'humanity' finds itself at seems to imply that in the face of these global threats what 'we' need is a new humanism (and precisely *not*: a *post*humanism): a new humanism that at last will deliver on the promise of human equality. The main objection to this idea of 'making humans great again' (like some Trump-inspired 'populists' might call this project) lies in the uncertainty of how such a new humanism could possibly avoid excluding nonhuman others once again. Thus far, humanism has always in effect meant: 'humans first' (a certain analogy with recent US politics and a general antidemocratic populism, again, might be no coincidence).

While the main bone of contention between posthumanisms and neohumanisms remains the very notion of the 'human' and its meaning, the main argument between posthumanism and transhumanism is about the role and nature of technology. As already mentioned, from the perspective of *critical* posthumanism, posthumanism should not simply be *equated* with the rise of technoculture.[24] Critical posthumanists (even though not everybody writing about posthumanism and the posthuman would necessarily or unproblematically identify with this label) do not belittle the impact technology, and especially digitalisation, has had and is having on every aspect of human and nonhuman (co)existence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, they critique a simplistic (and predominantly utilitarian) notion of technology, which tends to see technology as an almost 'fated' transformative dynamic of human development and 'progress'. This is what clearly distinguishes CPH from *trans*humanism, which tends to see technological progress as the main or even only driving force of history. Within that history, the present moment is then seen as an evolutionary turning point at which humans find themselves in the process of evolving with, or into, their successor species. What causes some confusion is the fact that transhumanists often refer to this utopian successor species as 'posthuman', while for posthumanists the notion of the posthuman remains a very much contested 'figure' that calls for critical and genealogical analysis. Posthumans – those entities, subjects or forms of agency, who have undergone radical technological 'enhancement' or some form of 'transubstantiation' (e.g. by downloading their mind into a computer) – have thus either become a form of (superhuman) superintelligence or, indeed, have been superseded by some further evolved form of (trans- or posthuman) AI. In this, transhumanist, sense, posthumans are in fact the apotheosis of a

[24] Badmington, "Posthumanism", p. 241.

certain understanding of humanism that remains informed by Christian eschatological motifs. One might thus rightly call transhumanism a spiritual or pseudo-religious, technognostic hyperhumanism.[25] Transhumanist visions or fantasies of disembodiment are the logical consequence of a dualist mode of (Christian, Neoplatonic, Cartesian) thinking that distinguishes between body and mind, mortal flesh and immortal soul and believes in their separability. They see posthumanisation, or the transformation and eventual transcendence of the human into a new, posthuman, species, as a technologically desirable (or indeed inevitable) outcome of history, often referred to by mystical terms like the 'singularity'.[26] The transhumanist techno-euphoria forms the endpoint of the trajectory of human perfectibility that goes hand in hand with a rejection of current 'meatworld' (enfleshed, 'wetware', biological or 'carbon-based') materialism. Instead, it can be said to whole-heartedly embrace a techno-utopianism and techno-idealism. In this view, following a tradition that runs form early-Gnosticism to late cyberpunk science fiction, it seems that it is simply human 'destiny' to transcend 'nature', 'biology' and 'death' and to seek immortality and perfection in some new technological medium.

CPH is much more ambivalent about technology, its origins, its ends and our relationship to it. It directly critiques the belief in human exceptionalism and perfectibility that underlies much of transhumanist thought. Even though science fiction is also an important reference point for many *post*humanists, more recent, ecologically-minded, posthumanisms are in fact not so much focused on a (technological) future. There has always been a way of reading science fiction not as a discourse predominantly focused on the future but rather as a critique of the present (and its extrapolations in the form of thought experiments and speculation). In fact, CPH interrogates (often playfully, creatively and subversively) the ambient and deliberate erasure of the boundary between science fiction and science fact, or 'science faction',[27] on which many transhumanist scenarios are actually based. Technology is not seen by CPH as an autonomous force of history – it is always the product of a specific time, context and selection process – neither does it perceive humans as sovereign subjects *vis-à-vis* technological development or objects. Instead, the human relationship to technology is co-constitutional or 'originary'[28] and 'prosthetic',[29] or 'entangled'.[30] However, it is an originary entanglement that does not imply another form of exceptionalism: nonhuman animals use technologies, too. It is also undecidable whether technology is 'natural' nor 'cultural' under these circumstances. This means that one might well say that there are posthumanisms that might function

[25] Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015).

[26] Max More and Natasha Vita More, eds., *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013).

[27] Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, pp. 107-134.

[28] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3 vols (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008-2011); and Arthur Bradley, *Originary Technicity: The Theory of Technology from Marx to Derrida* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[29] David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[30] Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), and Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 2007).

'without' technology,[31] not in the sense that they are technophobic or that they underplay or repress the impact of technology, but rather in the sense that they use a non-teleological notion of technics or the 'technical' in their analyses. There is nothing deterministic or inevitable about technology despite its undeniable transformative social and environmental impact. In this sense, posthumanism is not an exclusively future-oriented discourse but should be understood more generally as a synchronic and diachronic questioning of the humanist concept of the 'human' and thus as the 'ongoing deconstruction of humanism'.[32]

The best way to understand posthumanism like most –isms (feminism, Marxism, liberalism, materialism and so on) is therefore that it describes, explains, regulates and produces knowledge about that to which it adds a qualifying suffix. Adding the prefix 'post-' to these discourses, first of all, merely signals that they are no longer quite capable of defining their object, and that the consensus they seem to presuppose or to secure is no longer viable. Posthumanism, in this sense, speculates about what it means to be no longer (quite) human (at least in a Western humanist, anthropocentric sense). All these –isms, in short, represent (social) discourses:[33] the entirety of the statements and practices that relate to an 'object', which in the case of posthumanism is the 'posthuman', as well as its derivations 'posthumanity' and 'posthumanisation'. This object is constituted 'discursively', which means through describing it as a social reality. The most basic level of this discursive construction or formation says: there is such a thing as the 'posthuman', so what is to be done about it? What does it mean? In this sense, what starts off as a positioning – 'after the human' or 'no longer humanist' – requires a continued rereading or reinterpretation of an existing perceived state of affairs, world view or 'reality', followed by an alternative, more accurate, more convincing and a more 'realistic' understanding that harnesses change and is more 'comprehensive' and more 'persuasive' in its representation of 'where we are', so that it may provide a map for future orientation. The important thing to remember is then that discourses both describe and intervene in and to an extent also produce what they posit as their 'reality' and which they present as such to their 'subjects'. Discourses, as Althusser might have put it, want to recruit people and they address or interpellate them accordingly.[34] In short, they are eminently political and by definition, therefore, also partial and questionable, which means that they are contested both from within and from without, namely by other discourses. They are subject to power struggles over who has the best or most powerful explanations, who makes the most convincing, resonant and opportune truth claims.

The conceptual object around which posthumanism is constructed – the posthuman – is basically a metonymy. It functions like a figure, as in a rhetorical figure, or a powerful image.[35] It 'recognises' this figure in phenomena it analyses and turns it into the central aspect of the reality it in turn helps constitute. The posthuman thus becomes at once the most fundamental

[31] Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3.1/4.1 (2007): 15-30.
[32] Badmington, *Posthumanism: A Reader* (2000).
[33] Cf. Ian Parker, *Discourse Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 1992); Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, pp. 36ff.
[34] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 121–73.
[35] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, pp. 8-11.

anchoring device as well as the most powerful conceptual resource. It helps, for example, to track figurations or indeed *pre*figurations of the posthuman across the ages (from angels to zombies, and chimera to cyborgs) and leads to the 'discovery' of *proto*posthumanisms in every period within the history of ideas, from classical antiquity to postmodernism, or even in prehistoric or deep time. It exposes the iterative limits of the Western cultural imaginary, and brings it into contact with figurations of the human that at once resist and confirm the purported obviousness of what it means to be human. If posthumanism had a clear idea about what the posthuman really was and meant then the argument would probably soon come to an end, people would lose interest and move on. If this initially sounds like a strong reason for rejecting posthumanism, it is worth remembering that *all* discourses function like that, including the very humanism posthumanism is grafted upon, and which has never really been able to explain and establish any general agreement about what its most coveted and mysterious figure or concept, i.e. the 'human, *really* meant or was. This drifting state of the human is in fact one of the main points of criticism and motivations for a posthumanist critique in the first place. 'We' have no idea who we *really* are and the one constant in humanist attempts to carve out an exceptional position for the human in this world is, on the one hand, to emphasise the differences between humans and their others (i.e. humans can do this, machines and animals cannot… even though all of these differences that traditionally served as markers of a radical difference have had to be substantially relativised), and, on the other hand, to reify difference by saying that the human is that which always differs from itself, that which cannot be pinned down. Humans are those creatures who are constantly reinventing themselves, because they are notoriously underdetermined – which is one of the founding gestures of renaissance humanism.[36] Seen from this vantage, one might easily derive the notion that 'we have never been human'.[37]

Questioning whether the posthuman actually *exists*, whether it is a figure that remains fundamentally, ontologically, futural, as something that humans are becoming, or might become, or whether it is something that humans have always been – which then prompts a genealogical search that will inevitably find similar figures in human and prehuman history – is an essential part and source of power for the legitimation of posthumanism as a discourse, especially in its self-reflexive mode (i.e. *critical* posthumanism, or CPH). The more discussion about the posthuman and posthumanism emerges the more established and the more 'real' they become. Entire academic and scientific careers depend on this process, as does funding and influence on political decision-making (and hence the possibility of actually bringing about some anticipated reality). This is not a cynical or nihilistic claim that implies that everything is a 'construct' (i.e. the recently much maligned dominance of the discourse of 'constructivism' in the cultural and social sciences) and that any way of making sense of the world is as good as any other – it merely means that reality, including scientific claims about reality, are always contested and cannot or should not form the end point of any discussion. Crucially, this should also not to be misconstrued as an attack on science – nobody will deny the universal truth of

[36] Cf. Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* [1486] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[37] Cary Wolfe, "Bring the Noise: *The Parasite* and the Multiple Genealogies of Posthumanism – Introduction to the new edition", in: Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. xi.

gravity to take the example that is usually referred to in this context (cf. the so-called 'science wars')[38] – it is an investigation into the truth-finding processes of science and the privileged role they play within social discourses that help secure the power of institutions and their politics.

It is in this discursive sense, then, that the posthuman and posthumanism have managed to capture the attention of the academy and increasingly the wider public (e.g. through popular science magazines, science fiction films, docufictions, social media and so on). There is now what one might call an 'ambient' posthumanism promoted by powerful corporations like Google, pioneer figures like Elon Musk, institutions like the Singularity University that are increasingly called upon to advise government administrations, and which are promoting a clearly *trans*humanist version of posthumanism based on the idea that accelerated technological progress can only be a good thing and that it will help 'us' take the next, 'natural', step to becoming (more) posthuman. There is, however, also a posthumanism that questions this belief and provides alternative, more sustainable, more ethico-ecological interpretations of the posthuman – which is one of the ways of reading the 'critical' in CPH.[39] In other words, CPH brackets the question of whether the posthuman is a good or a bad thing, or whether it is likely to ever exist. It is self-reflexive and thus wants to keep the figure of the posthuman open, but it also wants to contextualise, historicise and politicise it. In this sense, it is a specific discursive strain within the discursive field or formation around the posthuman, aimed at constructing a critical observer position, even though it is fully aware that this cannot be done from an independent or disinterested remove. In this sense, there is no 'metahumanism' just like there has never been a 'metalanguage', or some vantage point *outside* (of humanism) from which to evaluate the question somehow 'disinterestedly'.

CPH does not deny the transformative potential of the posthuman, but it also investigates the constructed inevitability that surrounds it. It does so, first of all, by looking at some of the discursive gestures or practices and methodologies that are being employed within post- and transhumanist discourses, and it also speculates about the need for new, more creative and more inclusive – more-than-human – forms of knowledge production in this regard. It is precisely in this context that the positioning (or 'posting') of the prefix 'post-' has to be seen in all its problematic ambivalence. What one should have learnt from the discussion around postmodernism and the postmodern[40] is that this prefix and what it aims to do to or to perform on what it 'posts' comes with its very own, and rather aporetic, dynamic. The claim that something is reaching or has reached its end (or should finally do so) is not a claim like any other, and especially not where such a well-established discursive formation as humanism is at stake. This is even more complex for a discourse like humanism, since humanism upholds the notion of an 'essence' or 'truth' of our species identity, and which is supposed to lie in 'our' shared humanity based on some human 'nature' (which, however, always remains to be defined or deferred, Derrida would say, in *différance*). There is no question, however, that the

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

[39] Cf. e.g. Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017).

[40] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1992).

notion of humanity has a concrete history and that, in fact, it is the effect of a combination of humanism as an ideological discourse and modernity as a socio-historical formation. Humanism and humanist tradition (which dates back at least to Neoplatonic Christianity and the Renaissance with its rediscovery of Greek and Roman Antiquity as sources of knowledge) has had a quasi-monopoly as far as the question 'what is (hu)man?' is concerned. To position oneself after such a powerful tradition – post + humanism – means to embrace a conscious ambiguity that translates into two possible forms of accentuation: the undeniable experience that a certain humanism has reached its end (i.e. *post*humanism); and the certainty that this humanism, because of its own plurality, shapeshifting force and slipperiness cannot just be classified without remainders and repressions but instead needs to be 'worked through' in a critical, psychoanalytical and deconstructive sense (hence the other form of accentuation: post*humanism*). In both cases a simple supersession of humanism and its legacy is formally impossible since posthumanism necessarily *repeats* humanism in its posting gesture. In this sense the critical detachment that the prefix 'post-' promises is complicated by the fact that its root and thus its category is and remains *humanism and *human. Posthumanism cannot be a simple negation of humanism or a simple supersession and annihilation of it – an 'overcoming'. It can only by a reworking, critique, deconstruction, rewriting of the stem onto which it is grafted. This is only a problem, however, for those who think the history of ideas should work in the form of radical breaks and supersessions. While this certainly does not preempt any possibility of an eventual, *real*, break, it foregrounds the idea that even discontinuity (or the very fashionable notion of 'disruption') still depends on (or repeats) to some extent the existence and persistence of that which is being discontinued. Making sense of time (and change or transformation) necessarily depends on comparing and contrasting, on extrapolation, including 'reverse teleologies' (i.e. the idea that with hindsight, the 'present' was bound to be the outcome of a certain 'past'). It relies on narrative techniques like flash forward and flash back, anticipation and the like. In short, reading and critique are always aimed at coherence even where there may not by any and even while one may be actively looking for discontinuity and breaks.

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

the initial crisis within humanism itself and the precedence of nonhuman others.[41] CPH can thus be said to be 'parasitical' in its relation to the various humanisms it deconstructively inhabits.

As Neil Badmington explains,[42] the ambiguity built into the notion of posthumanism is already at work in the radical plurality of meanings of humanism itself. While the antihumanism dominating the second half of the 20th century portrayed humanism as a conservative and old-fashioned ideology of Western 'common sense', there is also a humanism associated with secular and scientific traditions that is seen, not without some justification, as progressive. It is therefore no surprise that from the point of view of modern science, which has been critical of humanism from the beginning, the idea of a posthumanism might look somewhat belated. On the other hand, in prohumanist secularist circles there will be strong moral opposition to the very idea of a posthumanism, understood as an (unwanted) break with a humanist cultural tradition that is itself seen as progressive and radical and for which any kind of posthumanism would only constitute an attack or backlash against hard-won values like freedom from premodern irrationalism, or a regression in terms of Enlightenment ideals of progress and reason. CPH is aware of this complex dynamic. On the one hand, it needs to show that humanism despite all its accompanying undeniable cultural progress, as an ideology, has come to be criticised for its merely apparent and superficial claims towards universality while tacitly assuming and promoting the specificity of its (Western, liberal, bourgeois, capitalist) normativity. One might say therefore that humanism was never as progressive as it made itself out to be; and, as has become clearer at least since WWII and the ongoing process of decolonisation and the gradual weakening of Western imperialism, it is now increasingly met with opposition and resistance, in a globalised, multipolar world.[43] On the other hand, if one really is to break with a five-hundred-year-old tradition like humanism, which still enjoys considerable power and support, one has to make sure to protect and if possible appropriate and continue to make accessible the transformative potential that already exists *within* this tradition and avoid giving in to naïvely utopian claims and promises of 'revolutionary' change. Which means that a *critical* posthumanism requires an intricate political and ethical positioning, namely one which signals to the techno-prophets that their attitude despite all apparent utopian radicalism has a long history that needs to be remembered and worked through; and a position which reminds the skeptics that humanism never was as humanist as it claimed to be and that the current technological challenge merely represents the logical outcome of a process of posthumanisation with which humanism has always been complicit and which it itself helped to create. The task of this kind of tightrope-walk, as Badmington explains, is to look both back and forward at the same time, and to 'assist' humanism in its own self-deconstruction, so that 'we' will not be forced to repeat its mistakes.

As a first summary, then, one might say that CPH is a theoretical approach within the humanities and social sciences, which, arguably, are morphing into what one might call the 'posthumanities'. It maps and actively engages with the 'ongoing deconstruction of

[41] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
[42] Badmington, *Posthumanism: A Reader* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000).
[43] Tony Davies, *Humanism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008).

humanism'. It differentiates between the figure of the posthuman and its present, past and projected avatars, like cyborgs,[44] but also monsters, zombies, ghosts or angels[45] and their 'posthuman bodies'.[46] It is also a social discourse (a material network of texts, practices, values, identities, institutions) which negotiates the pressing question of what it means to be human under the current conditions of globalisation, technoscience, late capitalism and climate change. The prefix 'post-' (in analogy with the discussion of the postmodern and postmodernism) has a double meaning: on the one hand, it signifies a desire or indeed a need to somehow go *beyond* humanism (or the human), which calls for some scepticism, while on the other hand, since the 'post-' also necessarily repeats what it prefixes, it displays an awareness that neither humanism nor the human can in fact be overcome in any straightforward dialectical or historical fashion (for example, in the sense: after the human, the posthuman). The qualifying term 'critical' in the phrase 'critical posthumanism' gestures towards a more complicated and non-dialectical relationship between the human and the posthuman, as well as their respective connection with the nonhuman and the inhuman.[47] Posthumanism in this critical sense functions more like an anamnesis and a rewriting of the human and humanism, a process of 'rewriting humanity', in analogy with Lyotard's notion of the postmodern project of 'rewriting modernity'.[48] In this process, CPH asks a number of questions that address the complications which arise out of this critical rewriting: how did we come to think of ourselves as human? Or, what exactly does it mean to be human (especially at a time when some humans are apparently quite enthusiastically embracing and promoting the idea that we are becoming, or might already to some extent, have become posthuman (e.g. most transhumanists)? What are the motivations for this posthumanising *desire*, when did it start and where does it come from? What are its implications for the future relationships and interdependence with nonhuman others (e.g. the environment, nonhuman animals, machines or technology, but also any form of spiritualism)?

The adjective 'critical' in CPH can thus be said to signify a number of things. It refers to the difference between a more or less *un*critical or popular posthumanism (e.g. in many science fiction movies or popular science magazines) and a philosophical, reflective, or theoretical approach (which is nevertheless inseparable from some of the transformative creative and technological practices the posthuman inspires), and which investigates the current forms of 'our' postanthropocentric desires – the yearning for the (in-, non-, post- etc.)human, the other, or for self-transformation. This desire articulates itself, on the one hand, in the form of an anticipated transcendence of the human condition, often imagined in various scenarios of disembodiment and metamorphosis;[49] on the other hand, it finds its expression in a more ecological rather than simply technological (one might say, an 'ecotechnical') form where this

[44] Chris Hables Gray, ed., *The Cyborg Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1995).
[45] Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human* (2002).
[46] Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
[47] Scott Brewster et al., eds., *Inhuman Reflections: Thinking the Limits of the Human* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
[48] Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (1991).
[49] Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

desire can imply a (rather suspicious) attempt by humans to 'argue themselves out of the picture' precisely at a time when climate change caused by the impact of human civilization calls for urgent, responsible and more altruistic, *human* action.[50]

The other meaning of 'critical' in CPH concerns a re-evaluation or even a reinvention of some humanist values and methodologies (including the very question of what critique is and does), and which, in the face of a fundamental transformation provoked by digitalisation and the advent of ubiquitous computing and digital media platforms, appear to have become obsolete, or out of touch with new practices, identities, communities, cognitive patterns and knowledges and which are therefore in urgent need of revision (esp. critical methodologies which are related to traditional forms of literacy, reading, thinking and analysis). The question that is raised here is how to remain critical in the sense of developing reading and analytical techniques, forms of conceptualisations and subjectivities that are both self-reflexive and aware of their own genealogies (i.e. able to stay critically connected with humanist traditions, or 'stay with the trouble', as Donna Haraway calls it,[51] and which seem to threaten literal, literary and textual approaches in particular), in a time that is increasingly characterised as both 'post-truth' and 'post-critique'. For core disciplines in the traditional humanities like literature and philosophy this means that not only their humanistic knowledge base but also their main addressee, the humanist subject who is in need of *Bildung*, is fast disappearing as it is being more and more 'decentred'.

Studies of literature's 21st-century extensions and remediations, for example, are having to engage with the broader resonances of the idea that the literary is currently being overtaken by processes of digitalisation, globalisation and technology-and-media driven change. In this, arguably, 'post-literary' and maybe even 'post-literate' climate, a critical posthumanist approach needs to be both aware and wary of the contemporary desire to leave the humanist apparatus of literacy and its central institutions like literature with all its social, economic and cultural-political implications, its regimes of power and its aesthetics behind. Critique, however, is not the same as resistance, and an increasing part of the academy and the (theoretical) humanities in particular have been embracing this new context to form new, interdisciplinary alliances with the sciences and their own critical commentaries (e.g. the so-called 'critical science studies', informed by Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory, speculative realism, or new (feminist) materialisms[52] – all allies of CPH with shared affinities despite their many differences). The emerging 'posthumanities' are thus having to engage with the positive but also the problematic aspects of the transformative potential that a new dialogue or alliance between the humanities, the social sciences and the sciences contains. The focus on the posthuman as a discursive object, on posthumanism as a social discourse and on posthumanisation as an ongoing historical and ontological process of transformation, allows the humanities, social sciences and the sciences – to create new encounters and test new

[50] Stefan Herbrechter, "'On not writing ourselves out of the picture…': An Interview with Stefan Herbrechter", *Antae* 1(3): 131-144; available online at: https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/12513/1/1-3-2014.1.pdf.

[51] Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble* (2016).

[52] Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008).

hypotheses that may lead to greater political and ethical awareness of the place of the human, the nonhuman and their entanglement, especially in connection with pressing issues like climate change, the depletion of natural resources, the destruction of biodiversity, migration, terrorism and global insecurity, or current and future biopolitics.

What is thus at stake in CPH is a rethinking of the relationship between human agency, the role of technology and environmental and cultural factors from a post- or non-anthropocentric perspective. Postanthropocentric posthumanities are still about humans and their cultures but only in so far as these are placed within a larger, ecological and ecotechnical, picture, as can be seen for example in the proliferation and institutionalisation of a variety of alternative 'humanities', like the medical humanities, the environmental humanities, the digital humanities. The digital humanities, for example, are informed by CPH in the sense that they address the role of new and converging media with their social and cultural implications, as well as their proliferation of digital and virtual realities and their biopolitical aspects (e.g. by investigating new forms of surveillance and commodification, the construction of new subjectivities and the merging of bio- and media technologies in the form of 'biomedia'[53]). It is becoming increasingly clear that the scale and the complexity of global challenges like anthropogenic climate change, human overpopulation, the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, intensified automation and virtualisation, and so on, require new forms of social, political, ethical, and ecological ways of thinking that can help ensure the survival not only of the human species but, also, the survival of multiple ways of being human, as well as the survival of other species, environments and ecosystems, and the survival of life in general.

CPH thus draws together a number of aspects that constitute 'our' early twenty-first-century reality and cosmology – our posthuman condition – and, at the same time, links these back genealogically to their beginnings and prefigurations within humanism itself.[54] The function that a genealogical understanding of posthumanism and approach to the posthuman serves is to refer back to the question of the post- and to what extent this signals continuity, or discontinuity – a break, overcoming, succession or indeed anamnesis, rewriting and deconstruction – as outlined above. Apart from asking *what* is the posthuman?, it also focuses on *when* is the posthuman?, what cultures does it belong to? This is why an important aspect of the criticality of CPH lies in its genealogical dimension. Genealogies are about ancestors, lineages, progeny and the knowledge they produce. They are historical in the sense that they trace past developments to investigate how 'things' have become the way they 'are' (or, at least, were thought to be at a certain time). Following Nietzsche and Foucault, genealogical analyses focus on the social and historical production of systems of knowledge, power and discourse. Their underlying methodology is to expose what is regarded as obvious, natural or unchangeable and to reveal it as constructed in the sense that it is the result of historical and political (or, one could say, cultural evolutionary, maybe even epigenetic) selection. Genealogies, however, are not about uncovering absolute truths or origins but are instead interested in the processes of knowledge production as such. While for Nietzsche, truth

[53] Cf. Eugene Thacker, *Biomedia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[54] Cf. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, eds., *Cy-Borges: Memories of the Posthuman in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), Herbrechter and Callus, eds., *Posthumanist Shakespeares* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

famously was a 'mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms',[55] Foucault is primarily interested in the (human) subjectivities that specific discourses and social practices afford.[56] According to Foucault, individuals are subjected to power by mechanisms of control and dependence that are closely aligned with identity and self-knowledge, which means that they are subject to processes that involve identification and embodiment (i.e. 'technologies of the self'[57]) or indeed resistance to them, and which are not necessarily seen as coercive but, under modern, liberal conditions, as 'choice'.

The discursive knowledge that is inevitably perspectival, historically and culturally situated – and thus specific – recruits and positions subjects for whom this knowledge is supposed to make sense. Foucault is therefore specifically interested in the processes of legitimation as well as in their disruptions, discontinuities, contradictions and exclusions, in order to create possibilities for an articulation of alternative, 'subjugated' knowledges. Consequently genealogy is about transformation and change provoked by 'denaturalisation'.[58] A genealogical approach, in this sense, is necessarily critical in that it questions accepted truths, institutional power, strong notions of identity, normality and reality, by emphasising the power struggles that have led to their establishing and legitimation. In doing so, it opens up possibilities for counter-memories and alternative narratives. In short, by stressing historical contingency, genealogies begin to show alternative possibilities of how 'things' could have been otherwise or might still develop differently in the future. In connection with posthumanism and the posthuman, both Donna Haraway's re-reading of the cyborg figure from a feminist materialist point of view,[59] as well as N. Katherine Hayles's recovery of the lost histories of cybernetics and technological embodiment in *How We Became Posthuman*,[60] can be said to be genealogical in this sense.

This kind of genealogical approach in general has been very influential in transforming the theory and practice of historiographies that are often associated with new historicism and cultural materialism or postmodernism. Genealogy, however, is not predominantly an interpretation of the past through a present-day perspective. Its aim instead is to produce 'histories of the present', or 'effective histories' that start with contemporary problems or current issues.[61] Writing history is here understood as a process of producing power-knowledge that is based on selection and exclusion, narrativisation and emplotment, as well as subject-positioning.[62] Genealogy is an analysis of the specific connections of subjectivity,

[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, "From: On Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense [1873]", in: *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. & trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), pp. 46-47.
[56] Michel Foucault, "The Subject of Power [1982]", in: Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, eds., *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 208).
[57] Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock, 1988).
[58] Cf. Barthes, *Mythologies* (1993).
[59] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991).
[60] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999).
[61] Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1994).
[62] Cf. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), and *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

truth, knowledge and power, i.e. the 'discursive formations' at work in historiography and its political legitimation. This is exactly what is at stake in CPH's 'rewriting' of humanism and the reopening of the question of what it might mean to be human today.[63]

Foucault's antihumanism most famously expressed itself in the image of 'man', as a construct of humanism and the 'human sciences' (or, the humanities), and thus as a recent historical figure, that is about to disappear 'like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'.[64] The apparent apocalyptics of this statement should not detract from the fact that Foucault's aim was a genealogical rereading of the 'history of humanity' in the sense of "the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic of life".[65] Foucault's genealogical method in producing effective histories is strategic in that 'it introduces discontinuity into our very being – as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself".[66] In this sense, it remains pertinent for CPH in three ways:

First, [as] a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, [as] a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, [as] a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.[67]

CPH, however, importantly and significantly extends the remit of Foucault's framework by addressing its residual anthropocentric bias and by including nonhuman forms of agency and subjectivity.

The other important advantage of seeing CPH as a genealogical venture is that it creates an antidote to understanding posthumanism as an exclusively futural or future-oriented discourse. Instead, it adds an investigation into posthumanism's prefigurations. In other words, it tracks posthumanism across the ages and, in doing so, discovers what one might call 'early posthumanisms' or 'proto-posthumanisms'. In fact, it is possible and necessary for a rewriting of (the history of) humanity to work through the idea of human self-identity from its paleoanthropological beginnings in deep time right through to its past and contemporary constructions of the future.[68] Humanism and anthropocentrism go back to the Renaissance, but they also affect the worldviews of Greek and Roman Antiquity and the Middle Ages of course. Retroactively, via the concept of the Anthropocene, they also throw us back into 'deep time' and a time 'before humanity', as well as catapulting us forward into a speculative time 'without humans' either in the form of an evolutionary (technological) successor species or in

[63] See also my "Genealogy", *The Genealogy of the Posthuman* (2020), available online at: https://criticalposthumanism.net/genealogy-entry/.
[64] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966], trans. A. Sheridan Smith (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 387.
[65] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 86.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 88.
[67] *Ibid*., p. 351.
[68] See my "Deep Time", in: Herbrechter et al., eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, pp. and my *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

the sense of apocalyptic scenarios of human or planetary extinction events.[69] There is thus a growing literature on posthumanism and its relevance, prefiguration, genealogy throughout human and nonhuman time, from classical posthumanism,[70] to medieval[71] and early modern posthumanism,[72] as well as the Enlightenment[73] and beyond. Together these approaches to a prefigurative and genealogical understanding of posthumanism and the posthuman make for a rich tapestry that pays tribute to the fact that "if the limits of the human have always exercised both our thinking and our esthetic practices, then some aspects of what is now termed 'posthumanism' and 'the posthuman' go as far back as the beginning of the human itself".[74] However, if all these early posthumanist prefigurations do not add up to a new comprehensive 'history of the posthuman' this is because every single rereading also affects and remediates the whole idea of periodisation and succession as such.

One of the main reasons why CPH can thus be called 'critical' is precisely because of this affinity to a genealogical understanding of critique. As Foucault explains, critique is "genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think".[75] This means that genealogies are critical precisely because they operate as denaturalising critiques of ideas and practices that hide the contingency of human life behind formal ahistorical or developmental perspectives. For Foucault more specifically, "genealogies are usually histories of present subjectivities, for their critical impact depends on people still being immersed in the beliefs and practices that they denaturalize".[76] It is in this sense that

[69] Richard Grusin, ed., *After Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

[70] E.g. Emanuela Bianchi, Sara Brill and Brooke Holmes, eds., *Antiquities beyond Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[71] Cf. *Postmedieval – A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, inaugural double issue "When Did We Become Post/Human", 1.1-2 (2010) ff.; and Jeffrey J. Cohen Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), and Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011).

[72]Cf. early works on renaissance animal studies by Erika Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), and Fudge, ed., *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), and Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman, eds., *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002). See also posthumanist readings of Shakespeare in Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, *Posthumanist Shakespeares* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012), as well as early thinking about machines and computers in Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday, *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Sawday, *Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine* (London: Routledge, 2007), and overviews like Jospeh Campana and Scott Maisano, eds., *Renaissance Posthumanism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[73] Edgar Landgraf, Gabriel Torp and Leif Weatherby, eds., *Posthumanism in the Age of Humanism: Mind, Matter, and the Life Sciences after Kant* (London: Bloomsbury,
2019).

[74] Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. xv.

[75] Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, p. 46.

[76] Mark Bevir, "What is Genealogy?" *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2.3 (2008): 263.

CPH, explicitly or implicitly, understands itself as a critical denaturalisation of (liberal) humanist subjectivity or, again, as an ongoing deconstruction of humanism. In doing so, genealogy and CPH both "explore the conditions of possibility of contemporary beliefs and practices" and "uncover the historical contingencies that made it possible for people today to think and act as they do".[77] Genealogical critique understood in this way aims to open up what Bevir refers to as "novel spaces for personal and social transformation" by loosening the hold on us of "entrenched ideas and institutions; it frees us to imagine other possibilities" – which is precisely what the figure of the posthuman signals,[78] namely a counter-memory to the humanist tradition of anthropocentrism. In this sense, importantly, genealogy can be understood as 'effective' history, namely as a history that is opened up and oriented toward the future.

To conclude, one might say that CPH proceeds genealogically in the sense that it contextualises and investigates figures of the posthuman and discourses on posthumanism by placing them within "theoretical and philosophical developments and ways of thinking within modernity".[79] Its ultimate aim is to re-evaluate the human (esp. its exceptionalism, anthropocentrism, its 'nature'), and in doing so, it challenges the legitimation (the power-knowledge apparatus) of humanism and its late heirs. It seeks out discontinuities and counter-memories from which to tell the story of the human and its others differently, without, however, underestimating the power of the human desire for self-surpassment and perfectibility. While this is undoubtedly a political stance, CPH's *raison-d'être* is ultimately an ethical one. It is motivated by care – care for different human and nonhuman ways of beings. In this sense, whoever cares about human beings and their past, present and future might want to engage *critically* with humanism's anthropocentric ideology. CPH is genealogical as well as critical because it begins with a current problem, an urgency – the insistence of the posthuman in all its forms. Its objective is to write effective histories that would do justice to "the cultural malaise or euphoria that is caused by the feeling that arises once you start taking the idea of 'postanthropocentrism' seriously … and to think the 'end of the human' without giving in to apocalyptic mysticism or to new forms of spirituality and transcendence",[80] to return to the definition with which this preface began.

It can thus be said that it is, in fact, the *desire* of the posthuman that is both the subject and object of CPH's critique. It is a desire that constitutes 'us' and a desire that 'we' nevertheless cannot trust. In this sense, it is worth insisting that critique can never be detached, since it is necessarily involved, or entangled, with that which it critiques, or in other words, critique is complicit with this/its desire. A sympathetic understanding of critique, ever since Kant, however, will stress the fact that it has never just been the work of pure negativity to shore up the human against any hybridisation with nonhuman others, as Bruno Latour claims,[81] but that as a practice (i.e. critical thinking) it has always been and remains capable of dealing just

[77] *Ibid*., p. 272.
[78] Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (2013).
[79] Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, p. vii.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[81] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* [1991] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

as well with 'matters of fact' as with 'matters of concern';[82] or, in other words, that it is, in its generosity, both analytical and speculative, creative, dismantling and (re)assembling, motivated by scepticism and care, all at the same time. It is in this spirit that CPH still *cares* about the human; but this is a care that cannot exist at the expense of nonhuman others, and one that necessitates an urgent pluralisation and critique of Western normativity. It dismantles 'our' self-understanding, but not without reassembling 'the social' in postanthropocentric terms. It analyses and distrusts 'our' humanist reflexes and legacies with a view to speculating about alternatives and creating different futures.

[82] Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern", *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 225-248.

Chapter 1: Poststructuralism and the End(s) of Humanism

While posthumanism owes many debts to antihumanist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, it tends to differ from antihumanism in one principal respect: while the antihumanists actively set out to overturn the hegemony of anthropocentrism, posthumanists begin with the recognition that 'Man' is (always) already a falling or fallen figure. What this means is that posthumanism often tends to take humanism's waning or disappearance as something of a given.[83]

Post-, Again

It is both a blessing and a curse that every generation has to re-appropriate and to re-create the world in their own image. It is a blessing because a new take on something as heavily sedimented as the history of human thought promises to bring fresh insight into something that has at times become decidedly stuffy and oppressive. It allows for a fresh look at things, which often makes former problems look like rather quaint obsessions while new tasks have appeared that impose themselves by their clear and immediate urgency. It is also a curse, however, because the repression that is involved in this re-appropriating and re-positioning process inevitably produces blind spots that might condemn the next generation to fight similar battles or repeat mistakes committed by previous ones. This has always been the mixed blessing involved in 'learning lessons' from history – even if or maybe because they also always involve a certain *un*learning. The transition from poststructuralism to posthumanism is no exception here.

Coming to the discussion about posthumanism and the posthuman and the question of what might come after the human, today, means being caught up in the conundrum of 'belatedness' this historical un/learning process produces. Modernity gave rise to a historical understanding based on the idea of futurity and progress as the driving force of development. The tacit consensus ever since, coinciding with the emergence of the Enlightenment, has been that history moves dialectically: every subsequent generation has to perform a kind of synthesis of previous contradictions and thereby ideally produces human civilisatory progress – an assumption that still underpins much of the legitimatory discourse in contemporary culture and politics.[84]

This consensus also constitutes the foundation of what is usually referred to as '(Western) liberal humanism' as the dominant, common sense, understanding of how every human being, rather ironically, expresses both its uniqueness and freedom in the hope of bringing about a better future for humankind –a very powerful idea difficult to dismiss. The dialectics of history finds its articulation both in Hegel (1770-1831) and in Marx (1818-1883), it is also at work in

[83] Neil Badmington, "Posthumanism", in: Simon Malpas and Paul Wake, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* (London: Routledge: 2006), pp. 240-241.

[84] It was Foucault's influential "What is Enlightenment?" (a reply to Kant's famous text written in 1784) that described modernity as an "attitude" or "ethos" characterised by the "will to 'heroize' the present" (cf. Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 32-33).

Freudian psychoanalysis und much of modern science. Nietzsche (1844-1900), on the other hand, was far more sceptical regarding the anthropocentrism and Christian morality underpinning the historiography of his time. Instead, he emphasised the human "will to power" at work in the history of mentalities.[85] Needless to say that all these thinkers had their doubts and conflicting views about the inevitability and feasibility of the idea of human perfectibility and about the ambiguity of the form and idea of what an end of history might actually look like. Following on from these early 'masters of suspicion' – Nietzsche, Marx and Freud – the poststructuralists and postmodernists of the second half of the 20th century form the first philosophical (or 'theoretical') movement that takes the problem of belatedness, the end of history, including the "end of man" (i.e. the mixed blessings of 'coming after' outlined above) as a starting point of their thinking and politics.

In *Specters of Marx* (1994), Jacques Derrida, often seen as *the* representative of a whole generation of poststructuralist thinkers, describes how "the eschatological themes of the 'end of history,' of the 'end of .Marxism,' of 'the end of philosophy,' of 'the ends of man,' of the 'last man' and so forth were, in the '50s, that is, forty years ago, our daily bread". [86] Derrida had previously referred to this "endism"[87] as a certain "apocalyptic tone in philosophy" (echoing Kant [1724-1804]), provoked by "the reading or analysis of those whom we could nickname the *classics of the end*". These formed "the canon of the modern apocalypse (end of History, end of Man, end of Philosophy, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger)", as taught by the influential Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968) in 1930s and 1940s Paris, who helped produce an entire generation of French Neo-Hegelians (among whom Bataille, Derrida, Lacan and Foucault). Derrida, however, also insists on the other – sociohistorical – side that was responsible for this apocalyptic tone and for the ubiquitous endisms of the time (which have been proliferating ever since):

It was, *on the other hand and indissociably,* what we had known or what some of us for quite some time no longer hid from concerning totalitarian terror in all the Eastern countries, all the socio-economic disasters of Soviet bureaucracy, the Stalinism of the past and the neo-Stalinism in process…[88]

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[85] See especially his *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873), and *Untimely Meditations* (1873-1876).

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

[87] Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms about Neo-Logisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seisms", trans. Anne Tomiche, in: David Carroll, ed., *The States of 'Theory': History, Art, and Critical Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 63-94.

[88] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 15. Derrida's comment was made originally at a conference entitled "W(h)ither Marxism", organised by the University of California Riverside, in 1993, which was concerned

Derrida insists on contextualising the movement of 'deconstruction' he inaugurated (and which is often, problematically, seen as a synonym for poststructuralism) within these two dimensions, one philosophical, the other political. Thus, for poststructuralists and their late followers, the idea of the 'end of man', the 'last man', or, indeed, "after the human" bears a certain *déjà-vu*, as Derrida explains:

those with whom I shared this singular period, this double and unique experience (both philosophical and political), for us, I venture to say, the media parade of current discourse on the end of history and the last man looks most often like a tiresome anachronism.[89]

Ignoring this dynamic of belatedness usually leads to the idea that, in relation to posthumanism and the posthuman, poststructuralism merely plays the role of a precursor who has done its job but now needs to be overcome in turn. This is then expressed in the following way: while the 'antihumanism' of the poststructuralists was a springboard for the kind of radical critique of humanism that posthumanism today represents, this now needs surpassing, extending, radicalising, and so on. We can see the specters of the Hegelian dialectic raise its head again, especially since the antihumanism often attributed to 'poststructuralists' like Althusser, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard – none of whom ever owned up to that label – was in fact already a highly contested inheritance of structuralism.[90] It was Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and his structuralist followers like the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) who believed that language and its principles could be made transparent and applied to all meaning-making systems (from anthropological kinship to fashion),[91] while the generation following them were already much more sceptical of both the empirical applicability and the metaphysical presuppositions on which a structuralist idea of language as a conventional, rule-based and abstract system of representation relied.

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

'Post-structuralism' is an 'umbrella term' which involves a 'displacement' and is more of 'an interrogation of structuralism's methods and assumptions, of transforming structuralist concepts by turning one against another'. However, it is not about 'origin' or a 'Fall' from it:

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with the survival of Marxism after its demise and ideological discreditation following the fall of the Soviet empire and what, in the 1990s, looked like the unstoppable 'triumph' of capitalism and liberal democracy.

[89] *Ibid*., p. 15.

[90] This is made very clear in John Sturrock's influential *Structuralism and Since* (1979) which still remains one of the best introductions to poststructuralist thinking, together with Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980) and *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[91] The rolling out of structuralist linguistics as a model towards the humanities and social sciences in general is usually referred to as the "linguistic turn". For a useful overview see Claire Colebrook, "The Linguistic Turn in Continental Philosophy", in: Alan D. Schrift, ed., *Poststructuralism and Critical Theory's Second Generation* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), pp. 279-309.

Structuralism as an origin never existed in a pre-lapsarian purity or ontological fullness; post-structuralism traces the trace of structuralism's difference from itself.[92]

Consequently, the same complication also applies to the relationship between posthumanism and humanism. It is, in fact, the awareness of the problematic genealogical relationship between humanism and posthumanism that the 'critical' in the phrase 'critical posthumanism' (CPH) refers to.[93] It is therefore necessary to submit the idea of the posthuman (in the sense of 'after the human') to a poststructuralist, critical reading.

Post-structural-ism

One of the most important points that poststructuralism, following structuralism, makes is that meaning is irreducibly plural. Meaning does not reside *in* language but actually arises out of the selection and combination of signs. 'Post-', for example, is a prefix that derives its meaning through difference from other prefixes, in particular 'pre-', and from an entire syntax of prefixation. This is the presupposition without which no meaning can be assigned. What 'post-' actually means, following Saussurean linguistics, is the result of 'negative' difference (it acquires its meaning through all it is *not*).[94] It means 'after', i.e. *not* 'before', while both after and before themselves have a number of additional meanings.[95] They are part of an endless 'chain of signifiers' each evoking plural meanings (semiosis).

The suffix '-ism' (as opposed to, for example, '-ity', which denotes a period or a state, cf. 'modern-ity') refers to a 'discourse' (in the sense of a 'set of ideas', a doctrine, like Marx*ism*, femin*ism*, but also human*ism* and posthuman*ism*, of course).[96] A discourse is probably best understood as an attempt at making meaning cohere around a central term (in the case of structuralism that would be the term 'structure' – while *post*structuralism would be the discourse that is precisely no longer based on the idea of 'structure'). That of course does not mean that there is agreement about what that central term (i.e. structure) actually means. However, if a (temporary) consensus can be established, it can provide a focal point, a perspective from which it may be possible to try and make sense of the 'world', establish (a) 'reality'.

[92] Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 1.

[93] See my *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) for an extensive explanation of what a *critical* posthumanist stance entails.

[94] Derrida goes on the critique Saussure's notion of difference and the binary opposition on which it relies by introducing the neologism 'différance' (in Derrida 1982 (originally 1972), see further discussion below).

[95] I explore and exploit some of the meanings and ambiguities of 'post-' and 'pre-' in *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[96] On the poststructuralist notion of discourse, see for example Ian Parker *Discourse Dynamics Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1992), discussed in Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, pp. 36-38 and *passim*.

The reason I put 'world' and 'reality' in scare quotes is that poststructuralists do not believe (this is undoubtedly their Kantian legacy) that there is such a thing as a world or a reality that can be perceived 'as such', i.e. independently from an observer or, to use the more usual term, reality always is a reality *for* a 'subject'. Let me stress right away – because this is a common misunderstanding of poststructuralism – this is not the same as saying that there *is* no world, or no reality (which would be a radically nihilistic claim). It is merely a question of availability and 'realism' (which, itself, is a discourse that claims the opposite, namely that it *is* possible to see reality as it *really is*, i.e. a discourse for which the detour through a representation of reality is ultimately not problematic). For poststructuralists, representation (this can be linguistic in the narrow sense, but also perceptual in the widest sense) is not transparent, it is not just a means to an end (i.e. to give to see reality as it really is), but is something that needs to be foregrounded and analysed. Since we can only ever have representations of reality (instead of reality itself – think of all the ways in which people would disagree about what something really is, for example 'climate change'),[97] what critical thought needs to focus on is the *politics* of representation, i.e. who says what about 'x'. Since all claims about reality are contingent, it is no surprise that they are highly contested, which is saying nothing else than reality is socially constructed, shared or negotiated. What poststructuralists are suspicious of are truth claims about reality – in this sense they are anti-realist – because these are usually powerful claims that position subjects within a discourse that uses ideology.[98]

Ideology is a set of beliefs that underpins a specific discourse:[99] humanism, for example claims that there is such a thing called 'the human' and that humanism as a discourse can produce important knowledge about its 'object' (i.e. the human), or even has the power to explain what it means to be human. Usually this is a claim that is based on exclusivity and essence: there is something like a human nature or a special set of abilities that differentiate the human from nonhuman animals, inanimate objects or supernatural entities. Since this nature is exclusively human it gives rise to a certain exceptionalism or a central position of the human, i.e. anthropocentrism. From a poststructuralist point of view, what is interesting here is that the human is both the subject of the discourse called humanism (and its long history through classical to Renaissance, Enlightenment and modern secular humanism) as well as its object. Humanism, as a discourse, claims to have access to the essential and universal, that is timeless, truth of which all humans and all things human partake. It is a discourse that positions humans as subjects in a very particular, namely circular, or tautological, way. Humans are those entities that through self-reflection must come to know who and what they are by accepting that they share an essential nature that separates them from everything else.

The curious thing about a subject, however, is that it is always in an ambiguous position with regard to power, discourse and ideology. For a poststructuralist, what is particularly suspicious is humanism's paradoxical claim that a human (subject) is essentially human but, at the same

[97] This is the main bone of contention poststructuralism and its followers have with Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism.

[98] See Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation*, 2nd ed. Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon (London: Sage, 2013), pp. 1-59.

[99] Cf. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation", trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 121-173.

time, needs to be *told* so, i.e. humans constantly need to be 'humanised'. What is even more suspicious is that this claim is usually made in conjunction with a liberal discourse that presupposes that the human is essentially free to make a choice about him- or herself (more problematically, 'itself'), in the sense of: you are essentially human if you choose to be so. If you act against your supposed 'nature' you are essentially 'inhuman', i.e. a 'monster'.[100] The discourse based on this contradiction – a free human subject that needs to be reminded that it has a free choice (usually between good and evil) – is what poststructuralists refer to as 'liberal humanism', and which is their main target.

A few words still need to be added about the middle part of post-*structural*-ism. The central idea that structuralists presuppose is that the way people make sense of things is by internalising a system of rules (see above) which allows them to map what otherwise would be a chaotic mess. So, for a structuralist, meaning is produced through an interplay or mapping between a concrete formal manifestation (a recognition) and some underlying pattern, or 'structure'. Let us stick with the example of a map. In order to make sense of a territory that you do not know and that you need to find your way around what you do is look for landmarks. These are signs that you have previously encountered and whose meaning you now project onto the new territory: there is a river, there is a mountain, there is a valley, there is North, there is South, etc. So, you are applying an underlying structure onto which you map the new territory. The particularity and the newness of the territory arises from the differences it presents to the structures you 'recognise': this particular new mountain looks similar to all the mountains you know, but it is also different because its peak looks like, say, a face. So you are applying your previous knowledge of mountains and humans to make sense of the difference that, in a sense, you have helped to establish or create. This works for a geographical as well as for other discourses. You presuppose an underlying structured system of what the 'human' for example is about and can do and which applies once you encounter beings that look at once similar to the kind of humans you know but who are also significantly different from what your structural 'knowledge' of humanness provides: e.g. a different skin colour or 'type', a human with qualities that are usually associated with nonhuman 'others' (e.g. a chimera or a cyborg) and so on.[101]

The critique that poststructuralism applies to this way of making sense – which, however, is and remains the standard way of making sense – is that this idea of underlying structure and manifestation is a depth-surface model that is highly problematic if you think it through. This is precisely what the 'post' in front of structuralism signals, and this is also where (Derridean) deconstruction comes in.[102] If that underlying structure, let us call it a systematic knowledge about 'humanness', is a model or 'territory' onto which concrete humans, nonhumans and

[100] Cf. Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[101] What to do with this 'difference' remains an eternal stumbling block for humanist ideas of 'universalism' and continues to be a highly contentious issue, particularly with regard to race, gender and species and their critique in posthumanist theory.

[102] Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences [1966]", in: Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., *The Languages of Criticism and The Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 247-272.

also posthumans have to be mapped (or to which they have to be compared), in serving as a model, it is at the same time both the origin and end point of the meaning thus produced; it is both its essence and its truth. However, if you want to make that structure present, if you want to find out what it really is, you will realise that its ultimate meaning will always escape you, because every manifestation of a particular human, for example, is always different from its idealised type. This means that – and this is the Derridean move that is captured by the neologism 'différance' – the full meaning of any structure and any essence must always be deferred while constantly differing from itself, i.e. while producing and proliferating differences or meanings. One therefore never arrives at a stable structure that could once and for all establish the meaning of what it is to be human (or posthuman for that matter). This would not be revolutionary or problematic if there were not constant attempts to pretend or claim by some people, philosophers, scientists, but also politicians, that they *do* know what things really mean once and for all (again, this is not a nihilist or populist argument that no safe meaning can ever be established, but it does challenge absolute truth claims). Humanists usually think they know what it means to be human (or at least tend to be confident about what isn't human), posthumanists – and this is the point of the 'post' in posthumanism – are less certain.

A discussion of poststructuralist, 'post-Saussurean', linguistics would not be complete without a discussion of the role of narrative. Signs do not occur in isolation, as soon as you perceive or think of a sign (a picture, a word, a landscape, a face, an object – literally everything that evokes meaning), meanings and associations come rushing in: experiences you have had, but also new connections that you make depending on a context. In order to create some sense of continuity, let us call this 'identity', in order to temporarily arrest this meaning and make it meaningful for someone (an 'I', which also implies a 'you', an 'us', a 'them', a 'world' and so on) you need to give this meaning a sequential order. This is what narrative does. It helps you make sense of time and in doing so, it establishes cause and effect – the basic operation of what philosophers refer to as 'rationality' (enabled by the faculty of 'reason' that is supposed to be innate, or natural, to every member of the human species and which, in turn, sanctions the most fundamental claims on which humanism, anthropocentrism and exceptionalism are based). A discourse like humanism is striving to create consensus about what it means to be human by establishing a consensus about how we became, are, continue to be and will further develop as, humans. In short, it takes the indefinite number of individual (human) stories and ways of making sense of (human) identity and turns them into what Lyotard, following Wittgenstein, called a '*grand récit*', or a powerful 'metanarrative'. A metanarrative is a narrative that appropriates a variety of smaller narratives and it is designed to legitimate central social values like freedom, individuality, or, as in the case of humanism's metanarrative, what it means to be human. [103]

Another, decisive, complication in the term 'post-human-ism' is an ambiguity about what the post in posthumanism precisely wishes to post (i.e. to critique, to project, to 'end'). There is a posthumanism that projects the end of human*ism*, the discourse; and there is a

[103] An 'incredulity' towards metanarratives is often seen, following Lyotard, as the central tenet of postmodernism (cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections of Time* [1988], trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

posthumanism that anticipates the end of the *human*. I would prefer to call the second variety, the desire that lies behind the idea of an overcoming of the *human*, 'transhumanist'.[104]

Poststructuralism and Posthumanism

Critical posthumanism (CPH) appropriates, continues and rewrites the legacy of poststructuralism while being aware of the problematic of dialectical overcoming and the ambiguity of the gesture of posting as described above. As a result, the main challenge is not to overcome (certainly not the human, maybe somewhat more humbly, human*ism*) but to submit to deconstruction the entire humanist philosophical tradition, worldview and set of values that have come to dominate Western culture, arguably form its ancient Greek, Roman and Judeo-Christian beginnings.

More specifically, what posthumanism extends and complicates are poststructuralist notions of subjectivity, writing and alterity. The problems that a posthumanist thinking, or a thinking 'after the human' faces (or a certain humanist notion of the human to be more precise), all refer back to the questions raised by poststructuralism's antihumanist stance. These problems are most clearly articulated in some emblematic postructuralist debates like Foucault's idea of the end of man, Derrida's reprise in his 'The Ends of Man', the discussion around the 'death' of the subject and the question of who or what might come after it, as well as Lyotard's notion of the inhuman.[105]

The main reason why poststructuralism is seen as antihumanist is that it treats the humanist subject (i.e. 'man') as a ghost-like figure, as a misconception that is about to disappear. A very brief history of the modern (liberal humanist) subject would read like this: Descartes believed that by doubting everything but his own ability to doubt he could infer the existence of a thinking subject (*ego cogito ergo sum*). Kant raised the stakes by making the subject the centre of experience and thereby excluded the object (or the 'thing as such') from (human) ontological investigation (which, under the name of 'correlationism', has become the main target of critique by 'speculative realism' and 'object-oriented-ontology').[106] Both Nietzsche and Freud are associated with a critique of the modern, Kantian, or transcendental notion of

[104] For the distinction between post- and transhumanism see Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, p. 40ff. Transhumanism is not so much a break with humanism (especially not with its anthropocentrism) but a continuation and projected achievement of human perfectibility (usually claimed to be achievable by way of technological and moral enhancement or, transcendence into a new "species", i.e. cyborgs and AI. Transhumanist technotopias of enhancement or replacement usually go the expense or a rejection of human 'embodiment'.

[105] Again, there is a significant overlap between poststructuralism and postmodernism in this context. One way of distinguishing poststructuralism from postmodernism might be simply "pragmatic" in that the former is the more "philosophical" while the latter tends to be a broader "sociological" way of making sense of "modernity".

[106] Quentin Meillassoux defines correlationism as "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 5).

subjectivity, however, it is structuralism in the first half of the 20th century, and poststructuralism that have accelerated the 'decentring' and 'death' of the (unified, self-centred, conscious) subject. Posthumanism partakes in the still ongoing deconstruction of the subject by focusing on a critique of subjectivity's inherent anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. In this respect, the idea of 'after the human', clearly recalls the landmark collection of essays figuring the who's who of poststructuralism at the time it was edited (1991) by Eduardo Cadava under the title of *Who comes after the subject?*[107] Who (or what) comes after the subject, is the poststructuralist version of the posthumanist question: who (or what) comes after the human? Or, who or what comes after the humanist subject? And, which forms of agency does posthumanism afford?

The idea of 'coming after' the (human) subject, in this sense, also takes up Foucault's image of "man" being "an invention of recent date", which might be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea".[108] Instead of premature apocalyptism Foucault's notorious phrase of the 'end of man' can be seen in a critically historical rather than a jubilantly nihilistic sense. Foucault's disenchantment with the human 'figure' points towards the historicisation of the human as an object of investigation, a shift that is likely to exceed any framework of philosophical anthropology and the 'humanities' more generally. This historicisation of the *figure* of the human (a gesture which programmatically refers to an entire generation of 'antihumanists'), however, remains somewhat incomplete. It is here that posthumanism indeed represents a radicalisation and a relocation of the human in the sense that it transcends any dialectical historicisation in which the human is neither the absolute subject of historicism (its 'end') nor merely one 'object' out of many. Instead, it is the unacknowledged speciesism or anthropocentrism underlying the idea of subjectivity that has become the central target of posthumanist critique.[109]

This critique, however, is already well underway in Derrida's influential interview "Eating Well" (1991), for example, where he speaks of the "fable of the subject" as an anthropocentric "fiction", which traditionally has always denied any form of subjectivity to the nonhuman (e.g. the animal, the machine, the object). In this sense, any discourse which tacitly presupposes the subject as a *human* subject is committed to what Derrida refers to as a "sacrificial" idea which sanctions directly or indirectly the instrumentalisation of the nonhuman by the human (an ideology Derrida names "carno-phallogocentrism"),[110] which not only serves the legitimation of 'meat-eating virility' in Western cultures but, in the age of biotechnology, is also related to the commodification of life in its multiplicity of forms more generally.[111] Today's so-called 'posthuman condition' (the proliferation of cyborgs, generalised biopolitics, the critique of speciesism in animal studies, the Anthropocene or human-induced climate

[107] Eduardo Cadava, ed., *Who Comes After the Subject?* (New York: Rouledge, 1991).
[108] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, ed. R.D.Laing (New York: Pantheon, 1970), pp. 386-387.
[109] Cf. Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
[110] Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well', or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida", in: Cadava, Who Comes After the Subject?, p. 113.
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

change) therefore does not coincide with the liquidation of the subject but rather with the pluralisation of subjects, including the proliferation of nonhuman subjectivities.

The "nonhuman turn"[112] that posthumanism and its critique of anthropopocentrism and the arrogance of humanism has provoked in the (post)humanities has an important precursor in Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the "inhuman".[113] What this notion of the inhuman prompts within posthumanism is the need to acknowledge all those ghosts, all those human others that have been repressed as part of the process of humanisation: animals, machines, objects, as well as gods, demons and monsters of all kinds.[114]

In summary: what poststructuralism bequeaths to posthumanism is the fact that 'after the end of man', or 'after the human', also need to be understood as *before* the human. In between the crisis of finality and renewal, there is 'our' current chance to rethink the human, to think the human otherwise. This is the ambiguity inhabiting every 'post-', and posthumanism in particular. Or, in other words, what poststructuralism, or simply the legacy of 'theory', reminds posthumanism of is, precisely, the continued need for theorising, or "theory after theory".[115] In this sense, poststructuralism survives in the work of many thinkers that have been instrumental in the development of CPH, notably in the writing of Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, Bernard Stiegler, Claire Colebrook, Karen Barad, Vicki Kirby, Roberto Esposito and Cary Wolfe, to name but the most obvious. What precisely survives, is a kind of critical instinct (which is of course also much older than poststructuralism itself), namely that in between (human) identity and (human) difference there is an otherness that both produces and undermines this very opposition of identity and difference. The posthuman, nonhuman, more-than-human as well as the after-the-human are names for this irrepressible invasion of the other into the supposed self-sameness of the human.

[112] Cf. Richard Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
[113] Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (1991). In his influential essay "A Postmodern Fable [1992]", trans. Georges Van Den Abeele, in: Simon Malpass, ed., *Postmodern Debates* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 12-21, Lyotard also raises the important question of posthuman embodiment.
[114] Cf. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human* (2002).
[115] Cf. Jane Elliott and David Attridge, eds., *Theory After 'Theory'* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Chapter 2: Posthumanism, Subjectivity, Autobiography

Post-human-ism

> As the posthuman gets a life, it will be fascinating to observe and engage adaptations of narrative lives routed through an imaginary of surfaces, networks, assemblages, prosthetics, and avatars.[116]

The official (auto)biography of the posthuman and its posthumanism might run something like this: traces of proto-posthumanist philosophy can be easily found in Nietzsche, Darwin, Marx, Freud and Heidegger and their attacks on various ideologemes of humanism. This critique was then taken further by the (in)famous antihumanism of the so-called '(French) poststructuralists' (Althusser, Lacan, Barthes, Kristeva, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, Derrida…), who were translated, 'homogenised', received and institutionalised in the English-speaking world under the label '(French) theory' and added to the larger movement called 'postmodernism'. At the same time, the impact of new digital or information technologies was being felt and theorised in increasingly 'interdisciplinary' environments in the humanities and '(critical) science studies'. Two foundational texts are usually cited here, namely Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985 [1991]) and N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). Both of these texts (Hayles's explicitly, Haraway's implicitly), from a theoretical point of view, function according to the formula: posthumanism = poststructuralist theory + technics. The temptation has therefore been to see posthumanism as the 'natural' successor – in analogy with the popular idea that AI, cyborgs or digital machines function as the obvious successors to the human species – to the still too humanist postmodernist-*cum*-poststructuralist paradigm. Which means of course that the poststructuralist theory responsible for the birth of this posthumanism supposedly merely has a 'midwife' function and thus needs to be 'overcome'.

This line of argument, however, seems rather simplistic and deterministic for what one might call *critical* posthumanism (CPH), which has been contesting this story in a number of ways. First, there is a rampant technological determinism in what often passes for posthumanist thinking. The inevitability of the technological drive of a historical teleology one could call 'posthumanisation' is usually just taken for granted. Since technology is what makes us human and since 'anthropotechnics'[117] is virtually synonymous with hominisation, technological

[116] Sidonie Smith, "Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries", *PMLA* 126.3 (2011): 571.

[117] Anthropotechnics, in general, is based on the idea that humanness is defined through the use of specific tools or techniques. The term has been used by Peter Sloterdijk, however, in his project of a 'prophetic anthropology', to characterise humans as those beings who develop techniques that are designed to act upon humans themselves, namely in the form of a 'self-taming' or 'self-engendering' process (cf. Peter Sloterdijk*, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism", Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 27 (2009): pp. 12-28*; *Das Menschentreibhaus – Stichworte zur historischen und prophetischen Anthropologie* (Weimar: VDG, 2001); *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics (Cambridge: Polity, 2013)*). Similar accounts of how humans are 'originarily' connected to technology can be found in Bernard Stiegler's work (Cf. *Time and Technics, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Trans. George Collins and Richard Beardsworth (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

innovation must by definition be the motor of history. While the first part of the thesis is certainly true, the second as I would argue is merely an ideological construction.

There is thus a need for a 'posthumanism without technology', in the sense that, following the Derridean logic of supplementarity, since the original *technē* deconstructs the metaphysical idea of humanism (i.e. human nature) – namely that humans can somehow know and experience something like an essential humanness that defines 'us' (or 'our' humanity) as a species – the human is always already inhabited by something other than itself, something 'inhuman', which nevertheless *necessarily* defines the human. Digital or high-tech, from a historical point of view, would thus be one possible form or maybe a period, or the latest, possibly last, stage of '(post)hominisation'. To counter the ambient technological determinism or the techno-teleology of many popular post- or transhumanisms one strategy of CPH has been to focus on 'prefigurations' and 'anticipations' of the posthuman (as a figure), posthumanism (as a discourse) and posthumanisation (as a process) and has argued that only a historically and theoretically aware thinking about these should deserve to be seen as 'critical'.[118]

In what follows I would like to go back and reconnect a few things that may have become somewhat disjointed in the autobiographical sketch of posthumanist theory outlined above. In particular, the points to revisit are: the poststructuralist critique of the subject, the postmodernist approach to autobiography and the notion of the posthuman itself. I will briefly return to Haraway and Hayles, before setting out the relationship between the often proclaimed 'death of the subject', postmodern autobiography, and a few examples of what might be termed 'posthuman auto-biographies'.

Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1991 [first 1985])[119] sets out what has proven to be a serious contender for a new (post-postmodern) 'techno-metanarrive'. Here are, arguably, the central passages that have given birth to the currently dominant discursive form of posthumanism (even if Haraway has always disavowed the label):

> By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation (…). By the late twentieth century in United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last

[118] Cf. Herbrechter, *Posthumanismus – Eine kritische Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009); and Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, "What's Wrong with Posthumanism?" *Rhizomes* 7 (2003; special issue "Theory's Others"), http://www.rhizomes.net/issue7/callus.htm (accessed 7/11/2023); "The Latecoming of the Posthuman, Or, Why 'We' Do the Apocalypse Differently, 'Now'", *Reconstruction* 4.3 (2004); "Critical posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology". *Subject Matters* 3.2 and 4.1 (2007): 15-30; "What is a Posthumanist Reading?" *Angelaki* 13.3 (2008): 95-111; Herbrechter and Callus, eds., *Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)Ressitibility of Theory* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004); *Cy-Borges: Memories of the Posthuman in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2009); *Posthumanist Shakespeares* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012).

[119] In Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-181.

> beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks – language, tool use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need for such a separation; indeed, many branches of feminist culture affirm the pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures.(…) The second leaky distinction is between animal-human (organism) and machine. (…) The third distinction is a subset of the second: the boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise for us.[120]

I want to highlight a number of questions these two passages raise and to which I will return in this essay: who is speaking here? Who is the narrator of this narrative? Who or what is left 'outside' this story? Where and when is the point of narration? I would argue that these questions play an important part in reading Haraway's text as a kind of autobiography (cf. her statement "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess").[121]

The second seminal posthumanist text is N.Katherine Hayles's, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). The most frequently quoted and most programmatic passage is this one:

> What is the posthuman? Think of it as a point of view characterized by the following assumptions. […] First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman considers consciousness […] as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures the human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.[122]

This is preceded by her main argument for an "embodied information politics", after Turing:

> What embodiment secures is not the distinction between male and female or between humans who can think and machines which cannot. Rather, embodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it. This realization, with all its exfoliating implications, is so broad in its effects and so deep in its consequences that it is transforming the liberal subject, regarded as the model of the human since the Enlightenment, into the posthuman.[123]

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[120] *Ibid.*, pp. 150-152.
[121] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[122] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 2-3.
[123] *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

It thus seems that the posthumanisation process for Hayles is a reinscription of embodiment under new conditions, a new understanding of (post)human autobio*graphy*, in which the subject of inscription and the inscription process itself with all its forms of materiality might no longer be controllable by a "liberal humanist subject" and instead will lead to new forms of (posthumanist) agency. The implications of this process will be dealt with in the last part of this chapter.

The Death of the Subject and Autobiography

It is worth reiterating that the 'liberal humanist subject' has been the main target of poststructuralist theory since the 1970s. But even before that, the subject had already been declared dead by European structuralism, and has been living a kind of ghost or zombie existence ever since. The fact that the subject's death has been enacted and repeated so many times, with its resurrection invoked on a regular basis, proves that the subject has always had the ontological (or rather hauntological) structure of a ghost[124] – it is, in fact, an at once impossible *and* necessary conceptual device or "*dispositif*".[125]

This is more or less the lesson (postmodern) theory has learned from a combination of Althusser, Lacan, Foucault, Levinas and Derrida.[126] It is also that which has made the concept of autobiography so complicated but also so popular a genre in recent times. The very idea of autobiography relies on a subject (or a narrator) who is capable of remembering, interpreting and identifying with his or her life story. It is a very specific form of embodiment that usually conveys trust in the impression that the subject of the narration is identical to the subject of the narrative. This is, in fact, what guarantees self-sameness, i.e. an assurance that 'I' *am* (or this *is*) 'me'. Many complications trouble this model of autobiographical consciousness, usually referred to as basically 'Cartesian': there are, first of all, the earlier blows against this

[124] On the 'inevitability' of the subject see Herbrechter and Callus, "Introduction: Posthumanist subjectivities, or, coming after the subject", Subjectivity 5 (2012): 241–264, and its discussion of Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991) in particular.

[125] As far as the notion of '*dispositif*' (or 'apparatus') is concerned, this originally Foucaultian term has since ben taken up by Giorgio Agamben, who sees the apparatus as "rooted in the very process of 'humanization'" (cf. Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus?" *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 16). According to Agamben, Foucault has shown "how, in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create – through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge – docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their 'freedom' as subjects in the very process of their desubjectification" (pp. 19-20). What has changed under the current (arguably posthumanist) condition is that apparatuses "no longer act as much through the production of a subject, as through the processes of what can be called desubjectification (…) what we are now witnessing is that processes of subjectification and processes of desubjectification seem to become reciprocally indifferent, and so they do not give rise to the composition of a new subject, except in larval or, as it were, spectral form" (pp. 20-21). Agamben's overly pessimistic view is of course echoed in what follows; but as I would argue, there is also a more positive potential for posthumanist forms of auto-bio-graphical subjectitivities as long as they are understood as 'postanthropocentric' (cf. below).

[126] For a good introduction and reader of the main texts in question see Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan, eds., *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, 2nd ed (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004).

self-conscious 'I' from the figures referred to earlier (whose work is sometimes grouped under the term 'hermeneutics of suspicion'). Nietzsche critiques the objectivity and the truth of the subject through his notion of the 'will to power'. Freud's main claim is that the ego is not the master in its own house, i.e. the autobiographical 'I' cannot be trusted with its own story because it is partly written by other, namely unconscious, forces, under the influence of protective mechanisms, censorship and unconscious desires. Marx adds the idea that a subject is in fact subject to ideologies and is therefore not fully aware of its implication in larger political schemes, i.e. one could adapt Marx's famous dictum and say: humans write their (autobiographical) stories but not under the conditions of their own making. Darwin, of course, detects another logic at work in human undertakings. There are at least two versions of autobiography in every human subject – the (psycho)*individual* biography and the (genetic) autobiography of the *species*, which stand in a kind of dialogue with each other and which are largely determined by biology, genetics and evolution.

Poststructuralism radicalises these forms of suspicion, all directed against the idea that subjects are free and competent to give an accurate account of themselves, by further problematising a number of aspects, many of them related to the specific understanding of language (as based on Saussurean linguistics), namely that language is an abstract and culturally constructed system of (often binary) differences: Lacan rereads Freud in terms of linguistics and differentiates within each subject between an imaginary (narcissistic), symbolic (social) and real (unconscious) order. The conscious subject, for Lacan, is the effect of a double misrecognition – a narcissistic misrecognition of an identification with an idealised other and a social misrecognition based on the equally narcissistic illusion of being able to master language. Both identity and language, however, come from an other, which means that the subject *is being* identified and spoken rather than actually being in control of his or her auto- (or, rather, auto-hetero-) biography.

Althusser brings together Lacanian psychoanalysis, a Marxist understanding of ideology and aspects of (Saussure's and Benveniste's) linguistics. For him, the subject is fundamentally an addressing device, a pronoun shifter that allows to connect between a 'you' and a 'me/I/we' and to switch between these, through the mechanism of hailing (or interpellation, address). It is because subjects can be subjected to an address (by other subjects) that they can become subjects in the first place. A subject is therefore first and foremost a position or positioning, or a vulnerability in terms of lacking awareness about the very fact of being positioned (hence the ideological misrecognition of the liberal subject as being interpellated as 'free'). The necessary but unacceptable position of the subject of autobiography would lie in the fact that 'I' write about my 'self' as the 'free' subject of my own (life) narrative, or 'I' 'am' the main character in 'my' 'own' life story.

Foucault adds to this an analysis of the larger discursive power structures that work as much at a micro-, or, individual, level as on a larger, societal, or macro-level. Instead of oppression, modern societies rely on self-disciplining through processes of biopolitics, subjectivity and embodiment. A subject for Foucault is a subject of (i.e. both exercising and receiving) power who adapts to socio-political pressures by working on 'it(s) self'. An autobiography in the Foucauldian sense can therefore only be the inscription of biopolitics (a politics that seeks to govern 'life itself', hence the conceptual shift towards 'life-writing') into a narrative by a more or less empowered self as subject.

Both Levinas and Derrida stress another structural contradiction, or indeed an aporia, at the heart of the subject that is also constitutive of autobiography. There is a temporal and spatial delusion at work in the idea of a subject's self-presence. The subject is the effect of a radically 'other' (who, in Levinas's theological model, is ultimately God as experienced in the face of another human; in Derrida, this other is an unknowable who has the structure of a trace or of '*différance'* – a 'non-present' presence that can never be made present as such because it is always deferred and thus always differs from itself, like a trace). This other always precedes and gives rise to the subject's impression of self-presence and identity – an identity which is, in fact, always merely an identity which comes to 'me' from an 'earlier' but ultimately 'unknowable' other.

In short, as necessary as it may be to remain sceptical of any notion of the subject and as desirable as it may be to speculate on "who comes after the subject?" (cf. Cadava et al. (1991)), poststructuralism and deconstruction never really proclaimed the actual 'death' of the subject, simply because anything human (including the post, trans or inhuman) is (literally and *letterally*, i.e. through and *in* language) unthinkable without a notion of subjectivity. With this complicated (necessary *and* impossible, necessary *because* impossible) notion of the subject in mind, I can now return to the question of posthumanism and autobiography.

Addressing the Posthumanist Subject

> Narrating lives intersects with theorizing the posthuman, as the very concepts of memory and embodiment, at the heart of life writing, are put under pressure.[127]

Nobody will seriously contest the challenge that some of the new and ongoing technohistorical developments (informatisation, digitalisation, cyborgisation, cognitisation etc. which can be grouped under the term 'posthumanisation') pose to a traditional (liberal) humanist understanding of what it means to be 'me' and 'human'. There is, understandably, an apocalyptic tone in many writings about the posthuman. However, the task is to critically examine posthumanism – its challenges and potential – through the actual subject positions it provides, affords, or constructs. There is no reason why Althusser's basic conception of the subject should not apply under posthumanist or even posthuman conditions, provided one remains aware of Althusser's antihumanist blindspot. While Althusser seems to have an ideal addressee in mind in his description of his "little ideological theatre" (namely a French-speaking, probably white, male) who is of course, by default, assumed to be 'human', alternative and less ethno- and anthropocentric scenes of interpellation under posthuman(ist) conditions are imaginable and have indeed been occurring on a daily basis.[128] The interpellation mechanism is by no means suspended under new technocultural conditions. However, humans can of course be interpellated by a whole variety of social actors: machines, animals, things, etc. These machines, animals, things, etc. can also be addressed by humans and, provided they can somehow 'embody' these positions these can all also be attributed with subjectivity, which means that when machines address machines, animals, things, etc., or when animals address… etc., (at least some) aspects of subjectivity may be involved.

[127] Smith, "Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries", p. 570.

[128] Cf. Easthope and McGowan, eds., *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, pp. 42-50; see also Suzanne Gearhart's critique in Herbrechter and Callus, eds., *Discipline and Practice*, pp. 178-204.

Therefore, far from any end or death of subjectivity, posthuman(ist) conditions rather imply a proliferation of subjectivities, as well as ideology, address or forms, and instances of interpellation.

Although the posthumanist critique of humanism usually refers to seemingly overwhelming and disarming scientific and technological challenges, there are conceptual aspects that apply even 'without' technology. The major conceptual challenge is the idea of a post- or non-anthropocentric worldview that a *critical* posthumanism (CPH) implies. Seeing the world and ourselves no longer as the central meaningful entity in the universe, and challenging our ingrained habit to anthropomorphise everything that comes into human view – these are the main targets of CPH, which looks for points of articulation outside a necessarily human-centred discourse like humanism. This has several implications for autobiography and subjectivity. One is that autobiographies by subjects other than humans become literally thinkable (i.e. outside the typical anthropomorphism in which a human subject merely takes on the identity of a fictional nonhuman actor). Another is the proliferation of human and nonhuman forms of interpellation, subjectification and embodiment mentioned above.

To start with the latter, we can look again towards Donna Haraway and her more recent work on companion species, which provides us with the beginning of a theoretical framework for non-anthropocentric posthumanist forms of address and subjectivities. In her *When Species Meet* (2010), 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".[129] Haraway's notion of 'response-ability', which she, in this context, restricts to the interaction between companion species (i.e. human and nonhuman companion animals) 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 "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.[130]

Haraway's answer to this challenge lies in a new (posthumanist, post-anthropocentric) 'ecology', when she writes: "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".[131] One might therefore argue that, from a CPH point of view, Haraway's ecology should probably be extended to all kinds of social actors (human, animal, machine, collectivities and network).[132] The resulting complexification of such a 'postanthropocentralised' environment has obvious implications for the genre of autobiography.

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[129] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p, 71.
[130] *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 90.
[131] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[132] This is in a way what Latour argues for under the banner of ANT, cf. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

> *Embodiment* as the ground of autobiographical acts and practices is changing radically…[133]

The autobiographic genre thus 'faces' further proliferation and fragmentation as a result of a posthumanist and postanthropocentric ecology. Every component of the term 'auto-bio-graphy' is being challenged afresh by posthumanism: in short, the *auto*- in *auto*biography is seen as an instance of auto-affection, which relies on an inappropriable (inhuman) other. The *bio*- in auto*bio*graphy is exposed to the challenge as to what might constitute the *bio*logical element in every narration of (a) 'life' (the now often preferred term of 'life writing' for autobiography remains, in terms of subjectivity, quite ambiguous: i.e. is the 'life' in 'life writing' a subjective or an objective genitive?);[134] finally, the question of writing in autobio*graphy* is being raised again with more urgency by new forms and media of inscription. It is, for example, worth remembering that the Derridean notion of the trace, mentioned above, was from the start never restricted to any human logic of writing, or to forms of inscription exclusively effectuated by human subjects.[135]

Under these conditions, it is no surprise that as the forms of subjectivity proliferate the genre of autobiography becomes more and more fragmented and subdivided into subgenres like *autofiction*, life writing, memoir, *autobio(s)copie*, etc.[136] To somewhat counterbalance this trend I would like to return to a crucial moment in the conceptual life of our understanding of autobiography, namely Paul de Man's "Autobiography as Defacement", in which de Man argues that the most fundamental, underlying aspect that holds for everything autobiographical (and which could thus serve as a point from which to critically evaluate the current posthumanist explosion of the genre) is a certain play of figures and figurations.

Auobiography, de Man writes, "is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts":

> The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject. This specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding, but this merely makes explicit the wider claim to authorship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be *by* someone and assumed to be

[133] Smith, "Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries", p. 570 (my italics).
[134] Cf. also Herbrechter, "Narrating(-)Life – In Lieu of an Introduction, in: Herbrechter and Elisabeth Friis, eds., *Narrating Life – Experiments with Human and Animal Bodies in Literature, Art and Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 1-13.
[135] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 9; cf. also Laurent Milesi, "Derrida and Posthumanism (III): The Technicity of the Trace", *Genealogy of the Posthuman* (2020); available online: https://criticalposthumanism.net/derrida-and-posthumanism-iii-the-technicity-of-the-trace/ (accessed 7/11/2023).
[136] Cf. for example Philippe Lejeune, *Les Brouillons de soi* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

> understandable to the extent that this is the case. Which amounts to saying that any book with a readable title page is, to some extent, autobiographical.[137]

Every text articulated by some *one* (i.e. a subject) has the autoaffective characteristics de Man describes and is therefore at least at one level autobiographical. However, as de Man continues: "The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions".[138]

Even if one does not follow Paul de Man's rhetoric-centred understanding of deconstruction to its textualist extremes, his understanding of 'prosopopeia' as the central autobiographical trope remains central for any analysis of the autobiographical including its current posthumanised forms:

> Prosopopeia [*prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)] is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name... is made as intelligible and memorable as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration.[139]

Giving a face to, or the opposite, taking a face away from, a narrated experience constitutes the fundamental rhetorical device of figuring and disfiguring, or autobiographical subjectivity as 'mask'. However, de Man's rather pessimistic conclusions might not be the only possible understanding of this 'un/masking' process at work in the autobiographical. In fact, it is probably the underlying, non-articulated anthropocentrism and humanism in de Man's model that explains the barely veiled cynicism in the following passage:

> As soon as we understand the rhetorical function of prosopopeia as positing voice or face by means of language, we also understand that what we are deprived of is not life but the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding. Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause.[140]

A rather more neutral evaluation becomes possible by assuming that the metaphorical figuration and disfiguration (together with its 'real' epistemological, ontological and material effects, of course) at work in any (autobiographical) instance of writing also applies to nonhuman subjects and to interactions between a whole variety of human and nonhuman agents, and within a variety of analog, digital, social etc. networks.

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[137] Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement", *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 70.
[138] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[139] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[140] *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

Further assistance with articulating this new framework for postanthropocentric and posthumanist autobiographical writing comes from Jacques Derrida, who problematises the genre and its laws by referring to it as "auto-bio-hetero-thanato-graphy"[141] and by picturing it as a specific 'scene of writing'. In *Circonfession*, Derrida refers to the fundamental disjuncture at work in autobiography as: "the uninterrupted auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphic work, the only confidence that has ever interested me, but for whom?"[142] Indeed, one might ask, who is the ideal addressee of one's autobiography? For whom does one write one's autobiography? Derrida explains the impossibility of autobiography on the basis of a number of aporias (i.e. 'necessary', or unresolvable contradictions). There is, first of all, the problem of self-identity and the name, i.e. "Am I that name?" and the question of who is behind the figure of figuration, the defaced behind the face? Judith Butler's explanation, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, is helpful here:

> The 'I' can tell neither the story of its own emergence nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, which are prior to one's own emergence as a subject who can know, and so constitute a set of origins that one can narrate only at the expense of authoritative knowledge.[143]

Derrida articulates the problematic desire behind the autobiographical impulse through the relationship between auto-affection and death, i.e. the autobiographical 'scene of writing' necessarily passes through death. In an interview entitled "As If I Were Dead",[144] Derrida describes the im/possibility at the heart of externalising one's autobiographical experience:

> But what does it mean to be dead, when you are not totally dead? It means that you look at things the way they are *as such*, you look at the object *as such*. To perceive the object as such implies that you perceive the object as it is or as it is supposed to be when you are not there... So, to relate to an object *as such* means to relate to it as if you were dead. That's the condition of truth, the condition of perception, the condition of objectivity, at least in their most conventional sense. (…) What is absolutely scary is the idea of being dead while being quasi-dead, while looking at things from above, from beyond. But at the same time, it is the most reassuring hope we have that, although dead, we will continue to look, to listen to everything, to observe what's going on. (…) I think it is bearable only because of the *as if*: "as if I were dead". But the *as if*, the fiction, the *quasi-*, these are what protect us from the real event of death itself, if such a thing exists.[145]

If I necessarily have to write my autobiography 'as if I were dead', my auto-affection also necessarily risks turning into 'auto-infection' and 'auto-immunity':

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[141] Jacques Derrida, "Circonfession", Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 198.
[142] *Ibid*., my translation.
[143] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 37.
[144] Jacques Derrida, *"*As if *I were dead" – An Interview with Jacques Derrida* [1995] (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2000).
[145] *Ibid*., pp. 18, 20, 22.

> Autobiography, the writing of the self as living, the trace of the living for itself, being for itself, the auto-affection or auto-infection as memory or archive of the living would be an immunizing movement (...), but an immunizing movement that is always threatened with becoming auto-immunizing, as is every *autos*, every ipseity, every automatic, automobile, autonomous, autoreferential movement. Nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography, poisonous for itself in the first place, auto-infectious for the presumed signatory who is so auto-affected.[146]

An autobiography is therefore, strictly speaking, 'deadly' or if not quite 'posthuman' then 'posthumous', in the sense that it requires a self-positioning based on an identification with another, objectified, or 'dead', me – a relation to me as other that is regulated by unpredictable because unconscious processes of auto-immuno-in/affection.

An additional complication here is the Derridean play on 'zoography' (or, the involvement of the 'animal aut*r*obiographique').[147] What part does 'my' animal/life (i.e. the human body or embodiment as such) – the *zoe* as opposed to the *bio* of any 'me' – play in 'life' writing or autobiography?[148] There always seems to be an elusive zoographical trace underneath and a zoo-ontological other who precedes and 'writes', each biography. As Judith Butler explains: "To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one's life. There is a history to my body of which I can have no recollection".[149]

The indispensable writing body has its own zoographical ways of inscription that may not be articulable in traditional forms of autobiographical writing and works against the idea that autobiography as a genre usually relies on the authenticity of (bodily) experience, as Butler goes on to argue:

> If there is, then, a part of bodily experience as well – of what is indexed by the word exposure – that cannot be narrated but constitutes the bodily condition of one's narrative account of oneself, then exposure constitutes one among several vexations in the effort to give a narrative account of oneself. There is (1) a non-narrativizable exposure that establishes my singularity, and there are (2) primary relations, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life, and so (3) a history that establishes my partial opacity to myself. Lastly, there are (4) norms that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. This last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by (5) the structure of address in which it takes place.[150]

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[146] Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002), p. 415.

[147] Aut*r*obiography, according to the logic of the auto as becoming other (auto-hetero-biography) outlined by Derrida, in "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", p. 415) and referred to above.

[148] For the distinction between *zoē* and *bios* see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[149] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, p. 38.

[150] *Ibid*., p. 39.

There is thus always an experience of dispossession (or desubjectification) at work , which is experienced (or inscribed, registered) at a material, bodily level, and which is the necessary precondition for auto-affection to arise in the first place, but which can never be narrated as such. The body who experiences (or is materially inscribed with) the *auto*biography can never *be* the body who narrates the auto*bio*graphy. There is, in fact, a disjuncture between bodies at work within the autobiographical process: material, somatic, phenomenological, narrating and narrated, to name but a few.

In terms of the narrated body, Butler's last two points coincide with a problem highlighted in Derrida's notion of *plus d'une langue* (in his own autobiographical 'language memoir',[151] which in terms of autobiography raises the question: what language constitutes the 'me' of an autobiography, given that (1) there is always more than one language at work (even within a/one language), and (2) there is never one (whole) language that can be made 'present' and thus guarantee the integrity and authority of a speaking subject? Derrida's *plus d'une langue* is thus part of an explanation for the proliferation of the 'language memoir' as an autobiographical subgenre, but it has of course also a bearing on the more general question: what language(s) would a nonhuman subject write its autobiography in? Digital code? Biosemiotics? In "The Animal That Therefore I Am" (2002), Derrida articulates the more dangerous aspects these questions might have. Placed within the context of an inflation of seemingly innocuous autobiographies and autobiographical subjects outlined above, the danger becomes manifest if we return to the other side of posthumanism – the possibility of a literal defacement and disfiguration or disappearance of the human and the human species, including the whole human and nonhuman ecology that is affected or auto-affected by this. Derrida hints at this when he refers to "the autobiography of the human species" (with its underlying "carnophallogocentrism"):[152]

> It will not be a matter of attacking frontally or antithetically the thesis of philosophical or common sense on the basis of which has been built the relation to the self, the presentation of the self of human life, the autobiography of the human species, the whole history of the self that man recounts to himself, that is to say the thesis of a limit as rupture or abyss between those who say "we men," "I, a man," and what this man among men who say "we," what he *calls* the animal or animals.[153]

What holds for animal nonhuman others might again be extendable under posthumanist or postanthropocentric conditions to other nonhuman others and their interactions between themselves and others.

Posthuman(ist) Life Writing

> In the future, surgically, genetically, or digitally altered models of embodiment will surely inform the tropes, narrative arcs, subject positions, and affective charges of life

[151] Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).
[152] cf. Derrida, "'Eating Well', or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida", in: Eduardo Cadava et al., eds, *Who Comes After the Subject?* Pp. 96-119.
[153] Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", p. 398.

> writing. What new stories will we be telling of embodiment, simultaneously organic and technological, as emergent experiments in inhabiting bodies unsettle boundaries between species and species, human and inert, human and quantum?[154]

So are there specifically posthumanist forms of life writing or autobiography that are aware of and address the issues raised above (and reflected in the epigraphs taken from Sidonie Smith's MLA presidential address on the theme of "narrating lives")? I can only give the very briefest of sketches of some examples of what kind of posthuman and/or posthumanist are envisageable.[155]

It seems obvious that once the writing of (a) life, life writing, narrating lives, testimonies of lives etc. are no longer (exclusively) done by human subjects new autobiographical forms become thinkable. However, this development of course also reflects back on the generic markers of human and humanist autobiographies as such. Some generic changes are due to changes in (old) media (i.e. 'retrofitting' or 'remediation' of the genre), others lie in the development of 'new' media platforms. Again other changes are due to more invasive technologies and processes of 'cyborgisation' or 'prosthesisation' (i.e. new forms of techno-embodiment and their experience). Conceptual and/or social changes in our relationships to nonhuman others (animals, things, machines, etc.) also lead to new forms of autobiography. In the context of an apocalyptic posthumanism already mentioned, the auto-hetero-thanatography of the human or of the entire human species becomes a subgenre of its own. Examples can be found from the Romantic period onwards, and have become prevalent in science fiction (where this seems to have become a major trope, i.e. humanity telling the story of its own replacement by machines, cf. *Bladerunner*, *Terminator*, *Matrix*…), as well as the rise of 'docufiction' programmes articulated from a fictional posthum(ane)ous position, on how the world would look 'without us' (cf. *Life After people* or *The World Without Us*).[156] The fundamental posthumanist question that all of these (postanthropocentric but, of course, not postanthropomorphic) 'scenes of writing' gesture towards would be: is there writing 'outside' (before and after) the human?[157]

New (arguably, posthuman) subjectivities are increasingly constructed in the form of what could be called the 'tech-memoir'. A well-known almost classic example by now is Kevin Warwick's *I Cyborg* (2002), in which he narrates his experience of having a microchip implant. Since Warwick (at least at the time) was also a professor of cybernetics his motivation in writing an autobiography from the point of view of becoming-other or becoming-(one-with-the)-machine, however, was both personal (i.e. autobiographical) and technoscientific. His memoir could therefore be described as an 'auto-hetero-techno-bio-graphy'. He begins *I Cyborg* by stating that:

> This book is all about me. One problem, when writing about oneself, is that it is extremely difficult to be objective. We tend to think we are in the right even when it is

[154] Smith, "Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries", p. 571.

[155] Posthuman and posthumanist are by no means identical in this context: e.g. humanist autobiographies of posthumans are significantly easier to imagine than posthumanist autobiographies of humans.

[156] Both based on Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (New York: St. Martins, 2007).

[157] See also Herbrechter, *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021)..

> obvious we are in the wrong. When we win, well it was obvious, we were better than the other fellow. When we lose, then there was an obvious mistake, the referee was biased, or, failing that, we may have lost, but how we performed in doing so was in a much better way than the other guy. When looking at a situation from a human standpoint, it is just as difficult for us all to be objective. If we look at our abilities in comparison with other creatures it can be impossible for us to concede defeat on any point. At length we may concede that some creatures are faster or stronger, but at least we can fall back on the undeniable fact that we are obviously more intelligent than they are.[158]

This becomes even more complicated once we start taking the phrase 'artificial intelligence' seriously, as Warwick continues:

> Unfortunately, since the advent of machine intelligence, even this stalwart reasoning has come into question. When we can clearly witness a Computer performing feats that we consider important aspects of intelligence — such as mathematical equations or fact retrieval — and easily outperforming humans in doing so, we try to find some excuse. (vii) We say, well, it's not really an intelligent act. Or, it's not doing it in the right way. Or, it's not conscious like we are. Or, worst of all, it's not conscious at all — how can it be, it's a machine.[159]

Warwick's motivation, or his ethics and politics, is to overcome the antagonistic (humanist) stance and fully embrace or even 'become' the machinic other:

> What matters is performance. Whether we like it or not, we know that machines can perform aspects of intelligence with a performance that outshines those of humans. The question we can then ask ourselves is, okay, rather than admit defeat, can we join forces? After all, partnerships and alliances are often the most powerful combinations of all. In this instance, can we upgrade the human form, directly linking with technology to become cyborgs?[160]

In perfect analogy to de Man's logic of de/facement, figuration and disfiguration outlined above, the experiment on himself, or rather his self, allows Warwick thus to put himself into the privileged position of writing about his experience and what it might mean to become cyborg:

> This is the story of my own attempt to push someway in that direction. Why should I want to do that? What led me to it? Why is it important to me? Most of all though, why do I think it is the most important topic facing the human race at this time? In reading these pages I hope that you will find answers to these questions and more. But please forgive me if you I feel [*sic*] that I am only indicating my own point of view. Although I am writing this as a cyborg, I still suffer from that human frailty of a lack of objectivity, particularly when it is myself in the dock.[161]

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[158] Kevin Warwick, *I, Cyborg* (London: Century / Random House, 2002), p. vii.
[159] *Ibid*.
[160] *Ibid*., p. viii.
[161] *Ibid*.

What starts as a serious attempt at writing from a postanthropocentric or posthumanist point of view, however, quickly falls back on the old idea of human perfectibility and thus rejoins the humanist grand narrative.

Somewhat more circumspect and uneasy is Jean-Luc Nancy's short philosophical memoir about his experience of becoming a kind of cyborg, having been fitted with a pacemaker. In *L'Intrus* (2002), Nancy writes his version of an 'auto-hetero-techno-bio-graphy' from the more metaphysical or phenomenological perspective of becoming inhuman or, at least, 'differently' human:

> What a strange self! It's not that they opened me wide [*béant*] in order to change my heart. It is rather that this gaping open [*béance*] cannot be closed. (Every x-ray moreover shows this: the sternum is sewn through with twisted pieces of wire.) I am closed open. There is in fact an opening through which passes a stream of unremitting strangeness… It is thus my self who becomes my own *intrus*...[162]

It is interesting to note, however, that Nancy, almost inevitably, employs the analogy of the "cyborg" (science fiction) or the "zombie" (horror movie): "I am becoming like a science fiction adroid, or the living-dead, as my youngest son one day to me".[163] It is as if the only (techno)cultural imaginary available here was that of science fiction horror.[164] This returns me to the question of technological determinism and posthumanism that I started with, and also to the role that science fiction might play in the contemporary cultural imaginary and its repertoire of tropes regarding the currently available forms of 'constructions of the future'.

Post-Script: De-Facebook

> The human relation to remembering is being reconfigured by the capacious, constantly updated and updatable archive that is the Internet. Every ort and fragment of digitalized life posted on a *Facebook* wall, on a blog, or in a tweet remain retrievable. This is an archive without an archivist, without rules of collection, and seemingly without rules of privacy. Far from encouraging purposeful self-representation or self-invention, this vast memory machine may well constrict life writing.[165]

One final note on the potential of new (increasingly global or globalised social) media networks, which are having a substantial impact on autobiographical practice and conceptualisations of the autobiographical. Gillian Whitlock, in *Soft Weapons* (2007), analyses the relationship between the 'virtualisation' of autobiography within digital environments, on

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[162] Jean-Luc Nancy, "L'Intrus", trans. Susan Hanson, *CR: The New Centennial Review* 2.3 (2002): 10.
[163] *Ibid*., p. 13.
[164] While organ transplantation always seems to involve an experience of the body as a "stranger to itself" this of course, by no means, inevitably leads to the use of techno-scientific metaphors (cf. Margaret Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002)). Cf. also Francisco Varela's account of his liver transplant (Varela, "Intimate Distances: Fragments for a Phenomenology of Organ Transplantation", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8.5-7 (2001): 259-71), which also discusses Nancy' "L'Intrus").
[165] Smith, "Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries", p. 570.

the one hand, and the power shifts which a global medium like the internet affords previously 'liminal' forms of autobiography. Increasingly, as she argues, autobiographical narrative is used as a "soft weapon" by individuals but also powerful lobbies in their fight for recognition:

> It is now a given in autobiography criticism that the "I" of autobiography and memoir has never been anything but virtual. (…) Any snapshot of the transits of life narrative must engage with the work of contemporary autobiography as it moves across cultures in conflict. Autobiography circulates as a "soft weapon." It can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard.[166]

As promising as some of these aspects of new social media might seem, it is nevertheless worth spelling out, as Sidonie Smith does,[167] that there is a problematic side to this fragmentation and virtualisation. The phenomenal success of social networks like *Facebook* certainly proves the new powerful alliance between autobiographical desire and the connectivity and interactive possibilities of digital media. However, it also raises the economic and ideological investment of digital capitalism in these emergent (and, arguably, 'posthumanist' if not at least partly 'posthuman') communities and new subjectivities. The new kind of subjectivity that digital environments like *Facebook* promote, sometimes referred to as the 'prosumer' (i.e. the (self)producing consumer of digitalised 'information'), seems nevertheless to thrive on the traditional (humanist) narcissistic urge of the Cartesian subject. The autobiographical tropes of figuration and disfiguration (taking on avatars and an increasing variety of web-(inter)-faces in order to find (old and new) 'friends' or merely to stay 'in contact' in an increasingly fragmented and virtualised environment) are being used ever more frantically (some would undoubtedly say 'enthusiastically') in an attempt to integrate, control and empower a *private* self with an inevitably and irrecoverably *public* face. This extended and accelerated mechanism of online identity work may feel empowering but it also plays into the hands of the ubiquitous capitalist logic driving the increasingly commercialised web with its harvesting of 'big data', which constantly attempts to exploit the ambiguous space between self-identity and autobiographical defacement. It is thus worth remembering that digital new media as well as sites and social networks like *Facebook* do not *automatically* lead to new 'empowered' forms of autobiography.

The 'posthuman condition' under which autobiographies are increasingly being produced have thus, on the one hand, greatly enhanced the opportunities for "giving an account of oneself" to use again Butler's phrase, which means that the potential for new post- or nonhuman subjectivities has also greatly increased. However, so has the deeply problematic proliferation of auto-affective and auto-immunitarian side-effects of the *dispositif* of posthumanist or postanthropcentric subjectivity, to return to Agamben's diagnosis of contemporary capitalist society.[168]

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[166] Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 1, 3.

[167] Cf. the epigraph to the Postscript above, Smith, "Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries", p. 570 above.

[168] Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus?", p. 20.

Chapter 3: The Rhetoric of the Posthuman

> Thus the task that remains is to engage the question of language at a fundamental level – i.e., *where a question concerning the being of language opens to the possibility of rethinking notions such as experience, material being, or the 'human' itself.* We must restore to the question of language all its ontological weight.[169]

This is all very well but how exactly do we do that, "restore to the question of language all its ontological weight"? Is the current trend not rather to 'forget' language (again)? Undeniably, the question of language has, for decades of structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism, been dominating the humanities to an extent where exasperations of language's 'prisonhouse', Derridean 'sophistry' and linguistic representationalism have led to, what might be called, a generalised anti- or even post-philological stance bent on reversing or repressing the effects of the 'linguistic turn'. One prominent example in this context is Geoffrey Galt Harpham's *Language Alone: The Critical Fetish of Modernity*, whose main argument against Saussurean and modern linguistics in general is that language simply cannot be an 'object of knowledge' for thought. The result of this 'misconception', as he explains is the following: "This is why all characterizations of the essence or true nature of language are tendentious, but it is also why thought of language has been able to serve so effectively as a proxy for other thoughts, a way of addressing recurrent questions about human life that have become difficult to address directly in a posthumanist and rationalist climate".[170] What I find particularly interesting in this passage is the reference to "posthumanism" (in 2002!) in the context of a "rationalist climate". It leads me to assume that the idea of addressing "directly" the questions of human "life" (that, apparently, have become difficult to tackle because of the 'linguisticism' (French) Theory, or poststructuralism and deconstruction) is what, in the first decades of the 21st century, is commonly thought of as posthumanism – namely, a return to questions of human (and nonhuman) life, however no longer only in the sense of what does it *mean* to be human (or inhuman), but even more so: what *is* it to be human in the face of accelerated technological change, the erosion of traditional (humanist) anthropological boundaries and deep ecology?

This means that, in fact, Harpham's call to reason and Fynsk's fundamental ontology of language are not so far apart, after all. Both present a scenario where the mist of language might dissipate to leave a clear view of experience, material being, the human or life itself. That seems to be what their hoping for at least. Harpham's aim is to clear the air by curing the thought of language of the common obsession of both humanism and antihumanism, as he states: "And so it is that both humanism, centred on the figure of the speaking lord of creation, and antihumanism, which posits man as the slave of impersonal forces, emerge under the ambiguous sign of language".[171] Neither objectification of language, then, nor losing sight of language completely – which would spell the end of the humanities (at least as 'we' know them) – would be a solution. This also corresponds to Fynsk's main political objective: "how to speak of the humanities today?" So, whatever you do, don't insist too much on the

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[169] Christopher Fynsk, *The Claim of Language: A Case for the Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 60; italics in the original.

[170] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *Language Alone: The Critical Fetish of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. ix-x.

[171] Harpham, *Language Alone*, p. 14

linguisticality of language, seems to be the message, in the current 'posthumanist' and '(neo)rationalist' climate. Posthumanists – i.e. those of 'us' who are addressing the 'posthuman condition' – should no longer "get bogged down in arguments about language", as Robert Pepperell made clear.[172] But how indeed, then – to return once more to the epigraph taken from Fynsk – should we "restore to the question of language all its ontological weight", if we are not really supposed to speak of it, or to take language too seriously? Or, in other words, how to avoid speaking?[173] This is the conundrum that introduces my topic in this chapter, namely rhetoric and the relationship between language and the (post)human.

Rhetoric and Philosophical Anthropology

> Rhetoric teaches the anthropological indispensability of appearance and form. And these are the common fundamental experiences of anthropology and rhetoric: truth is unobtainable and reality is unfriendly. Rhetoric is self-defence [*Rhetorik ist Notwehr*].[174]
>
> The challenge of bringing logos and ethos into the right relationship was, and is, the challenge confronting anthropos.[175]

The relationship between rhetoric, humanism, (philosophical) anthropology and philology was a topic considered worth readdressing in the last few decades, especially in Germany, as a number of essay collections with titles like *Die Aktualität der Rhetorik* (1996), *Rhetorische Anthropologie: Studien zum Homo rhetoricus* (2000), *Homo Inveniens: Heuristik und Anthropologie am Modell der Rhetorik* (2003), and *Kulturtechnik Philologie* (2011) demonstrate.[176] In his introduction to *Rhetorische Anthropologie*, "Was weiß die Rhetorik vom Menschen?", Josef Kopperschmidt speaks of the "implicit anthropology" of (classical) rhetoric in the context of the currency and the turn or return to rhetoric in the late 20th century. Indeed, one might ask, why rhetoric, still? Who or what continues to force humans to use rhetoric – this seems to be a question that becomes worth asking once anthropology has to

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[172] Robert Pepperell, *The Post-Human Condition* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 1995), p. 183.

[173] This conundrum recalls Jacques Derrida's engagement with the question "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", in: Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (New York: SUNY, 1992), pp. 73-142. The differentiation Derrida undertakes between deconstruction and negative theology in this essay is of course not unrelated to the problem of 'how to speak of the posthuman?' which concerns me here. The point that Derrida makes is that there is always "an obligation before the first word" (p. 73) that would turn the idea of "not speaking", or the forgetting (repression?) of language, into a denial: "To speak for *nothing* is not: not to speak. Above all, it is not to speak to no one" (p. 76). The entire deconstructive logic of the trace, the event and of addressing the subject is thus again implicated in the problematic of the 'posthuman'.

[174] Norbert Bolz, "Das Verschwinden der Rhetorik in ihrer Allgegenwart", in: Heinrich F. Plett, ed., *Die Aktualität der Rhetorik* (Munich: Fink, 1996), p. 74 [all translations unless indicated otherwise are mine].

[175] Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 11.

[176] Heinrich F. Plett, ed., *Die Aktualität der Rhetorik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1996), Josef Kopperschmidt, ed., *Rhetorische Anthropologie: Studien zum Homo rhetoricus* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2000), Stefan Metzger and Wolfgang Rapp, eds., *Homo Inveniens: Heuristik und Anthropologie am Modell der Rhetorik* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2003), and Pal Kelemen, Erno Kulcsar Szabo and Abel Tames, eds., *Kulturtechnik Philologie: Zur Theorie des Umgangs mit Texten* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011).

deal with its own (ongoing) crisis of legitimation. The crisis, of course, does not come out of the blue, and the antihumanist intellectual climate of the second half of the 20th century anticipates, prepares and continues to inform the current debate about the posthuman, posthumanism and the prospects of 'postanthropocentrism'. So, if rhetoric is an anthropological necessity, what would a posthumanist, namely postanthropocentric, 'rhetoric' have to look like? Would it still be, recognisably, 'rhetorical', in the classical sense? Furthermore, if rhetoric is one of the fundamental strategies of survival for the human species, what is going to happen to rhetoric at the time of human extinction or, at least, its fundamental transformation, if one is to take seriously the current radical posthumanist scenarios? Do cyborgs dream of electric tropes?[177]

This ambient postanthropocentrism also raises the question or the possibility (maybe even the 'spectre') of a nonhuman rhetoric. So if humans need rhetoric for reasons of sociality, because of the lack of inherent truth in human affairs (because truth has to be rhetorically established) to compensate for "uncertainty" and metaphysical "anxieties" (cf. Bolz's phrase "*Rhetorik ist Notwehr*" [rhetoric is self-defence] quoted above) then the current talk of extinction threats, deep ecology and the 'Anthropocene' should maybe become the focus of a (critically) posthumanist philology. Or, as Kopperschmidt argues, with reference to Hans Blumenberg: "rhetoric is (as a practice), and teaches (as a theory) the 'art of survival' under the conditions of an intrinsic lack of evidence and the socially required renouncing of violence".[178] Peter L. Oesterreich's "homo rhetoricus" also uses rhetorical persuasion and the social construction of reality as a fundamental 'cultural technology' (*Kulturtechnik*) and as a survival strategy – which means that in the face of human extinction or the suggested advent of a possible 'successor species' (e.g. AI) one would expect rhetoric to become *more* important, not less. The argument therefore might be, as for example in Oesterreich, that from the point of view of "fundamental rhetoric" (*Fundamentalrhetorik*), the current state of language use needs to be investigated in relation to human 'survivability' – hence Oesterreich's follow-on (crisis) concept, namely the "homo rhetoricus corruptus".[179] The corruption here perceived occurs through what Oesterreich calls the "widespread dogmatic forgetting of rhetoric", and the "instrumentalisation" and "manipulation" of rhetoric by (mass) media".[180] There is thus a fine line between 'good' rhetorical use as a necessary means of

[177] There have been a few attempts at addressing this kind of question in recent years. They tend to steer clear of the 'ontological' level of language as such, however, and instead seem to be preoccupied with aspects of 'embodiment', 'materiality', 'technicity', 'globalisation' and 'migration', as far as I can see. Cf. for example Amanda K. Booher and Julie Jung, eds., *Feminist Rhetorical Studies: Human Bodies, Posthumanist Worlds* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018); Casey Boyle, *Rhetoric as a Posthuman Practice* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018); Alastair Pennycook, *Posthumanist Applied Linguistics* (London: Routledge, 2018); and Lionel Wee, *Posthumanist World Englishes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Posthumanism as a challenge for linguistics, rhetoric, translation and discourse studies is also beginning to make its appearance in the form of entries in various handbooks, e.g. *The Routledge Handbook of Intercultural Communication*, ed. Jane Jackson (London: Routledge, 2020), or *The Cambridge Handbook of Discourse Studies*, eds., Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Ethics*, eds. Kaisa Koskinen and Nike K. Pokorn (London: Routledge, 2021).

[178] Kopperschmidt, "Was weiß die Rhetorik vom Menschen?", in: *Rhetorische Anthropologie*, p. 20.

[179] Peter L. Oesterreich, "Homo rhetoricus (corruptus)", in: Kopperschmidt, ed., *Rhetorische Anthropologie*, pp. 353ff.

[180] *Ibid*., pp. 364, 366.

dealing with our environment in a "technical-formal" way,[181] and a purely 'technical' use of rhetoric as such.

As Norbert Bolz explains, however, the critique of rhetoric usually involves a distrust of technological media, since "rhetorical techniques are being replaced by media technologies in the process of coping with the improbabilities of communication, and this is being done through technicisation".[182] Nevertheless, the argument of language corruption through 'technocratic' and 'manipulative' use has a long history. A key moment of that history is Heidegger's "Traditional Language and Technological Language", a seminar given to future engineers in 1962.[183] Heidegger's aim was to "rethink the current conception of modern technology" which has developed from predominantly manual to engine to cybernetic forms and is basically a "positioning that challenges forth (*herausforderndes Stellen*)" nature and humans. This demand or challenging forth, that characterises modern technology, raises the possibility that "modern technology could speak forth a demand (*einen Anspruch sprechen*) the realization of which humans would be unable to bring to a halt or even survey and control as a whole", so that "humans see themselves banished into perplexity and helplessness in the face of technology's claim of power". What Heidegger adds to this view of technology (developed in earlier texts, especially in "The Question of Technology") is the role of language when he asks: "However – what does this all have to do with language? In how far is it necessary to talk about the technological-language, i.e., about a language that is technologically determined by what is most peculiar to technology? What is language (*die Sprache*), which is precisely what in a special way remains exposed to technology's dictate (*Herrschaftsanspruch*)?"[184]

Language for Heidegger thus is both "technological" itself and that which resists technology's "dictate". "Only language enables humans to be those living beings which they are as humans".[185] But language is more than mere 'communication' or 'information' – an understanding that Heidegger sees (already in the 1960s) as undergoing a "revival, but also a consolidation and a unilateral ascent to extremes with the reign of modern technology. This is reflected in the sentence: Language is information".[186] The implications for Heidegger lead him to ask a question that might be considered central to a posthumanist philology and to the role that a 'rhetoric of the posthuman' could play:

> In how far does what is peculiar to modern technology, which challenges humans forth, i.e., sets them up, into making natural energy available and securing it, come into effect also and precisely in the transformation of language into mere information?[187]

The 'technologisation' or 'informatisation' of language, or its 'depoeticisation', is "the severest and most menacing attack on what is peculiar to language: *saying* as showing and as letting-appear of what is present and what is absent, of reality in the widest sense", and it is at the

[181] Cf. Bolz, "Das Verschwinden der Rhetorik…", p. 67.
[182] *Ibid*., p. 75.
[183] Martin Heidegger, "Traditional Language and Technological Language", trans. Wanda Torres Gregory, *Journal of Philosophical Research* 23 (1998): 129-45.
[184] *Ibid*., pp. 134-138.
[185] *Ibid*.
[186] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[187] *Ibid*.

same time "the threat to the human being's ownmost essence".[188] Hence the ideological 'posthumanising' claim, encapsulated for Heidegger in Norbert Wiener's statement: "language is not an exclusive attribute to man, but is one he may share to a certain degree with the machines he has constructed [and one might indeed add, with many other nonhuman animals]".[189] The poet's task – but one might also add the task of the rhetorician, the philologist, or the critical posthumanist – would then be that of preserving "the new possibilities of the already spoken language… to say the world anew from the language that is preserved" and to safeguard the "world-relation" of human beings, of which Heidegger says that: "It is a world-living whose impact can barely be noticed by today's humans because they are continually covered over with the newest information". If the "saving power that conceals itself in the mystery of language, in as far as it always brings us into nearness of what is unspoken and what is inexpressible"[190] was already dwindling for Heidegger in the 1960s, what would he have to say about the early 21st Century, with its ubiquitous smart phones, global real-time information exchange and the fact that probably most 'acts of communication' are no longer performed by humans but indeed by networked machines among themselves?[191]

This means that 'technical communication' is not only taking over an ever bigger part of communication but that the increasing interaction between humans and nonhumans and the interaction between nonhumans and other nonhumans is inevitably becoming a focus for rhetoric itself – *posthuman* rhetoric, as one might call it, literally or rather digitally. This, in any case, was the line taken by a special issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly*, edited by Andrew Mara and Bryon Hawk, on "Posthuman Rhetorics and Technical Communication". In their introduction, Mara and Hawk argue that posthuman rhetoric would be needed "for the complexities of living, writing, and working in a variety of biological and mechanical systems". It does not come as a big surprise that the kind of 'technical communication' that requires embracing a certain kind of posthumanism would be driven by corporate, or "organizational" interests: "As organizations become more complex, technologies more pervasive, and rhetorical intent more diverse, it is no longer tenable to divide the world into human choice and technological or environmental determinism". Posthuman rhetoric, one has to infer, would then be mainly concerned with the extension of agency to nonhuman actors and ('smart') environments. The role of new media – an interaction between humans (wetware), software and hardware – is central to this extension of the rhetorical realm: "software such as Bloglines, Technocrati, Flickr, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and even Amazon will function as actors to collate data in ways that enable human communication and choice". However, it is questionable to what extent the 'human' in this sentence still may be considered the subject of this 'enabling' process, based on "cognition… distributed throughout the system".[192]

Arndt Niebisch, goes even further by positing a "posthermeneutic philology" that is no longer based on the "letter" (or the 'lettered' as such) but on the "number" (operational structures

[188] *Ibid*., p. 141

[189] Norbert Wiener, *Mensch und Menschmaschine* (Frankfurt: Alfred Metzner, 1952), cited in Heidegger, "Traditional Language and Technological Language", p. 141.

[190] Heidegger, "Traditional Language and Technological Language", p. 142.

[191] This is one of N. Katherine Hayles's main points in *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[192] Andrew Mara and Bryon Hawk, "Introduction", *Technical Communications Quarterly* (special issue "Posthuman Rhetorics and Technical Communication") 19.1 (2010): 1-10 (here pp. 2, 3, 6).

of numeral systems, based on numbers as functional signs, not alphabetical letters), [193] which means that texts are only one of many possible forms of symbolic orders (others would be software, logical calculations, lists, data bases etc.). The key notion here is writing which, following Derrida, Kittler and Sybille Krämer, is extended to all forms of notation or inscription, and which does not necessarily require human agency, and, indeed, increasingly happens in and by 'posthuman systems' without any actual human involvement. In fact, the more posthuman or independent media become, by operating outside human meaning and perception, the more neutral and transparent or "dematerialized" they are and are thus enabled to carry any human content.[194] Which means that they are quickly turning into embodied, unconscious and 'automatic' cultural technologies (*Kulturtechniken*). The next logical step, at least according to Kittler, would be to bypass the hermeneutical question of meaning altogether and opt for a "posthuman philology" that would focus on purely semiotic inscription processes in and through media as such, or a truly postanthropocentric philology of pure data processing. Gadamer's stance that "*Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache*", from the point of view of such a posthuman rhetoric or philology, would have to be reevaluated from a postanthropocentric perspective, since we no longer know what *Sein* means or what understanding entails. This would also mean to completely bypass one of Heidegger's fundamental aporias, namely that:

> Language still denies us its essence: that it is the house of the truth of Being. Instead, language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings.[195]

However, before we might somewhat overenthusiastically go down this route and read the phrase 'posthuman rhetoric' in all its technical or purely semiotic glory, let us look once again at the bigger picture. Related to this problematic, at an institutional level, the question of the future of the humanities once again comes into view, this time however with renewed urgency.[196] For what would the humanities be without language?

The Rhetoric of the Posthuman – Disfigurations

> [I]t seems to me that the starting point of inquiry and reflection, the anthropological problem, lies in the apparently unavoidable fact that anthropos is that being who suffers from too many logoi. [197]

> Will we one day speak of humans as a species that has disappeared?[198]

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[193] Arndt Liebsch, "Die Liebe zur Ziffer – Positionen einer posthumanen Philologie", in: Kelemen, Szabo and Tamas, eds., *Kulturtechnik Philologie*, pp. 165-83 (here p. 166).
[194] *Ibid*., p. 179.
[195] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 223.
[196] As Christopher Fynsk's subtitle to *The Claim of Language* also makes clear: *A Case for the Humanities*.
[197] Rabinow, *Anthropos Today*, p. 6.
[198] Jean-Michel Besnier, *Demain les posthumains. Le futur a-t-il encore besoin de nous?* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), p. 10.

Let us now take up the original conundrum of the unspeakability of the posthuman once again, this time with feeling. Rhetoric would not be rhetoric and language would not be language if the phrase 'the rhetoric of the posthuman' could not be read in at least two ways. The provocative, dismissive reading of the phrase would be: the posthuman is just 'talk', cheap rhetoric, that is all. The posthuman merely exists as a rhetorical figure, in discourse. So, 'what does it *mean* to be (post)human?' would be the main question posthumanism as a discourse and the 'posthumanities' of the future academic institution might wish to pose. If ethos, pathos and logos seem to quite 'naturally' lead to anthropos, however, why is there so little interest in the *rhetoric* of the posthuman – the posthuman being both subject and object of this phrase? Probably, because, as Pepperell pointed out above, after decades of obsessive and oppressive 'lingualism' as a result of the linguistic turn, posthumans do not 'wish' to get bogged down in debates about the role of language.[199] And yet, a skeptical note might be in order.

What else, one might ask, could the posthuman be today than a (rhetorical) 'figure'? When talking about the posthuman we are firmly on rhetorical territory right from the start – involving both a 'posting' gesture and a metaphorisation. Haraway's cyborg – one of the progenitors of today's notion of the posthuman – was a powerful trope or figure, which she decided to embrace for strategic reasons, namely to wrest away the future from a technocentred neoliberal masculinist or patriarchal order. Similarly, the posthuman is a figure or trope that is used to challenge the authority of the humanist value system. However, just like the cyborg figure constantly flirts with the neoliberal economics of domination, the posthuman may also be seen as the ultimate fulfillment of humanism.[200]

A further case in point is Rosi Braidotti's recent attempt to wrestle with this powerful ambiguity, or this "tropic swerve"[201] of the posthuman figure.[202] For Braidotti, the posthuman is indeed a very powerful figure (or, as she prefers, a "figuration") which helps evaluate 'our' humanness in a postanthropocentric context and promotes an affirmative politics of flexible, hybrid and multiple identity.[203] Figuration is in fact a key word in Braidotti's Deleuzian "affirmative" feminist and materialist approach in general, and, especially as far as the

[199] The full quote is: "Post-Humans never get bogged down in arguments about language. The scholars and humanists will always try to restrict debate to the battleground of language because they know no one can win" (Pepperell, *The Post-Human Condition*, p. 183). Harpham, in *Language Alone*, also seems to endorse this idea when he says that "the displacement of the undiscussable onto the empty signifier language constitutes the central intellectual project of the past century" (*Language Alone*, p. 236); or also: "In the post-Heideggerian, poststructuralist, postmodernist ethos of the past half-century, a superhuman language has taken on an inhuman and somewhat sinister life of its own, becoming, in some accounts, a shadowy, potentially malignant form of agency with the power to cloud men's minds, to think their thoughts for them…" (p. 222). See also Crispin Sartwell, *End of Story: Toward an Annihilation of Language and History* (New York: SUNY, 2000).

[200] Cf. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century [1985]", *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-82.

[201] Cf. Thierry Hocquet's reference to Haraway's use of "tropical swerving" in his *Cyborg Philosophy: Penser contre les dualismes* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), p. 100.

[202] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

[203] Cf. my review of Braidotti, "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence… or, What Is Left of the Humanities?", *Culture Machine Reviews* (April 2013): https://culturemachine.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/495-1102-1-PB.pdf (accessed 06/11/2023).

posthuman is concerned.[204] She repeatedly stresses "the importance of combining critique with creative figurations":[205]

> Critiques of power locations, however, are not enough. They work in tandem with the quest for alternative figurations or *conceptual personae* for these locations, in terms of power as restrictive (*potestas*) but also as empowering or affirmative (*potentia*). For example figurations such as the feminist/the woman/the queer/the cyborg/the diasporic, native nomadic subjects, as well as oncomouse and Dolly the sheep are no mere metaphors, but signposts for specific geopolitical and historical locations…[206]

For Braidotti, the posthuman also follows this logic of figuration, with its restrictive power *and* affirmative potential. The posthuman "metaphor", if taken seriously, i.e. 'literally', is thus a "conceptual persona", which stands in for a whole geopolitical and historical "location". It becomes clear, however, that this posthuman persona or figure/figuration is in fact the *necessary* rhetorical trope for Braidotti to characterise the situation of the human today.

Braidotti further defines her use of figuration as: "the expression of alternative representations of the subject as a dynamic non-unitary entity; it is the dramatization of processes of becoming".[207] Even though she does not herself use the phrase 'rhetoric of the posthuman' it could be argued that the way she emphasises the transformative potential of the posthuman figure constitutes a *politics* of the posthuman that is entirely reliant on the ambiguity of the posthuman *figure* as conceptual *persona*, as mask, or a prosopopoeia (of the human). In the posthuman figure, she writes, "critique and creation strike a new deal in actualizing the practice of conceptual personae or figuration as the active pursuit of affirmative alternatives to the dominant vision".[208] The posthuman figure, for Braidotti, allows 'us' to be "worthy of our times": "we need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently on the way".[209]

What Braidotti's argument presupposes is first of all a certain discursivity of the 'location', or the idea of a 'posthuman condition', in which the figuration of the posthuman occurs. The 'rhetoric of the posthuman', in fact, is everywhere at work in "the changes and transformations currently on the way". This was, indeed, also the main argument in my *Posthumanismus – Eine kritische Einführung*,[210] namely that posthumanism is first of all a discourse. The posthuman (figure) is subject, object and transcendental signifier of this discourse that can be seen at work in popular science magazines, television documentaries ('docufiction'), Youtube videos, popularised science fiction scenarios, politically or economically motivated science reports, etc., but also in cultural theory books like Braidotti's, or indeed this very chapter on 'posthuman rhetoric' or 'the rhetoric of the posthuman'. All, by

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[204] Cf. Chapter 10 on the "politics of figuration" in new feminist materialist and posthumanist discouse.
[205] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 163.
[206] *Ibid.*, p. 164.
[207] *Ibid*.
[208] *Ibid*.
[209] *Ibid.*, p. 184.
[210] Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanismus – Eine kritische Einführung* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2009), translated as *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

virtue of using and speaking about the figure of the posthuman, contribute to its readability and 'reality', and are thus working towards its 'realisability':

> 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 the discourse is describing a 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 also 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 exists 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, all the statements about posthumanist practices whether positive or negative contribute in some form to the emergence and existence of the posthuman and posthumanity.[211]

The central paradox expressed in and through the figure or figuration of the posthuman, however, lies in its ambiguous finality, a point well expressed by Besnier: "Why would this perspective of an end of man seem so terrifying? Did we not we desire it? Did we not we grow up in the hope that science and technology would help us emancipate from the servitude of the human condition?"[212]

Since we have no idea of what constitutes the 'essence' of the human, there can be even less surety about what it means to be posthuman, or what a 'posthuman condition' might actually be. The figure of the posthuman, the rhetoric of the posthuman, is first of all this: a discourse whose arch-metaphor and transcendental signifier, the posthuman, necessarily has no ultimate referent. The transcendental signified of the signifier 'posthuman' which both constitutes and 'limits' or regulates the discourse of posthumanism, by definition needs to be deferred in its fullness or truth. It thus remains a figure and exists only as absence, as defacement, as '*homme sans*' [the human without]. *L'homme sans*… might actually be, following Martin Crowley, the best description of our human' (not: posthuman) condition, namely a "constitutively human incompleteness [*inachèvement constitutivement humain*]":

> For the human to be human a part of his proper substance has to be subtracted… it is indeed a question of species. The human proper would thus maybe consist in his being exposed to the subtraction of that which was meant to have been properly his own…

[211] Herbrechter, *Posthumanism : A Critical Analysis*, pp. 36-37.
[212] Besnier, *Demain les posthumains*, p. 14.

> The human *without*: that is to say, this operation according to which the exposing which characterizes the human subtracts him from himself. [213]

The 'human without', an 'empty' figure by any account, can only give birth to an even less determined 'posthuman without'. If the posthuman is therefore a sign of humanity or the human transforming into something else, or if the dominant value system is really moving from five hundred or more years of humanism towards a 'postanthropocentric' context, the figure of the posthuman must be (the final) part of one might call the 'autobiography' of the human.[214]

The question of 'how to write the autobiography of the human?' and 'who would write it?', informs the notion of 'auto-bio-hetero-thanato-(anthropo)-graphy' I proposed in my "Posthumanism, Subjectivity, Autobiography", which considers the posthuman as a figure of postanthropocentric prosopopoeia.[215] The argument uses Paul de Man's notion of autobiography as based on the trope of disfiguration and asks 'who, in any narrative of the posthuman, posthumanity and posthumanisation, would be the narrator?' and 'from which (temporal and spatial) location would the story of the posthuman, literally, be tellable?' The implied 'death of the (human) subject' would either have to lead to new 'posthuman' subjectivities or would remain entirely figurative and therefore purely ideological.

In "Autobiography as De-Facement",[216] Paul de Man argued that:

> autobiography is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject. This specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding, but this merely makes explicit the wider claim to authorship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be *by* someone and assumed to be understandable to the extent that this is the case. Which amounts to saying that any book with a readable title page is, to some extent, autobiographical.[217]

This means that every text articulated by some *one* (i.e. a singular or plural subject) has the autoaffectional characteristics de Man describes and is at least at one level autobiographical. However, as de Man continues:

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[213] Martin Crowley, *L'Homme sans: Politiques de la finitude* (Paris: Lignes, 2009), pp. 15-17, 25. Some parts of this book have been translated as Martin Crowley, "The Human Without", *Oxford Literary Review* 27 (2005): 67-81.

[214] Cf. Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?", *The Georgia Review* 31.4 (1977): 830-850.

[215] Stefan Herbrechter, "Posthumanism, subjectivity, autobiography", *Subjectivity* 5.3 (2012): 327-47. An updated version appears in this volume as Chapter 4.

[216] Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement", *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67-82.

[217] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

> The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions.[218]

Paul de Man's understanding of prosopopeia as the central autobiographical trope is crucial for an analysis of the posthumanisation of the autobiographical:

> Prosopopeia [*prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)] is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name... is made as intelligible and memorable as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration.[219]

Giving a face to, or the opposite, taking a face away from, a narrated experience constitutes the fundamental rhetorical device of figuring or disfiguring autobiographical subjectivity as mask. If the posthuman is therefore another mask that hides the emptiness of the 'human without', if it is (merely) a device of autobiographical defacement, then from a rhetorical and discursive point of view, the focus of a *critical* posthumanism (CPH) – one that takes the proposed posthuman scenarios seriously, even literally, nevertheless without *believing* in their transparency or indeed inevitability – becomes the strange political and moral desire that fires up the posthuman or posthumanist imagination: "The strange thing is that certain [posthuman utopias] do not hesitate to use the paradox which consists in associating the future well-being with the disappearance of humans as such".[220]

In order to critically evaluate this strange paradox, however, close attention to posthuman rhetoric – i.e. rhetorical or tropological usages of the posthuman figure – seems vital. What is happening to language under posthumanist conditions in this context is therefore just as important as the question of what is happening through language and the linguistic trope of the posthuman in particular. Hence the, in my view, felicitous ambiguity of the phrase 'the rhetoric of the posthuman'.

Postanthropocentric Rhetoric

On the one hand, I would think that we should not neglect the importance of rhetoric, as if it were simply a formal superstructure or technique exterior to the essential activity. On the other hand, I would be very suspicious of what I would call 'rhetoricism' – a way of giving rhetoric all the power, thinking that everything depends on rhetoric as simply a technique of speech. Certainly, there are no politics, there is no society without rhetoric, without the force of rhetoric… Now this doesn't mean that everything depends on verbal statements or formal technique of speech acts. There are speech acts everywhere, but the possibility of speech acts, or performative speech acts, depends on conditions and conventions which are not simply

[218] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[219] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[220] Besnier, *Demain les posthumains?*, p. 23.

verbal… rhetoric as such depends on conditions that are not rhetorical… They depend on certain situations: political situations, economical situations – the libidinal situation, also.[221]

So what do posthumanists imagine is going to be the future role of rhetoric? What is the 'location' of ethos, pathos and logos in a 'post-anthropocentric' world? Is there another, more *critically* posthumanist scenario than either Pepperell's forgetting/repression of language or Heidegger's notion of a technocratic decline of language into mere communication, information, or data? What, in other words, is the role of technology) within the discourse of posthumanism (technology, presumably, being the focus of this 'new' posthumanist theory that wishes to displace 'language')?

In our article on posthumanism 'without' technology, Ivan Callus and I proposed a 'thought experiment' to address precisely this question: "A posthumanism without technology is configurable in grammar and conceivable as a thought-experiment, but its absoluteness cannot be instantiated. We shall therefore come across as mounting something of an apophantic performance, so that all of this might sound like so much rhetoric".[222] The thought-experiment we believe is worth pursuing, precisely, because "contexts discussing the posthuman typically shun rhetoric. Posthumanism, it would appear, must do away with the play and ploys of a certain kind of language".[223] This is no coincidence, as argued above, because the posthuman is a deliberate turn away from the perceived dead-end of the linguistic turn. It is instead about "the doable (not to say about the done)": "The posthuman sees things to their end – seeing things to their end being, incidentally, itself as ready a definition of posthumanism as any".[224] One could, instead, propose that posthumanism might shun rhetoric and foreground the doability and performativity of 'technology' precisely because it needs to detract from the fact that it is the most speculative discourse of all thinkable. In envisaging the 'beyond' of the human it, in fact, "opens onto openness itself. It is the unknowable itself, the unthinkable itself".[225] And maybe posthumanism is also developing something of an autoimmunity against language (and rhetoric) because technology and rhetoric are ultimately, in their 'essence' so to speak, indistinguishable. Both rely in fact on the notion of 'invention' for example,[226] and both are ultimately 'poietic'.

This particular notion of technology goes of course back to Heidegger's "question concerning technology",[227] where he claims that "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological (…) technology is a way of revealing (…). *Technē* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic".[228] Heidegger's 'poietic' notion of technology goes against the predominantly 'instrumental' idea of technology – an idea, which in its radicalised form has

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[221] Jacques Derrida, "Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation (with Gary A. Olson)", *Journal of Advanced Composition* 10.1 (1990): 15-16.

[222] Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical Posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3.2-4.1 (2007): 15.

[223] *Ibid*.

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

[225] *Ibid*.

[226] On this notion of invention cf. Jacques Derrida, "Psyché: the Invention of the Other", in: Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, eds., *Reading de Man Reading* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 18 and *passim*.

[227] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", *Basic Writings*, pp. 307-342.

[228] *Ibid*., pp. 311 and 318.

gone so far as to reverse the human-technology relation. It increasingly seems, in posthumanist discourse, that technology has developed agency and instrumentalised the human. This is already one of Haraway's starting points, when she remarks that "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert"[229]. And this is currently generalised under the notion of "originary technicity"[230], or the "technicity of the trace".[231] If it is technology which might makes us human – with technology as the grammatical subject of this sentence – the input of invention is reversed (or at least reversible) and rhetoric, ironically, would now become technology's domain. The phrase 'rhetoric of the posthuman', indeed, does also express this eventuality, namely that rhetoric is no longer human, it is no longer 'done' by humans, if it ever was. A posthumanism without technology, if unthinkable, is precisely that which calls for thinking, because it begs the question – through a Heideggerian deliberate and rhetorical confusion between *technē* and *poiesis* – of "an infernal posthuman without possibility",[232] without invention or *poiesis*, without any possibility for articulation or (con)figuration. The posthuman figure in this sense, ironically, might spell out the end of figuration. The important thing however is that it still spells out an end at all, i.e. that it cannot help but 'figure' in the multiplicity of its prosthetic forms.[233]

A critical posthumanism, a thinking of the posthuman that would take the complicity of technology and rhetoric seriously (or even literally) would be precisely a posthumanism that does wish to get "bogged down" in discussions about language, because its antihumanist predecessors were already advocating a form of human instrumentalisation quite similar to contemporary posthumanisms 'with' technology. In attributing agency to language, as most poststructuralists following Heidegger have been doing, have they not committed the same category error as the posthumanist technological determinists? What is the difference

[229] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", p. 152.

[230] Cf. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 82ff and *passim*.

[231] Cf. Laurent Milesi, "Almost Nothing at the Beginning: The Technicity of the Trace in Deconstruction", in: Louis Armand and Pavel Cernovsky, eds., *Language Systems: After Prague Structuralism* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2007), pp. 22-41.

[232] Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical Posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", p. 22.

[233] What David Wills says about the subject's techno-tropological turn (in his rereading of Althusser's notion of interpellation) seems particularly relevant in this context:

[T]he enunciative or discursive apparatus in general seems to possess such a shadow in the form of what is called rhetoric. By means of it, language turns its back on any presumption of a homogeneous communicability, turning to and into tropological indirection and artifice. Yet the rhetorical space that opens behind language, as its immanent density and unsoundable reserve of complexity and power, is coextensive with what, on the one hand, constitutes the ethical and political subject, the subject of discourse that we are used to calling an "agent," and, on the other hand, allows for that agent to participate in any transformation of the real world (…). By turning to become political, the subject is necessarily turning into a form of figuration, accepting a role. Not least because what calls and so constitutes the political subject (…) is a form of technological surprise. In reacting or responding to that call, one turns into tropological space and into a cog within that discursive machinery. As my analyses attempt to explain, the friend, the lover, and the ethical subject are produced out of such an asymmetrical surprise; they mobilize the tropological dorsal force of such a surprise to have language function as rhetoric – a dramatic flourish in excess of the message, designed to catch off guard and off balance – as it were *before* it functions as communication. (David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 17-18).

between a statement like "Man acts as though *he* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man",[234] and a statement like 'It is technology that makes us human', which seems to be one of the standard reversals that posthumanism, after Haraway, has been using to 'reontologise' our relationship with the 'environment'.

Nevertheless, it is hard to see how posthumanism could be critical without close attention to its rhetoric and its discursivity. However, while De Man's prediction about the future of theory might help remind posthumanism of its rhetorical nature, there is a danger for theory to develop a blindness (an autoimmunity) or complacency towards the self-effacing tropological aspect of posthuman rhetoric/the rhetoric of the posthuman.[235] Or, in other words, behind the rhetoric of the posthuman there certainly is a 'real' desire, just like behind the currently proliferating extinction threats.

And this is where theory's (or critical posthumanism 'without' technology's) and de Man's 'textual' or 'linguacentric' approach maybe become more relevant than ever, as Claire Colebrook also seems to argue. She sees De Man's apparent "textual nihilism" as a deliberately "disfigured" or "inhuman" (one could almost say rhetorically 'anthropodecentred') and dislocated voice"'without persona, as though it came from an inhuman future". And in a highly significant rhetorical thought-experiment-like move of her own she provokingly and speculatively asks:

> What if thinking could occur as though, let us imagine, humans did not exist, as though this world of ours with our future were not a self-evident value? This may seem insanely abstract but nothing could be more pertinent for the present. 'We' are, after all, living in a present that is at once intensely self-destructive (terrorism, climate change, resource depletion, economic pillage) and intensely self-loving (for our overwhelming question appears to be how 'we' might survive or adapt, as though 'we' need not question who 'we' are and our worth).[236]

This leads Colebrook to reject most of the discourse that runs under the name of posthumanism as a "reaction formation":[237] "What if thoughts of responsibility, of what we owe to the earth, of our deep connectedness, of our inescapably ecological existence or our

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[234] Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking", *Basic Writings*, p. 348.

[235] In "The Resistance to Theory", *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), Paul de Man famously wrote: "The resistance to theory is a resistance to the use of language about language" (p. 12), or one might indeed say "a resistance to the rhetorical or tropological dimension of language" (p. 17). However, de Man also says that since "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself this resistance" (p. 19). Theory, due to its 'self-resistance', thus cannot but continue to flourish: "What remains impossible to decide is whether this flourishing is a triumph or a fall" (p. 20).

[236] Claire Colebrook, "Introduction", in: Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller, eds., *Theory and the Disappearing Future: On de Man, On Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 6.

[237] Cf. Colebrook's introduction to *Extinction* (Living Books about Life, Open Humanities Press), http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org/books/Extinction (accessed 6/11/2023):
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… (n.p.).

participation in one unified network of immaterial labour were a reaction formation, a repression of the fragmented, dispersed, disarticulated and punctuated problem of existence?"[238] The "theocratic" model of an earth, a nature or some "great organism that might offer 'us' a foundation or future"[239] that underlies so much current (posthumanist, postanthropocentric) ecological or ecocritical thinking, ultimately deprives 'us' from human agency precisely at the moment when we most need it, namely to change the present, to create and imagine alternative futures. And in this, one form in which the rhetoric of the posthuman plays a central role, as Colebrook summarises:

> Although the word post-human, like humanism, has an unmanageable range it has tended to refer recently to the overcoming of man's self-enclosure within the bounds of his own supreme and world-constituting rationality in favour of the thought of an ecology of all bodies that interface with living systems, animality, technology and what is left of nature and history (…). This 'posthuman' liberation from cognitive or linguistic models – the liberation, more generally from the human notions of 'mind' as some thinking machine – precludes a consideration of what de Man referred to as rhetoric and figure.[240]

Close attention to figuration and disfiguration is the domain of theory (de Man's and like-minded). It is the only way to critically evaluate the distance between rhetoric and desire, between politics and ideology, between the posthuman and posthumanism. I am more hopeful than Colebrook that CPH – in the shape of a posthumanism 'without' technology, for example – might help 'us' to take the posthuman desire seriously while disarticulating or disfiguring the rhetoric of the posthuman and to critically accompany the figure of the posthuman on its way towards "producing stability and fixing referents", a process "that de Man refers to as 'grammar'".[241]

PS: A Note on Posthumanist Rhetoric and New Media

> To what heights do we need to ascend to see man freely in his *distress* of being [Wesens*not*]?[242]

Even though I will not be able to do justice to this aspect, one further meaning of 'the rhetoric of the posthuman' remains to be explored. If we accept that posthumans will not be able to do without rhetoric, we can nevertheless no longer be sure that this rhetoric will be recognisably human, and even less so, humanist. But what might (a) posthuman(ist) rhetoric understood in this sense actually be? What might be its promises, inventions, techniques and figures? Classical rhetoric was certainly an important if not central part of humanism's "anthropotechnics".[243] If these "taming devices", according to Peter Sloterdijk, are now in

[238] Colebrook, "Introduction", *Theory and the Disappearing Future*, pp. 10-11.
[239] *Ibid*., p. 11.
[240] *Ibid*., p. 17.
[241] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[242] Martin Heidegger, "Der Mensch", *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), p. 491.
[243] Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the *Letter on Humanism*", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009): "The latent message of humanism, then, is

transition, and on their way towards a new (media) future, creating a situation 'after' lettered and literate humanism, what might a truly posthumanist if not posthuman rhetoric actually mean or do?

To be sure rhetoric – what is deemed effective and aesthetic speaking (effective because somehow aesthetic, aesthetic because somehow effective) – has always been changing over time, and there is no reason to believe that the very 'essence' of rhetoric should not be affected by the current change from humanist to no-longer-quite-humanist or almost-already-posthumanist reading and writing habits (or, to speak with Gregory Ulmer, a shift in "apparatus" from literacy to "electracy").[244]

Let me very briefly sketch two possible starting points for a such a posthumanist rhetoric in the making and the angle from which CPH might approach them: the first concerns the rhetorical move to deliberately (con)fuse media-technological and biological 'figures' (which, in fact, within the remit of the phrase 'rhetoric of the posthuman', would mean turning rhetoric into a kind of 'media-bio-politics'). This is something Derrida hints at in a long and fascinating footnote at the end of "The Rhetoric of Drugs".[245] He calls this phenomenon, whose beginnings he identified in 1989, hence the focus on the use of 'virus' in both computer and biological discourse, "telerhetoric or metatelerhetoric":

> In the case of computers, is the use of the word 'virus' simply a metaphor? And we might pose the same question for the use of the word 'parasite'. The *prerequisite* to this sort of problematic would have to concern rhetoric itself, as a parasitic or viral structure: originarily and in general. Whether viewed from up close or from far away, does not everything that comes to affect the proper or the literal have the form of a virus (neither alive nor dead, neither human nor "reappropriable by the proper of man", nor generally subjectivable)? And doesn't rhetoric always obey a logic of parasitism? Or rather, doesn't the parasite logically and normally disrupt logic? If rhetoric is viral or parasitic (without being the AIDS of language it at least opens up the possibility of such an affection) how could we wonder about the rhetorical drift of words like "virus", "parasite", and so forth?[246]

In terms of a media-bio-rhetoric to come, or maybe already emerging, the bio-science fiction scenario Derrida evokes at the end of "The Rhetoric of Drugs" certainly no longer satisfies a humanistic rhetorical logic: "If now the AIDS virus were spliced onto a computer virus, you can

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the taming of men. And its hidden thesis is: reading the right books calms the inner beast" (p. 15). In the age of (new) media the 'posthumanist' question therefore becomes: "What can tame man, when the role of humanism as the school for humanity has collapsed? What can tame men, when their previous attempts at self-taming have led primarily to power struggles? What can tame men, when, after all previous experiments to grow the species up, it remains unclear what it is to be a grown-up? Or is it simply no longer possible to pose the question of the constraint and formation of mankind by theories of civilizing and upbringing?" (p. 20).

[244] See Gregory Ulmer's important and early argument for a transition from a literacy-based to (for want of a better term, I suppose) "electracy" based "apparatus"; cf. for example Gregory Ulmer, *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy* (New York: Longman, 2003).

[245] Jacques Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs", trans. Michael Israel, *Points…: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 228-54, and 471-3.

[246] *Ibid.*, p. 472.

imagine what might happen tomorrow to Interpol's computers and the geopolitical unconscious. What then would become of the diplomatic corps? What would become of spies? And let's not even talk about soldiers – we can no more distinguish between military and civilian than we can between public and private".[247] It does not therefore seem very likely that any posthuman rhetoric, even less any rhetoric of the posthuman, might get away without close attention to this kind of life-transforming rhetoric that plays itself out between language and life, humans and nonhumans, *bios* and media.[248]

The other, closely related, starting point concerns the question whether the intensified co-implication (interfacing, networking, etc.) of humans and digital (new) media can still be captured ("tamed", as Sloterdijk would say) by using the (humanistic) figure or *dispositif* (apparatus) of 'literacy', at all. For sure, most computer mediated communication (whether mobile, visual, oral…) still uses language and hence rhetorical means. It is certainly not the case that reading and writing have somehow become less important. And surely, 'machines' or digital devices 'communicate' more and more amongst themselves by using code (and code might increasingly be seen as 'unrhetorical' or 'de-rhetoricised' language). But is it not rational to believe that eventually the trope of literacy will no longer be able to do its job, namely to describe the ability for symbolic creativity and critical reflection with and through new digital media.[249] Apart from Greg Ulmer's early inroads in the late 1980s and 1990s, who, following Derrida "applied grammatology" to all kinds of writing, under the name of "electracy", there have been few attempts to move away from the notion of literacy altogether. Instead, the notion of 'new literacies' has been proliferating.[250] An approach like the one represented by Bryon Hawk, following Ulmer, however, seems more promising and might be able to do justice to the potential contained in this elusive phrase, 'rhetoric of the posthuman': "Like language, new media make new affections and new relations possible (…). If rhetoric and composition is to move forward and adapt to the coming networked cultures, it can no longer settle, much less strive for, the production of overly simple systems to account for the complexity of writing (…) in the coming global media culture".[251] The rhetoric of the posthuman remains a major ideological battleground.

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[247] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

[248] This is of course very much related to the phenomena Eugene Thacker, about a decade later, describes in his *Biomedia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[249] A skill-set or 'apparatus' I would like to call 'mediacy' (as a complement to literacy and numeracy) and which would have to be a central concern for any posthumanist idea of education (see Chapters 7, 8 and 9 in this volume for further explorations of 'posthumanist education' and 'mediacy', or 'originary mediality').

[250] Cf. for example Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel, *New Literacies: Changing Knowledge and Classroom Learning* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), who comment on the fact that during the 1980s and 1990s the term 'literacy' was applied to an "ever increasing variety of practices, to the point where it now seems that practically any knowledge and learning deemed educationally valuable can somehow or other be conceived as literacy" (p. 14). However, when literacy practically becomes a dead metaphor for any kind of 'reading skill' not only is the specificity of the various skills involved eroded but also the ideological baggage of humanist "taming devices" is merely extended to arguably no longer entirely humanist or even human practices of knowledge production.

[251] Bryon Hawk, "Toward a Rhetoric of Network (Media) Culture: Notes on Polarities and Potentiality", in: Lynn Worsham and Gary A. Olson, eds., *Plugged In: Technology, Rhetoric, and Culture in a Posthuman Age* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2008), pp. 156, 158.

Chapter 4: (Un)ravelling

This is an exercise in recollection, or rather in recollect*ing*, storying, carrying, staying with the trouble but also in worlding and mattering. "It matters", Donna Haraway writes, "which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts. Mathematically, visually, and narratively, it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systemize systems".[252]

Storying, or, why critical posthumanism, still

I do not know about you, but to me it seems that my world, the world I thought I knew, the world I thought I was promised to come, to be almost there, is unravelling: the dream of Europe and cosmopolitanism (undone by returns to nationalism and sovereignty like Brexit), liberal democracy (undermined by populism, Trump and post-truth politics), world peace and prosperity (shattered by a return of the cold war in Ukraine, climate change and refugee crisis). But then again, I am a white-European, middle-aged man, I have always had it coming for me, didn't I? Still, I would like to think "me-too", I have tried, as Rosi Braidotti rightly challenges everyone of us, to be worthy of "our time", worthy of "my time".

Contrary to what many people think, however, critical posthumanism (CPH) is not Braidotti's invention. While I will be very happy to concede the "posthuman" to her, the phrase 'critical posthumanism' originates elsewhere. That said, I am not claiming that the phrase is entirely "mine" either though I would want to insist on the fact that Ivan Callus, Manuela Rossini and I have been most consistent in using and developing it. To be precise, the phrase 'critical posthumanism' was first publically floated in its self-reflective sense, as opposed to 'uncritical posthumanism', in a special issue of *Cultural Critique* (number 53), in 2003, by a couple of its contributors. It is the issue in which Neil Badmington published "Theorizing Posthumanism", arguably the first exercise in taking stock of the then newly emerging theoretical paradigm, following on from Haraway and Hayles. In there, Badmington speaks of the opposition between what he calls Hayles's denouncement of "apocalyptic or complacent posthumanism" and its "counterpart (…) *critical posthumanism*".[253] He actually credits Jill Didur's article in the same issue of *Cultural Critique* with identifying critical posthumanism and its "terrible twin", apocalyptic, technoeuphoric or "uncritical", popular posthumanism or even transhumanism. In her article, "Re-embodying technoscientific fantasies: posthumanism, genetically modified foods, and the colonization of life", Didur proposes to co-opt what she calls "posthuman discourse" and "its critique of (…) universalizing, disembodied views" that she finds in Haraway and Hayles, to "foreground the relation between information and materiality that is obscured in conceptualizations of genetically modified foods produced by agribusinesses".[254] She goes on to explain that "critical posthuman thinkers" like Haraway or Hayles, and their "critical posthumanism" question the view that there was ever an originary divide between nature and culture.[255] For Didur "the task of critical posthumanism", following Hayles's ground-breaking

[252] Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin", *Environmental Humanities* 6.1 (2015): 160.
[253] Neil Badmington, Neil, "Theorizing Posthumanism", *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003): 11, 23 n. 2.
[254] Jill Didur, "Re-embodying Technoscientific Fantasies: Posthumanism, Genetically Modified Foods, and the Colonization of Life", *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003): 100.
[255] *Ibid*., pp. 101-102.

work in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) "is to get at 'what has been elided, suppressed, and forgotten to make information lose its body'".[256] What Didur refers to as her "work on critical posthumanism" is probably the first occasion where someone self-identifies as a critical posthumanist and at the same time pushes a feminist new materialist agenda to the forefront of this new theoretical paradigm.

Things are a little more complicated, however. Neil Badmington could just as well have credited another article in the same issue with the birth of CPH, namely Laura Bartlett's and Thomas B. Byers's "Back to the Future: The Humanist Matrix", which focuses on the demise of the "liberal humanist subject" as the main task for CPH. They write that: "One strand of thought suggests that the posthuman constitutes a radical, subversive break from the Western tradition of liberal humanism, with its subject who has been historically interpellated by and for the forces of patriarchal capitalism. But another school of thought, a critical posthumanism, has come to question, as Hayles does, our open-armed embrace of the posthuman subject and has suggested that the posthuman may be an extension of liberal humanism rather than a break from it".[257] This is where you can clearly see a distinction that also guides my own approach, namely the one between posthumanism as a (either critical or uncritical, theoretical or social) discourse and the posthuman as a (rhetorical, ambivalent, political) figure or figuration that needs to be 'read' critically.

This is what is meant by CPH, at least in my view – namely a critique of the posthuman. And it is that which, after all, makes Neil Badmington's contribution to the issue and his entire work on posthumanism ever since his ground-breaking reader with that title, published in 2000, arguably the most important and also first candidate for a theoretical positioning of CPH. It is also the approach that sits most uneasily with the kind of humanism that posthumanism is supposed to leave behind, because of the dynamic of the 'post', of overcoming, transcending, surpassing, breaking with, which we should know so well from so-called 'postmoderists' or 'post-structuralists'. As Badmington explains in "Theorizing Posthumanism": "the 'post-' of posthumanism does not (and, moreover, cannot) mark or make an absolute break from the legacy of humanism. 'Post-'s speak (to) ghosts, and cultural criticism must not forget that it cannot simply forget the past".[258] And this is, precisely, where methodically, so to speak, CPH positions itself, away from earlier forms of antihumanism and contemporary forms of futuristic and technoeuphoric transhumanism. As Badmington puts it:

The writing of the posthumanist (…) must (…) take the form of a critical practice that occurs *inside* humanism, consisting not of the wake but the working-through of humanist discourse. Humanism has happened and continues to happen to 'us' (it is the very 'Thing' that makes 'us' 'us,' in fact), and the experience—however traumatic, however unpleasant—cannot be erased without trace in an instant. The present moment may well be one in which the hegemony and heredity of humanism feel a little less certain, a little less inevitable, but there is, I think, a real sense in which the crisis, as Gramsci once put it, 'consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born' (…). The scene is changing but the guard is not. Not yet, not now. A working through remains underway, and this coming to terms is, of

[256] Didur, "Re-embodying Technoscientific Fantasies", p. 106, citing N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 13.
[257] Laura Bartlett and Thomas B. Byers, "Back to the Future: The Humanist Matrix", *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003): 29.
[258] Badmington, "Theorizing Posthumanism", pp. 21-22.

course, a gradual and difficult process that lacks sudden breaks. An uneasy patience is called for.[259]

It is the patience of "critical practice", a reference to Badmington's mentor, Catherine Belsey, and the identity of the Cardiff Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory (CCCT), of which Neil, as well as me are 'products', so to speak: the centre of 'British post-structuralism' in the 1990s. So is the notion of "cultural criticism", also associated with the CCCT. In short, there is a formula that can be read between the lines: CPH is concerned with the ongoing deconstruction of humanism. This also explains more clearly what I wrote in a recent piece published in the first issue of *Interconnections*, Christine Daigle's new Canadian journal on posthumanism:

Arguably, what has come to be known as 'critical posthumanism' took off from a specific place and intellectual climate in the 1990s and early 2000s. It arose out of the (…) Cardiff Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory, which, at the time, was one of the leading places for (British) poststructuralism and (French) Theory—a combination of Barthesian semiology, Foucauldian genealogy and biopolitics, Althusserian Marxism, Derridean deconstruction, cultural materialism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lyotard's inhumanism, Cixous' *écriture féminine*, Said's orientalism, and Spivak's and Bhabha's postcolonialism.[260]

CPH is thus a continuation, an extension, and, in many respects, a radicalisation of poststructuralist critique and critical practice under new conditions. "Theory after theory",[261] so to speak, that is able to explain new forms of subjectivity, postanthropocentric notions of politics, ethics and justice, new ontologies and materialisms, the shift from 'sign to trace', the focus on and problematisation of the idea of taking postanthropocentrism 'literally', and of how to read from a 'posthumanist' point of view.[262]

In a nutshell, CPH is Neil Badmington's, but also Elaine Graham's take, in her undeservedly often neglected *Representations of the Post/Human* (2002) in which she discusses the obsessive "ontological hygiene" on which humanist notions of the human tend to rely. Apart from that it is of course also Donna Haraway's (who, however, never embraced the label), or Katherine Halyes's, Cary Wolfe's and many more. CPH was always a bit quieter, certainly not technophobic but technosceptical for sure – after all a posthumanism without technology is an important thought experiment that is still worth performing[263] – more 'literary' as well in its belief that literature, or fiction and speculation more generally are what, today, have the critical edge, in conjunction with certain science factional aspects of science and its dissemination.[264]

It is also a kind of attitude or inclination, namely one that is less confident that you can leave something so venerable, intuitive, or sticky as humanism behind and simply 'overcome' it, rather than something that, patiently, has to be 'worked through'. Hence the continued need

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[259] Badmington, "Theorizing Posthumanism", p. 22.

[260] Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical Posthumanism, Again", *Interconnections* 1.1 (2021): 66. See also the Introduction to this volume.

[261] Cf. Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge, eds., *Theory after Theory* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[262] Herbrechter, "Critical Posthumanism, Again", p. 67.

[263] Cf. Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical Posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3.2/4.1 (2007): 15-30.

[264] On the notion of "science faction" see my *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 114ff.

for and recourse to psychoanalysis, a psychoanalysis of the human, humanity and humanism in the face of its crumbling, its ongoing deconstruction, its threating return, in other words, its uncanny haunting. In short, critical posthumanism has embraced the deconstruction of humanism to face the critical challenges that continue to be posed to humanism, humanity and the human. In the process of its emergence it has been provoking, disrupting, *unravelling*, that is, deconstructing (at least) 500 years of humanism, as Ihab Hassan famously proposed. Hassan's proclamation, however, is certainly not without a profound sense of unease, when he speaks of the advent of a "posthumanist culture", a process "which depends mainly on the growing intrusion of the human mind into nature and history, on the dematerialization of life and the conceptualization of existence".[265] It is a process "begun by the firelight in the caves of Lascaux" and steering towards the "expansion of human consciousness into the cosmos" ending in a "transhumanization of the human".[266]

CPH has been shadowing this process of posthumanisation. It has been doing so by looking into the prospects of prefixing, of beginning and ending, of overcoming and transcending, of perfecting as well as regressing. In doing so, it has been stressing political moves and ethical stances invoking entanglement, relationality, intersection, enmeshment and the like. One thing, however, even though it was always hidden in plain sight, has taken critical posthumanists, but certainly not just them, by surprise, namely that the process of posthumanisation or of 'unbecoming human' (or 'unlearning to be human') in a humanist sense, was co-occurring with what one might call the *raveling* of the planet – the end(s) of man and the end(s) of the world rolled into one big post-Anthropo-scene.

Unlearning, or the linguistic return

Freud said, "The prefix 'un'(…) is the token of repression".[267] I do not know about you but when I embark on a writing and thinking project it usually starts with a word, or rather with something that is not quite a word. These (not quite) words and the concepts they somehow envelop, the realities they try to represent, the discursive-material-semiotic nodes they constitute, if you wish, somehow 'arrive' out of who knows where. In this case this *arrivant* was the verb 'to unravel'. However, before I tell you more about this curious word-concept-reality of *unravelling* – and the impression I mentioned above, that the world, 'my' world, is unravelling – I think I need to pre-empt some objections. As you know, some strands of posthumanism seem averse to what has become known as the 'linguistic turn' that dominated theory or philosophy almost throughout the entire 20th century. Its basic and in my view inescapable insight, however, is that there is no straightforward relationship between language and reality, or, in other words, that any claim towards linguistic transparency, as a mere and faithful reference to and representation of some prior and external reality – the 'classic realist' claim – is a misconception of how language works. Language is not a reflection of reality, it has its own ability and drive to construct, shape, transform as well as hide reality. In fact, language in its wider, more general sense of a symbolic system of meaning-making

[265] Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanst Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes", *The Georgia Review* 31.4 (1977): 835.
[266] *Ibid*., pp. 836, 843, 849.
[267] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny [1919]", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vo. XVII (1917-1919), ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 245.

signs and of material-discursive inscription of marks is, one might say, properly entangled with not only social, human reality but with any reality perceived, lived, enacted by some form of agency whether human or nonhuman.

Thus, when Karen Barad began her "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" by saying "language has been granted too much power",[268] she was being somewhat disingenuous, polemical, or strategic about intervening in a theoretical climate that maybe had taken the linguistic turn towards an excessive and hermetic 'linguisticism'. As Barad says: "The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every 'thing' – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation".[269] Her outrage leads her to ask: "How did language come to be more trustworthy than matter?"[270] However, given that poststructuralism never thought language to by trustworthy, nor dematerialised for that matter, Barad's statement seems somewhat misleading, especially since she is herself exploiting the fundamental ambivalence of language in her own title – which is of course so much more than a title, but rather a programme: how matter comes to matter, and all the subsequent plays and puns on mattering and matter-reality taken up by new feminist matter-realism. Indeed, discursive practice and discursive formation – in short, discourse in a Foucauldian sense – are not the same as language, or are not *only* language, but they are constituted and circulated, established and perpetuated, materialised through linguistic or symbolic *material*. In this sense, despite of or actually in line with any form of "agential realism", "intra-action" and "entanglement", one should insist on the fact that language *matters*. And this is one of the most important messages and practices that CPH in my view is here to remind us of. This is all the more important since the *figure* of the posthuman – language in its 'pure' rhetorical form, one might say – was embraced eagerly by early posthumanists precisely as a welcome escape from arguments about language. Why indeed would cyborgs or AI need language, surely they will be able to 'communicate' telepathically, or at least by 'code', will they not?

So, I do not know about you but I still think language matters, quite literally. Having followed the *discourse* of posthumanism and commented on its use of *figures* and *figurations* of the posthuman (critically but also productively, I hope) for the last 20 years or so, maybe this is a good time to take stock before it might all start to *unravel* … again. *Ravelling* or *unravelling*? As already mentioned, the word 'to unravel' arrived on my desk, in my in-tray, so to speak. Maybe I should say that, at heart and by training, I am a linguist, even 'worse', a philologist, as they were called when I did my studies of English and French in Heidelberg in the late 80s and early 90s. *Un*-ravel, the prefix has got history, of course and I will return to that, but first of all let me tell you how I got stuck on the root of 'ravel'. Ravel, the *OED* tells me, refers to a process of "fraying, disintegrating", but the verb 'to ravel' is curious in that it can actually refer to processes that are *both* of an "entangling and disentangling" nature. It is therefore almost as if the idea of un/raveling was following the same logic as the famous Freudian '*unheimlich*' – the canniness of the uncanny, based on the ambiguity of the German *heimlich* (at home *and* in secret), which much exercised poststructuralists and postmodernists throughout the last decades of the 20th century. By negating the canny, or that which one apparently knows, one

[268] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", *Signs* 28.3 (2003): 801.
[269] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity", p. 801.
[270] *Ibid*.

does not necessarily get any closer to the unknown but instead risks (re)producing *un*canniness – that which has existed from the beginning and which might have given rise to a specific trouble of reality in the first place. In short, it signals the return of the repressed, its haunting (re)appearance.

It is in fact not quite clear whether ravelling, or indeed unravelling for that matter, is a positive or a negative thing. Since ravelling can mean both entangle and disentangle – and both entangling and disentangling can also have positive and negative connotations – both can be associated with confusion, a rendering incoherent or muddled, a fraying (of fabric, clothes etc.), an unwinding, destroying or regressing. At the same time it is precisely this process (just like disentangling, of course) that can be associated with examining, considering, dismantling in a rational, positive, analytical sense, depending on whether reduction and investigation are desirable or not. So just like ravelling, unravelling is about disentangling, undoing, reversing, *as well as* about making plain, disclosing or revealing, solving a mystery, working out a conundrum. Why, you will ask, is this relevant to our so-called 'posthuman times', or any inquiries into entanglements and intersections in a posthuman world? In other words, in a world where it seems important and pressing to act, change, get stuck, by emphasising our entangled nature? Simply because, in my view, the *critical* in CPH is of an unravelling, or disentangling, nature. It requires (at least also) that we distance ourselves from matters of reality, matter-reality, including in the sense of so-called new materialism. In other words, CPH can only call itself *critical* if it is also critical of *itself* – as long as it continues to perform its own (psycho)analysis so to speak. And psychoanalysis, I hardly need to remind you, is the discourse of unravelling *par excellence*. Therefore, allow me a brief return to Freud and the *unheimlich*, his "unconcept", as Anneleen Masschelein calls it.[271]

It is an "unconcept" in that it is a concept that auto-deconstructs – a concept that shows the limit of conceptualisation in action so to speak. In this sense it is also a synecdoche of psychoanalysis as a whole, namely as that analytical undertaking that is concerned with the limits of consciousness, (self)knowability and negation. The prefix un-, as in the *un*conscious, or the *un*canny, is first of all a negation of a concept – consciousness and canniness. Psychoanalysis, as Elissa Marder writes in her contribution to a special issue of the OLR (*Oxford Literary Review*) simply called "Un": "Psychoanalysis is unthinkable without 'Un'. 'Un' links the unconscious (*Das Unbewusste*) to the Uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*)".[272] Freud himself, in his famous essay on the uncanny, makes this move when he says that psychoanalysis as a practice or discourse might seem uncanny to many people.[273] The science of the uncanny or uncanny science starts with the assumption that – Freud quoting Schelling – "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light".[274] We will recall that Freud in his comment on Jentsch and his reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman* first considers the idea of the automaton and the uncertainty whether the human protagonist of the tale, Nathaniel, is dealing with and falling in love with a fellow organic human being or a doll, Olympia – an early version of the Masahiro Mori's passage through the so-called

[271] Anneleen Masschelein, *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory* (New York: SUNY, 2011).
[272] Elissa Marder, "Un", *Oxford Literary Review* 42.2 (2020): 233.
[273] Freud, "The Uncanny", p. 243.
[274] *Ibid*., p. 225.

"uncanny valley"[275] and arguably one of the central tropes of our 'posthuman times', namely how to deal with our anthropomorphic relation to everything, from machines, to animals, to things, to nature, in other words, the issue of Haraway's cyborg and the breakdown of the boundaries between human/animal, organism/machine and physical/nonphysical.[276]

However, we should also recall that this uncertainty is in the end rejected or at least put to one side by Freud as the source of uncanniness, both in Hoffmann's fictional as well in the general psychic context. It is rather Nathaniel's repressed fear of the Sandman, a figure that is a mixture of dreams, fantasies or fairy-tales who puts out children's eyes, which Freud interprets as a symptom of the Oedipus or castration complex, i.e. as a threat to primary narcissism. Freud rather sides with Otto Rank in taking his notion of the double as the main source and motivation for uncanniness. "[D]oubling, dividing and interchanging of the self"[277] is a "preservation against extinction" and it is through doubling, splitting and repeating that the human ego overcomes its primary narcissism, Freud explains. However, the price is a repression of the "bad self", and the double remains a threat, a reminder, a haunt of primitive stages thought to have been tamed and surmounted, a reminder and harbinger of mortality and death. And this, according to Freud, is the uncanny proper, the return of the repressed as the price to pay for the human capability (or consciousness, if you prefer) of "self-observation". "[T]he quality of uncanniness", Freud explains, "can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted".[278] It is a reminder, or a "harking back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people".[279] Little wonder, one might say, that identity is always unravelling. In short, it is "whatever reminds us of this inner 'compulsion to repeat' [that] is perceived as uncanny",[280] which means that "[o]ur analysis of instances of the uncanny", as Freud says, "has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe".[281]

We can maybe begin to see what is going on here, what kind of unravelling is awaiting us here – nothing less than the unravelling of the notion of consciousness, critique and analysis itself. And we can also hear the level of Freud's prejudice against so-called "primitive" thought, and "animism" in particular, in his defence of psychoanalysis as a rational Enlightenment undertaking, characteristic of a certain Western metaphysics and eurocentrism – *wo Es war soll Ich werden* (where It was I shall be) – and the violent reaction against all this in some more recent strands of CPH, critical especially of its Western, European, colonial legacies, in other words, an increasingly vocal decolonial CPH.[282]

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[275] Cf. Laurent Milesi, "Freud's Uncanny in the Posthuman Valley", *Oxford Literary Review* 42.2 (2020): 247-251.

[276] Cf. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century [1985]", *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-182.

[277] Freud, "The Uncanny", p. 234.

[278] *Ibid*., p. 236.

[279] *Ibid*.

[280] *Ibid*., p. 238.

[281] *Ibid*., p. 240.

[282] I have tried to address the posthumanist return of and to animism in my recent volume on *Before Humanity*, in a reading of William Golding's *The Inheritors* and a chapter called "Animism without

Freud, the rationalist, concludes that "animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thought, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something frightening into something uncanny".[283] Ultimately, the uncanny is an effect produced "when the distinction between imaginations and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on"[284] – which throws us right back to the previous discussion of the role of language in the constitution of reality, right back to Jacques Lacan's critical return to Freud and the proposal attributed to Lacan that it is not I who speak (a) language but language that speaks me. It is also the reason why Freud writes that "there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life".[285] This is, then, how consciousness constantly unravels by what one might call the ravelling and revisiting of its 'home'.

I am of course not the only one to notice the curious matter of what is going on with ravelling and unravelling. Jordynn Jack, in *Raveling the Brain: Toward a Transdiciplinary Neurorhetoric* (2019) resists the scientific urge to 'unravel' the brain's secrets by the phantasm of a scientific gaze that purports to dissect and penetrate the brain – something that Jack refers to as a complex of "neurorealism, neuroessentialism and neuropolicy",[286] a "rhetorical-material meshwork" similar to the semiotic-material-discursive practice referred to earlier. Jack rather wishes to apply a rhetorical model used in the analysis of poetry: "we do not simply unravel poems, teasing out meanings that move from complex to simple; *we ravel them*, tying images and ideas together, generating multiple interpretations, puzzling them out".[287] Jack's claim is that "[we] can understand this meshwork better not by unravelling it, but by ravelling – by following threads of discourse across time and through different movements: we will imagine ourselves, so to speak, as the weaver's shuttle moving in and out of these threads",[288] a methodology obviously inspired by Barad's notion of entanglement, agential realism and the role of apparatuses. Jack characterises her methodology as "ravelling out" (or puzzling out a problem through multiple perspectives), "ravelling back" (seeing how discursive-material strands were previously knotted and entangled, working backwards as in a rhetorical genealogy), and "ravelling together" (in her specific case, emphasising the intertwining of humanistic research and neuroscientific concepts).

Jack's approach and insights are fascinating and illustrate what can be achieved in applying Baradian posthumanist performativity. However, I am specifically interested in it here because it stresses the problematic nature of the 'un' in unravelling I pointed out above, namely that we are dealing here with a repression and the return of some of the most fundamental aspects of human self-understanding, of what 'makes and unmakes us human', so to speak. As posthumanists, but also as humanists, transhumanists, or even antihumanists, we think we can unravel what it means to be human, but in the very same process we ourselves, of course, become unravelled. We think that by ravelling the human, i.e. by entangling or re-entangling

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Humans, or Belief without Belief"; cf. Stefan Herbrechter, *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 9-63 and 81-111.

[283] Freud, "The Uncanny", p. 243.

[284] *Ibid*., p. 244.

[285] *Ibid*., p. 249-250.

[286] Jordynn Jack, *Raveling the Brain: Toward a Transdisciplinary Neurorhetoric* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019), p. 2.

[287] *Ibid*., p. 2.

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

him, her or it, with whatever the human had to disentangle itself from to become human in the first place we perform some idea of justice, we work through the repressed of humanism or anthropocentrism. And in so doing, we become either more or less human, or both, or even better, namely human otherwise, as if that which can make us human is to be found, precisely, in what we had to repress in the first place – the inhuman. This mess or meshwork, this entangled logic might be what we can call the '(un)ravelling of the human' – and we all engage in this process, as critical posthumanists, because we find the human uncanny, our threatening double, our bad 'primitive' self.

This is precisely what we will have to unlearn, however. 'Unlearning to be human' is a phrase I proposed in a couple of articles on posthumanist education inspired by Jean-François Lyotard's (1991) notion of the 'inhuman'.[289] The 'un' in unlearning is similar to the 'un' in unravelling in that it is not a simple negation, not a negation of learning, as if that was something desirable. For education to cease to be a form of humanisation (in the sense of humanism's anthropogenetic machine), it is necessary to understand how learning to be a human is supposed to work and then, through a patient and thorough working-through and rewriting process, to 'un-learn' that process or to 'rewrite' it. The 'un' in unlearning therefore is also a form of deconstruction. Like the 'un' in Freud's *unheimlich*,[290] it at once makes strange and familiar; it is a sign of the return of the repressed and a symptom of repetition-compulsion. A posthumanist education worthy of its name and time would primarily have to unlearn the aspects, mechanisms or apparatuses, of the humanist forms of interpellation and subjectification that fuel what Giorgio Agamben calls the "anthropological machine",[291] bearing in mind however that there is no simple escape to subjectification as such, neither through decentring the subject, nor through its repositioning, nor through its proliferation, i.e. by attributing subjectivities to nonhuman forms of agency, even though this of course is a step in the right direction. Especially if that happens in conjunction with what one might call 'reworlding'.

Reworlding, or carrying the other

I do not know about you but unravelling and unlearning are both promising and at the same time un-nerving processes for CPH. The distinct feeling that 'my' world, the only one I have, is unravelling and has been doing so for a while, that it is '*fort*', as in Paul Celan's famous line that ends his short poem "*Große glühende Wölbung*" in the collection *Atemwende*[292] – "*Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen"* (the world is gone, I must carry you), which Jacques Derrida commented on so insistently in his Seminar on *The Beast and the Sovereign*[293] – is of course not without a certain tragic, nostalgic or melancholy undertone. It speaks of the traumatic

[289] The latest of which is my "Unlearning to Be Human? The Pedagogical Implications of 21st-Century Postanthropocentrism", in: Christine Daigle and Matthew Hayler, eds., *Posthumanism in Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 213-226. This aspect is taken up and developed in Chapters 7 and 8 in this volume.

[290] Éamonn Dunne, "Learning to Unlearn", in: Aidan Seery and Éamonn Dunne, eds., *The Pedagogics of Unlearning* (London: Punctum, 2016), pp. 13-24.

[291] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[292] Paul Celan, *Atemwende* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967).

[293] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2 vols. (The Seminars of Jacques Derrida), trans. Geoff Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

experience of losing one's bearings, of death, annihilation, extinction both at a personal, a social, as well as at a species and planetary level. It is connected to what has been called "geotrauma"[294] in the age of the 'Anthropocene'. However, first of all, it should prompt the renewed questioning of what a world actually is.

In her *Earth and World: Philosophy After the Apollo Missions*, Kelly Oliver asks a number of powerful questions: "How can we share the earth with those with whom we do not even share a world? (…) [I]s there any chance for cosmopolitan peace through, rather than against, both cultural diversity and biodiversity of the planet? Can we imagine an ethics and politics of the earth that is not totalizing and homogenizing? (…) How can we avoid the dangers of globalization while continuing to value cosmopolitanism?"[295] She notes that the Apollo missions and seeing 'our' planet from outer space (i.e. the famous *Earthrise* (1968) and the *Blue Marble* (1972) photographs) led to a kind of split consciousness which can also be seen at work in the rift between trans- and posthumanism: "While seeing Earth from space caused some to wax poetic about Earth as our only home, it led others to imagine life off-world on other planets".[296] While the world as a kind of immanent experience and reality thus gave way to the idea of the planetary and the global it also gave rise to the ecological movement of Whole Earth (i.e. the "image of the entire planet interconnected organically through the uniqueness of Earth's fragile atmosphere"). At the same time, however, it also led to the emergence of geo-engineering and One World ("the image of the entire planet connected through technology").[297] One might also add the search for exoplanets and the dream of space colonisation, the desire of leaving the spent planet Earth behind and press re-start to this. As Kelly writes: "The reactions to seeing the Earth from space make manifest tensions between nationalism and cosmopolitanism and between humanism, in the sense that we are the center of the universe, and posthumanism, in the sense that we are insignificant in the universe. In these reactions to seeing the Earth, there are contradictory urges to both love it and leave it".[298]

Kelly goes on to discuss Kant, Arendt, Heidegger and Derrida in detail before outlining her own vision of "terraphilia" or "Earth ethics". It would be impossible to do justice to her *tour-de-force* argument here but I want to pick out what arguably is the crux of world-thinking in our posthuman times that some call the Anthropocene or at least the curious realisation that this term stands for, namely the idea that humans have become so powerful that they are the main geological force on the planet just at a time when through various extinction, geo-engineering and world-without-us scenarios, humans seem ready to argue themselves out of the (world) picture. The human seems to be bent on extracting itself, making itself uncanny in the process, ironically, or maybe cynically, precisely at the time when human responsibility is greatest.[299]

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[294] Cf. e.g. Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

[295] Kelly Oliver, *Earth & World: Philosophy After the Apollo Missions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 4.

[296] *Ibid*., p. 3. Hannah Arendt famously begins her *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 1-6, with the same observation.

[297] Oliver, *Earth & World*, p. 15.

[298] *Ibid*., p. 14.

[299] Cf. my "'On not writing ourselves out of the picture…': An Interview with Stefan Herbrechter", *Antae* 1.3 (2014): 131-144; available online at:

This uncanniness of the human and its world is captured in Derrida's reading of Celan's *Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen*. "On the one hand", as Kelly explains, "Derrida insists that we do not share the world and that each singular being is a world unto itself, not just a world, but *the* world. On the other hand, and at the same time, we are radically dependent on others for our sense of ourselves as autonomous and self-sufficient, illusions that come to us through worldly apparatuses. We both do and do not share the world (…). Even when the world is gone, the earth remains. Even if we do not share a world, we do share the earth",[300] which in typically Derridean fashion raises the ethical stakes into almost hyperbolic proportions of an impossible but absolutely necessary and inescapable imperative – the world is gone, I must carry you. I must carry you because the world is gone, but also because I have to carry you, the world is gone – it works both ways, language again plays its tricks, one might say. What Kelly Oliver identifies as an instance of Derridean autoimmunitarian logic lies in the fact that "in order to take the world as a whole, we imagine it gone. In order to see the whole earth, we fantasize its obliteration" and "what is supposed to save us, the image of the whole earth, at the same time signals its self-destruction".[301] This uncanny ambivalence constitutes the haunting quality of our desire for a world and its 'wholeness'. We thus, again, both ravel and unravel the world, we have to both entangle and disentangle it from us, us from it. What to do in such an aporetic situation?

Heidegger's notion of (human) *Dasein* as "Being-in-the-World" is haunted by the anxiety of "homelessness", of becoming as apparently "*weltarm*" (poor in world) or "*weltlos*" as the animal or the stone – a claim that has been the focus of much critical posthumanist contestation, of course. Dwelling in a world that always withdraws like truth is the human condition that requires "world building" and the "unhomelike being at home of man on earth" (*das unheimische Heimischsein des Menschen auf der Erde*).[302] One could just as well have linked this to the uncanny – the *unheimisch* to the *unheimlich* – and to the task of "becoming at home in not being home" (*das Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein*) as the true meaning of humanity's worldly and impossible, aporetic, dwelling, or as Leslie Paul Thiele puts it: "The ongoing search for a home in our earthly homelessness defines human life. Engaging this search authentically in thought defines the philosophic life".[303]

Human ontological uncanniness is thus 'productive', if one follows *Heidegger on Being Uncanny* – the title of Katherine Withy's excellent study that starts with the words: "There are moments when we are struck by a feeling of strangeness, as if there is something wrong with being human (…). We feel that there is a dimension of human existence out of step with itself – unstable, out of joint, *unheimlich*".[304] That is, as long as 'man' does not consider 'himself' the lord of beings but only the shepherd of Being, and as long as technology is not laying waste to the earth or the balance of the original fourfold. As Heidegger says: "To preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to escort mortals – this

https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/12513/1/1-3-2014.1.pdf (accessed 31/10/2023).

[300] Oliver, *Earth & World*, p. 8.

[301] *Ibid*., p. 12.

[302] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne „Der Ister", Gesamtausgabe*, Band 53, Abteilung 2: *Vorlesungen 1919-1944* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), pp. 150-51; cited in Leslie Paul Thiele, *Timely Meditations: Martin Heidegger and Postmodern Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 178

[303] Thiele, *Timely Meditations*, p. 178.

[304] Katherine Withy, *Heidegger on Being Uncanny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 1.

fourfold preserving is the simple nature, the presencing, of dwelling".[305] One can sense why Heidegger's fundamental ontology despite its darker sides of upholding human exceptionalism and his antimodernism that drove him into the arms of national socialism, continue to have a certain appeal to deep ecological movements.

However, watching the world unravel one can also not ignore that regardless of all that, Heidegger may well have a point. The problem is that "the world in the phenomenological sense as shared horizon of intelligibility", as Marie-Eve Morin explains,[306] the world "as a meaningful totality of involvement, is a projection or a phantasm, the function of which is to cover over the abyssal gap between". It is in this sense that the world is always already 'gone', is always already imagined as spent, repressed, inaccessible. If there is an ecology of the future in all of this it inevitably has to go through this 'end of the world' scenario. It has to undergo the experience of the *unheimliche Heimischkeit,* of loss and geotrauma, that demands us to carry the other. And the other here, is of course no longer exclusively a human other. As Nancy would say, in the absence of either a religious or humanist sense bestowed on the world from outside in the form of a cosmos or the unity of a cosmic order, the world itself becomes (the) sense. Or, in other words, the end of the world is the beginning of ethics, as Kelly Oliver explains.[307] In the beginning, there is no world, there are only islands, glossing Derrida, reading John Donne, and each human or nonhuman death is the end of the world. This constant loss of world, a geotrauma that goes well beyond the so-called Anthropocene, is what reminds us that we are earthlings with bodies that can die, and which calls for an ethical response in the first place. It is also why CPH is so radically opposed to and different from any transhumanist phantasm of disembodied space-colonising AI-enhanced post-linguistic and posthuman intelligence.

What we need, therefore, especially in these world-changing times, is what you might call 'reworlding' – an ethico-political process that works through this uncanny unhomeliness of being human and its curious unravelling – not in order to 'rehome' the human, or any nonhumans for that matter, but as a kind of response and responsibility to the other, to the world as other that is always gone and which allows us to be here, 'in the first place', while calling for human 'carrying'. Reworlding the human – that might thus be another definitional phrase or programme for CPH. Reworlding the human while rewriting humanity, both go hand in hand. They are what drive the patient unravelling and disentangling of our surviving here on Earth.

[305] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, and Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 149-51, 158-59; cited in Thiele, 181.

[306] Marie-Eve Morin, "Worlds Apart: Conversations between Jacques Derrida & Jean-Luc Nancy", *Derrida Today* 9.2 (2016): 169.

[307] Kelly Oliver, "The Poetic Axis of Ethics", *Derrida Today* 7.2 (2014): 122.

Chapter 5: Posthumanist education?

The posthumanisation of the education system

One might be very tempted to dismiss posthumanism as another Anglo-American theory fashion and to simply wait for this latest 'postism' to go the way of all the previous ones. If there was no globalisation with its tangible effects both at an economic as well as a media and cultural level this might be possible or even a sensible thing to do. But the fact is that, even in disciplines that have always been predominantly focused on their respective national spaces, cultures and institutions such as the humanities and social sciences – which includes education, of course – global flows nowadays increasingly provide the main political and institutional impulses. This occurs through global competition via mechanisms of international 'transparency' and 'accountability' (cf. university league tables, or international studies of education systems like the OECD's PISA studies), which connect comparative educational standards with business location and correlate local training standards with an increasingly global competitive and mobile workforce. This puts national education systems under pressure to open themselves up to international and global benchmarking. Education, as a still predominantly national institution, is forced, due to more flexible tax legislation under the conditions of global neoliberalism, to make major investments to convince mobile international and global corporations and elites that the right political decisions are being taken to provide attractive educational opportunities and business locations including a flexible and skilled workforce ready for the so-called 'knowledge society'.[308]

International comparison is thus regularly used to break up apparently too rigid or obsolete local structures within educational systems and to create greater transparency, accountability, flexibility and competitiveness (all classic ideologemes of neoliberalism). The aim is to prevent or maybe reverse the culturally and financially disastrous losses to educational investment through the so-called 'brain drain'. The pressure on education systems under these conditions of competition and free market ideology as well as fashionable notions like for example 'transferable skills', which are aimed at streamlining and adjusting national workforces with regard to global employability and mobility, in my view, already constitute a context which might one might have to call 'posthumanist'. The posthumanist school and university, in this rather reductive economistic sense, together with the accelerating and intensifying digitalisation and ubiquity of (new) media technologies are thus heavily implicated in and affected by the ongoing process of 'posthumanisation'.

Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* provided a critique of the neoliberalisation of the university in as early as 1996. Readings's debunking of the vacuity of neoliberal ideologemes like 'excellence', however, was not enough to prevent the further managerialisation and the

[308] Cf. Joseph Zajda, Lynn Davies and Suzanne Majhanovich, eds., *Comparative and Global Pedagogies: Equity, Access and Democracy in Education* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008); Mario Novelli and Hulya K. Altinyelken, eds., *Global Education Policy and International Development: New Agendas, Issues and Policies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); Heinz-Dieter Meyer and Aaron Benavot, eds., *PISA, Power and Policy: The Emergence of Global Educational Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Joseph Zajda, ed., *Globalisation, Ideology and Politics of Education Reforms* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015); Joseph Zajda and Val Rust, eds., *Globalisation and Higher Education Reforms* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015); and Bob Lingard, Wayne Martino and Goli Rezai-Rashti, eds., *Globalizing Educational Accountabilities* (London: Routledge, 2015).

global reach of the 'corporate university'. In fact, neoliberal trends have been spreading throughout the entire education system ever since, so that the traditional and fundamental link between humanism and education, for better or for worse, has become much more tentative. If universities all over the world are anxious to invest ever more money in marketing to improve their ranking and to attract lucrative international students and establish satellite institutions all over the world, as well as setting up distance learning environments, this is happening in the form of a repackaging of the (humanist) notion of education as 'knowledge transfer', with a view to creating a global 'information society'. At the same time, mobility, transparency, flexibility and multiliteracy are used to sell an entirely instrumentalised form of education as individual investment and as 'lifelong learning' to the global constituency of 'customers'. This means that the previous humanist consensus that education most importantly serves to help develop some idea of 'personality' and 'humanity' has almost entirely disappeared.

This is the historical context in which the phrase 'posthumanist education' has to placed. In my *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (2013; German edition 2009), I introduced some differentiations which I believe are still helpful to understand the emergence and the development of the *discourse* of posthumanism. A distinction should be made between 'posthuman' and 'posthumanist', in which *posthuman* refers to a more or less fictitious *figure*, usually represented as either a specter, a desirable ideal or simply human destiny;[309] while *posthumanist* refers to the idea of a current task, namely a questioning or an ongoing deconstruction of the entire intellectual *tradition* and the *set of values* that humanism is based on.[310] Posthumanism, in this sense works like a discourse, with its own posthuman objects and its construction of a new social reality. Within this discourse, one should further differentiate between a variety of positions with regard to the changing nature of social reality (i.e. a variety of *posthumanisms*): namely a popular posthumanism and a critical posthumanism, on the one hand, as well as a posthumanism 'with' and 'without' technology, on the other hand. Popular posthumanism is based on the idea of present or future transformation of humans into 'posthumans' and can be seen at work in a number of popular science magazines, television debates, Youtube videos and ubiquitous science fiction scenarios (all of which are increasingly merging into what might be called new '(techno)cultural imaginary'). *Critical* posthumanism (CPH) means above all a questioning of the current ambient ideas and trends with regard to the process of 'posthumanisation'(i.e. of humans become somehow 'other', namely 'posthuman'), especially its motivations and ideological presuppositions. Critical posthumanism thus provides a kind of 'psychoanalytic' reading of current desires and fears of human transformation and self-understanding. It understands the prefix 'post' as a symptom of a partially repressed lack of meaning at the core of the human.[311] The commonsensical understanding of posthumanism, however, focuses on technological change. This posthumanism 'with' technology usually constitutes an approach based on the idea of an autonomy or autopoiesis of technological development, while a posthumanism 'without' technology is of course not literally to be seen as 'luddite', but intends to divert the emphasis

[309] Cf. also Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
[310] Cf. Neil Badmington, ed., *Posthumanism* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000).
[311] Cf. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, "What is a posthumanist reading?", *Angelaki* 13.1 (2008): 95-112.

of the discussion away from technocentrism and technological determinism towards a more general anthropological (and postanthropological) trajectory.[312]

Another clarification with regard to the meaning of CPH concerns the historical dynamic of all things posthuman. More specifically, CPH problematises the prefix 'post-' – in analogy with Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the 'post-' in 'postmodern'[313] – in the sense that it questions the very possibility of overcoming or transcending a humanist world picture. In this sense, posthumanism is clearly distinguished from transhumanism. As the prefix 'trans-' indicates, transhumanists like Hans Moravec, Vernon Vinge, or Nick Bostrom argue for a transcendence of the human as such – a kind of transformation of humans into something else (i.e. into a new species, superhumans, artificial intelligence etc.). Popular posthumanism often plays with such transhumanist scenarios in either technoeuphoric but mostly technodystopian ways. In its critical variety, however, posthumanism places the emphasis on a re-evaluation of humanist tradition and in doing so often refers back to *proto*-posthumanist approaches, which already exist in various humanist and also antihumanist stances. It is therefore necessary to be aware of existing posthumanising tendencies within humanism itself (and their critiques) in order to keep a critical handle on the actual potential of and resistance to the excesses of current posthumanisation processes and scenarios.

Posthumanism and pedagogy

The academic debate about posthumanism from the start has had an important educational component, even though this might have remained somewhat in the background until more recently. The first academic use of the term, in 1977, by the American literary and cultural theorist Ihab Hassan, occurred in the context and the genre of what he called a "university masque". With regard to what Hassan refers to a nascent posthumanism in the university he wrote:

> There is nothing supernatural in the process leading us to a posthumanist culture. That process depends mainly on the growing intrusion of the human mind into nature and history, on the dematerialization of life and the conceptualization of existence.[314]

And he continues:

> At present, posthumanism may appear variously as a dubious neologism, the latest slogan, or simply another image of man's recurrent self-hate. Yet posthumanism may also hint at a potential in our culture, hint at a tendency struggling to become more than a trend... We need ... to understand that the human form – including human desire and all its external representations – may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming

[312] Cf. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, "Critical posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3.2/4.1 (2007): 15-30.
[313] Cf. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1992).
[314] Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes", *The Georgia Review* 31.4 (1977): 835.

> to end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism.[315]

The essential link between education and humanism lies in education's historical aim of preparing children for majority (*Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*).[316] It is therefore no surprise that there should be many current attempts to defend humanist objectives within education given humanism's beleaguered state.[317] However, what seems to be irreversibly broken is the previous social and cultural consensus about humanist ideals and values – even though it has become increasingly obvious that these were in fact never as universalist or universalisable as they were made out to be. Humanism's ambition to be universal in reach, based on the essentialist notion of a common *human nature*, was in fact always underwritten by a very specific *normativity* (i.e. white, male, European, cosmopolitan, enlightened, rational). It is precisely this universalist norm that has become contested and untenable, or that has simply lost its implied addressee and thus its appeal, in the age of global migration, multiculturalism and radical pluralism of values. From a sociocultural point of view, posthumanism emerges precisely out of this (often seen as 'postmodern') discussion about pluralism, but, crucially, adds another component to it. This component is based, on the one hand, on technolgical development, and, on the other hand, on environmental change. Both developments lead to, what might be called, the emergence of a *postanthropocentric* world picture, which can be seen at work in the idea that humans are, from now on (but, in retrospect, have always been) only one group of actors among many other nonhuman forms of agency. Although this has, in fact, always been the case, the spreading awareness that humans and 'their' environment (humans and nonhuman animals, humans and machines, objects, 'nature', the planet etc.) form units and are in fact *networked*, is relatively new. When taken seriously, this has far-reaching consequences for 'our' current and future human self-understanding and thus, of course, for the education of future generations.

This is not to say that the current turn towards the posthuman and posthumanism within the theory and philosophy of education is without precedent. There have been previous attempts – mainly following the poststructuralist 'ends of man' or 'death of the subject' debate, on the one hand, and Donna Haraway's 'cyborg manifesto', on the other hand – to engage with the new figure of the posthuman (without addressing the full implications of posthumanism as such, however). The poststructuralist-deconstructive route is maybe best represented in the interventions by Gert Biesta, while the cyborg-route was pioneered in Noel Gough's and John Weaver's work. However, only now are there volumes or collections appearing that provide an overview of the wider implications of posthumanism for educational theory and practice. The earliest strategic use of posthumanism in relation to educational theory is probably by William Spanos,[318] whose starting point is the poststructuralist critique of the ideology of 'disinterestedness' that underlies the discourse of humanist education. In a similar vein,

[315] *Ibid*., p. 843.

[316] Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971).

[317] See for example, Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), and Julian Nida-Rümelin, *Philosophie einer humanen Bildung* (Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung, 2013).

[318] William Spanos in his *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

Biesta,[319] builds on the poststructuralist critique of the liberal humanist subject and the ends of man debate[320] as an attack on the 'manipulative' character of humanist pedagogy.[321] This philosophical trajectory based on a critique of power and a deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject is supplemented in the work of a number of other education theorists with a discussion of the social implications of 'cyborgisation' as introduced by Donna Haraway in the mid-1980s.[322] As early as 1995, Noel Gough[323] proposed to use the figure of the cyborg and the genre of science fiction as a way of opening up new forms of narrativisation for science teaching – an approach which in later publications he supplemented with a turn to actor-network-theory, or ANT.[324] This line of argument is also taken up by John Weaver,[325] who calls for an engagement with posthumanism and the challenges posed to the idea of human nature by biotechnology and the new biosciences. In line with the erosion of human exceptionalism and the acknowledgement of nonhuman forms of agency there are also more recent attempts to rethink education from other theoretical positions, which, nevertheless, may be subsumed under the label posthumanism, namely *new feminist materialism*, the already mentioned actor-network-theory[326] and object-oriented-ontology.[327]

In a special issue of *Gender and Education* (2013) on "Material feminisms: new directions for education", the editors explain that:

> The radical shifts occurring across the social sciences make this an exciting time for educational research. New material feminisms, post-humanism, actor network theory, complexity theory, science and technology studies, material culture studies and Deleuzian philosophy name just some of the main strands that call us to reappraise what counts as knowledge and to re-examine the purpose of education. Together these strands shift the focus away from individualized acts of cognition and encourage us to view education in terms of change, flows, mobilities, multiplicities, assemblages, materialities and processes.[328]

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[319] Gert Biesta, "Pedagogy without Humanism; Foucault and the Subject of Education", *Interchange* 29.1 (1998): 1-16.

[320] Cf. Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man", *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), pp. 109-136; and Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, eds., *Les Fins de l'homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Galilée, 1981).

[321] See also Gert Biesta, *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

[322] Cf. Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[323] Noel Gough, in "Manifesting Cyborgs in Curriculum Enquiry", *Critical Studies in Education* 36.1 (1995): 71-83.

[324] See Noel Gough, "RhizomANTically Becoming-Cyborg: Performing Posthuman Pedagogies", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36.3 (2004): 253-265.

[325] In Weaver, *Educating the Posthuman: Biosciences, Fiction, and Curriculum Studies* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2010).

[326] Cf. Tara Fenwick and Richard Edwards, "Introduction: Reclaiming and Renewing Actor Network Theory for Educational Research. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43.S1 (2011): 1-14; and Fenwick and Edwards, eds., *Actor Network Theory in Education* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[327] Cf. Nathan Snaza et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", *Journal of Curriculum Theory* 30.2 (2014): 39-55.

[328] Carol A. Taylor and Gabrielle Ivinson, "Material Feminisms: new directions for education", *Gender and Education* 25.6 (2013): 665.

Two other recent publications are worth mentioning here to show the extent to which the discussion about posthumanism has entered educational and curriculum theory. Tyson Lewis and Richard Kahn argue for what they call "exopedagogy" – i.e. a pedagogy that goes beyond the "bounds" of anthropomorphism and which takes into account the entire "bestiary" of "posthuman (zoomorphic) monsters".[329] Similarly, and most recently, Nathan Snaza and John Weaver start form the premise: "What would a world be that did not insist on human superiority or dominance and that did not disavow the human's ecological entanglements?"[330]

In the following, I propose to briefly discuss some of these different positions, spell out the stakes and implications of the phrase 'posthumanist education' and relate them to a few curricular aspects. I begin with a discussion of comments made by Peter Sloterdijk – whose importance for education theory in my view has not been sufficiently recognised. I am referring especially to the controversy surrounding his so-called "Elmau Speech" which takes as its starting point the current crisis of human "technologies of domestication" (*Zähmungstechniken*).

Humanism as a technology of domestication

In recent years Peter Sloterdijk's work has increasingly relied on the term "anthropotechnics".[331] In his "Response to Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism'" (the subtitle to his Elmau speech, entitled "Rules for the Human Zoo"),[332] Sloterdijk recalls Heidegger's critique of humanist metaphysics. Heidegger chastises humanism's *Seinsvergessenheit* (its 'forgetting of being') in the face of the modern technological challenge. Consequently, Sloterdijk puts forward his own technical or rather media-technological definition of humanism, which he understands as "telecommunication in the medium of print to underwrite friendship" and as a "chain letter through the generations",[333] whose underlying "communitarian fantasy" of "participation through reading the canon reveals a common love of inspiring messages".[334] At the heart of this media technological illusion lies "a cult or club fantasy: the dream of the portentous solidarity of those who have been chosen to be allowed to read".[335] However, this "reading nation" has been thrown into a deep crisis by the processes of globalisation and digitalisation. Sloterdijk describes the resulting squeeze in these words:

> If this period [i.e. humanism] seems today to have irredeemably vanished, it is not because people have through decadence become unwilling to follow their national literary curriculum. The epoch of nationalistic humanism has come to an end because the art of writing love-inspiring letters to a nation of friends, however professionally it

[329] In Lewis and Kahn, *Education out of Bounds: Reimagining Cultural Studies for a Posthuman Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 10ff.
[330] In Snaza and Weaver, eds., *Posthumanism and Educational Research*, (2015) *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 3; see also Snaza et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", (2014).
[331] Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).
[332] Peter Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: a response to the *Letter on Humanism*", *Environment and Planning D* 27 (1999): 12-28.
[333] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[334] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[335] *Ibid.*

> is practiced, is no longer sufficient to form a telecommunicative bond between members of a modern mass society.[336]

The disintegration of the humanist (phatic) bond is accompanied by growing fears that humanism actually might always have been relying on somewhat negative values as its main motivation, namely on the fear of a people governed by natural *Verwilderungstendenzen* ["a tendency towards the bestialisation of humanity"].[337] Basically, humanism understands itself as a melioristic antidote to humans' inherent barbarity: "Anyone who is asking today about the future of humanity and about the methods of humanization wants to know if there is any hope of mastering the contemporary tendency towards the bestialization of humanity".[338] Humanist education based on reading therefore amounts to what Sloterdijk calls *Zähmungstechnik* [technology of domestication], which is supposed to immunise humans against the spectre of the "unconstrained homo inhumanus".[339]

From this rather provocative analysis Sloterdijk draws two conclusions, which, in my view, have profound effects on any posthumanist educational thinking. Behind the opposition between humanism and posthumanism and their respective fantasies or desires, according to Sloterdijk, lies the question of "anthropodicy" – that is "a characterization of man with respect to his biological indeterminacy and his moral ambivalence".[340] This implies the view that humanism is basically a specific media technological communication model, and that it is precisely the technical inadequacy of this model which has provoked the current crisis: "Above all (…) from now on the question of how a person can become a true or real human being becomes unavoidably a media question, if we understand by media the means of communion and communication by which human beings attain to that which they can and will become".[341] What is at stake in a move towards a posthumanist notion of education relies therefore on a return to the 'underdetermination' of the human – the openness and ambivalence of the human – while the specific pedagogical challenge lies in a fundamental change of media technologies. The pedagogical question that arises out of Sloterdijk's analysis is: how does one prepare humans today, i.e. in the age of bio(techno)politics, new media, digitalisation and climate change, for the enormous and planetary challenges that lie ahead?

Sloterdijk understands the contemporary crisis of (European) national bourgeois humanism as an opportunity for a post- or transhumanist thinking to emerge, where Heidegger's critique, as well as that of a number of poststructuralist thinkers, such as Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Lacan, is giving birth to new posthumanist schools of thought. What distinguishes these emerging posthumanisms from the earlier Heideggerian and poststructuralist critiques of humanism is, on the one hand, the reopening of the question of technology (in following but also going beyond Heidegger, especially as far as interdisciplinary approaches negotiating between the sciences and the humanities are concerned), and, on the other hand, the overcoming of Heideggerian or even Foucauldian anthropocentrism that remains inscribed even in the most radical antihumanist critique. Once humans begin to take the notion of

[336] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[337] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[338] *Ibid*.
[339] *Ibid*.
[340] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[341] *Ibid*.

postanthropocentrism seriously, fundamental ontological, ethical and environmental questions necessarily arise – questions that inevitably affect any future-oriented pedagogy. For Sloterdijk, this epochal question should be articulated as follows:

> What can tame man, when the role of humanism as the school for humanity has collapsed? What can tame men, when their previous attempts at self-taming have led primarily to power struggles? What can tame men, when, after all previous experiments to grow the species up, it remains unclear what it is to be a grown-up? Or is it simply no longer possible to pose the question of the constraint and formation of mankind by theories of civilizing and upbringing?[342]

In answer to the last question, Sloterdijk, conscious of writing in a time of what might be called (following Agamben, in his rereading of Foucault) the age of generalised "biopolitics",[343] proposes a rethinking of a humanist "*Zähmungsgeschichte*" [a history of taming] as a history of "breeding" (Sloterdijk here alludes to the return of eugenics as a result of biotechnological advances).

Globalisation, digitisation and biotechnology in the process of a complex media-technological convergence produce an emergence of humans from their previous humanist state of "self-domestication" and lead to a post- (or maybe trans-) humanist form of "self-cultivation":

> With the thesis of men as breeders of men, the humanistic horizons have been pried apart, so that the humanist can no longer only think, but can move on to questions of taming and nurture. The humanist directs himself to the human, and applies to him his taming, training, educational tools, convinced, as he is, of the necessary connection between reading, sitting, and taming.[344]

Posthumanist educationalists would thus necessarily have to start by questioning not only existing humanist taming technologies and adapt them for 'our' time, but they would equally have to query the very idea or necessity of and motivation for 'taming' as such. However, if Sloterdijk's analysis is correct, would the very possibility of pedagogical thinking and pedagogical reason not break down altogether? Which minimal consensus about values, what minimal notion of humanity and what minimal idea of education for humans could still be established or presupposed, once the idea of 'self-cultivation' through educational reproduction was abandoned? Is the phrase 'posthumanist education', in this sense, not a contradiction in terms?

The current "intellectual discomfort in the human zoo"[345] – the (theme) park-like conditions that Sloterdijk refers to as the anthropotechnological "spheres" that humans have been creating to protect themselves and which allow for their "hominization" in the first place – demands a posthumanist thinking in the face of a "zoo-political task".[346] Interestingly, in his

[342] *Ibid*., p. 20.
[343] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[344] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo", p. 22.
[345] Ibid., p. 25.
[346] *Ibid*.

interpretation of the crisis of humanism Sloterdijk, almost instinctively, or maybe rather inevitably, returns to the very beginning of European humanist thought – Plato – and explains that:

> Plato's dangerous sense for dangerous ideas finds the blind spot of all high culture pedagogies and politics – in particular, his admission of the actual inequality of people before the knowledge that power gives.[347]

What transpires here, however, is that Sloterdijk turns out to be not so radical a thinker of a progressive posthumanist project for a transformed democratic education, after all, but someone who remains profoundly caught up, rather like Heidegger, in a feeling of late humanist frustration. He seems to place himself, somewhat nostalgically, in the position of a (reluctant) observer of the current "archiving" process of the humanist tradition. It is this nostalgic tone which in the end poses the greatest challenge for a *critical* posthumanism whose aim must be the development of a *positive* educational programme, without this kind of *ressentiment*:

> Everything suggests that archivists have become the successors of the humanists. For the few who still peer around in those archives, the realization is dawning that our lives are the confused answer to questions which were asked in places we have forgotten.[348]

A cynic might be tempted to say Sloterdijk has thus replied to Heidegger's letter in a somewhat melodramatic fashion. Despite its critical disguise, however, this reply has simply performed a continuation of the humanist trajectory while invoking its end. The letter, in this sense, has not failed to arrive at its destination. However, taking Sloterdijk's own analysis seriously, one would have to write very different kinds of 'letters' – on other media platforms, for example. The question would be to what extent these would still afford letter writing at all. Rhetorical and stylistic consequences necessarily would arise and the very idea of a correspondence would be challenged. It is this new (media) situation which necessarily constitutes one of the main starting points for a *critical* posthumanist education – namely the move from literacy to what might be called *mediacy*.

Critical *posthumanist education*

So can there be a posthumanist education at all? This is where I need to come back to the meaning of the term *critical* in CPH. One reaction to Sloterdijk's reply to Heidegger would thus need to be performative, so to speak. The humanist founding and legitimating gesture of writing letters – a gesture on which 'men' and 'republics of letters' have been relying and to which they cannot stop 'replying' (which of course includes my own humble response here) – always presupposes a certain ideal of literacy at the core of any humanist understanding of education. Given the requirement of this most important of humanist technological *dispositifs* – i.e. literacy – how, in practical terms, would a *critical* posthumanist education look in terms of curriculum (if, indeed, the notion of a curriculum can escape its posthumanist deconstruction)? If we follow the logic of postanthropocentrism I outlined above, a focus on

[347] *Ibid.*, translation modified.
[348] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

proliferating environmental issues including ethical, political as well as epistemological aspects seems to suggest itself. In the remaining part of this section I would like to briefly turn to each of these aspects (i.e. ethical, political and epistemological).

We can assume that the crisis humanist education finds itself in has been caused by changes both to the (humanist) system as well as to the (humanist) subject that supported this system and in turn was supported by it. In terms of the system, this crisis has been exacerbated by neoliberal globalisation and the resulting global competition in educational standards. In terms of the subject, new media technologies have led to a change in the fundamental self-understanding of humans as well as to new forms of subject positionings or interpellations (to extend Louis Althusser's term). How would a critical posthumanist pedagogy support, as well as provide possibilities for a critique of, these emerging new subjectivities and thus enable them to critically and creatively address their new systemic environments. This requires, in my view, an ethical-ecological, a political-technological and an epistemological-cognitive conceptualisation, which need to be associated with their respective appropriate learning contents. To recapitulate, this move is based on the understanding of the 'post-' in 'posthumanism' not as a displacement, an overcoming of or a detachment from the humanist tradition, but as a critical reappropriation, a perlaboration or rewriting of it.

In the biotechnological age and the time of bio(techno)politics, a posthumanist and postanthropocentric ethics must, by definition, be 'organic', in the sense that it should be concerned with life, its affirmation and its survival. A posthumanist ethics is therefore, on the one hand, characterised by the awareness of human-induced climate change with its global impact on the geosphere, biodiversity, resource extraction and the associated problems of sustainability (cf. the emerging geological debate around the Anthropocene).[349] This aspect is so central – a question of survival, not only for the human species, but for the entire life-supporting environment with its nonhuman actors (animals, plants, machines, objects, etc.) – that ecology is in fact becoming the new core educational subject. Instead of being just a new subject, however, ecology functions more like a core of ideas and values that inform every disciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary teaching practice and curriculum, in any school or university all the way down or rather all the way up. Whether natural sciences, social sciences or humanities, at the beginning of any subject-specific training there has to be an engagement with postanthropocentric questionings designed to develop an environmental consciousness. For the humanities in particular, this means a shift towards teaching the history of hominisation from a postanthropocentric standpoint that also addresses and critically evaluates the idea of human exceptionalism and incorporates a focus on environmental entanglement as well as the importance of nonhuman forms of agency.

One step in this direction would be creating a responsiveness to the work that has emerged out of (critical) animal studies, and which would address and reverse the literal disappearance of animals from human-centred environments throughout modernity (with the exception of some selected companion species, zoos, nature television programmes and, of course, ever-increasing industrial meat production and intensive farming and their consumption). The affective changes that the *de- or maybe even postanimalisation* (both material as well as

[349] See for example Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Karen Malone, Son Truong and Tonia Gray, *Reimagining Sustainability in Precarious Times* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017).

psycho-social) and the segregation of human and nonhuman environments have produced throughout modernity, need to be critically addressed and if possible reversed, to create a human self-image that recognises the actual entanglement of human and nonhuman animality at both the material level (of embodiment) and the ethical-ecological level (of biodiversity as an intrinsic good). As long as animals are primarily seen and dealt with as goods and industrial products, the process of human denaturation cannot even begin to be taught appropriately. The technophantasm of a complete separation between spirit and matter, as promised by transhumanists for example (which merely continues in the tradition of two millennia of Christianity and dualist metaphysics), will have to be detracted and its cruelty and exclusionary character exposed as a part of a long history of the displacement of physicality and the devastating effects this has had on our fellow animals as well as on our human self-image. An ethical-ecological education therefore has to critically respond to the positive *and* negative aspects of posthumanisation, especially with regard to issues of sustainability, redistribution and an idea of social justice, in which the interest of humans may not be considered as *a priori* central. As an example, let me refer at this point to the extremely valuable work by Helena Pedersen which engages with educational theory and animals in the classroom.[350]

The presence of nonhuman animals in education, according to Pedersen, "makes visible the coercive and exclusionary implications" of current education policy, and "requires education to seriously scrutinize its own embeddedness in reproductive practices and thought patterns and take effective measures toward its transformation".[351] The benefit of engaging with posthumanist theory, for Pedersen, lies in the fact that it "complicates many assumptions surrounding the relations between education and democracy and provides new perspectives on the notion of 'voice' in a context where individual and collective voices of disadvantaged or subordinate groups (human or animal) are marginalized or silenced".[352] In this context, the decisive challenge that posthumanism poses is: "What would it mean for democracy education to respond to the 'voices' and lived experiences of nonhuman animals?"[353] Posthumanist approaches to animals in education, on the other hand, should address the implications for formal education if approached as a web of socio-material relations where humans, animals, scientific knowledge, technologies, and artifacts interact under shared conditions in a biosocial space.[354] Practically, for a truly posthumanist education this means that the constitutive speciesism at work in existing pedagogy does not only have to be addressed as such but would need to be actively undone, deconstructed, in order to jam, so to speak, what Agamben refers to as "the anthropological machine".[355] This alone would begin to tackle humanist education's implication within the (re)production of human self-understanding based on exceptionalism.[356]

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[350] Helena Pedersen, *Animals in Schools: Processes and Strategies in Human-Animal Education* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2010).

[351] Helena Pedersen, "Education Policymaking for Social Change: a post-humanist intervention", *Policy Futures in Education* 8.6 (2010): 693.

[352] *Ibid*., p. 687.

[353] *Ibid*.

[354] Cf. Helena Pedersen, "Education and Posthumanism", *Genealogy of the Posthumant* (2015); available online at: http://criticalposthumanism.net/genealogy/education (accessed 8/11/2023).

[355] Agamben, *Homo sacer* (1998).

[356] Cf. also Helena Pedersen, "Is 'the posthuman' educable? On the convergence of educational philosophy", animal studies, and posthumanist theory, *Discourse* 31.2 (2010): 237-250.

In connection with this ecological trajectory of postanthropocentrism the question of the distribution of and access to resources – material, biological, as well as cognitive and media technological – also needs rearticulation. This entails the second aspect, namely the political-technological dimension of any posthumanist pedagogy worthy of its name. For our current situation, this means a reorientation not only as far as the accessibility of the latest technologies are concerned (for the purpose of communication, commerce, mobility, health, leisure), but it requires a kind of second ecological shift towards postanthropocentrism with its new understanding of humans and nonhumans in relation to an emerging global media technological environment. The most advanced approach in this respect, in my view, can be found in Bernard Stiegler's work,[357] in which he refers to the "originary technicity" of the human (similar to Sloterdijk's "anthropotechnics"), and in which he insists on the co-evolution of humans and technology.

The question of technology – as it was so insistently formulated by Heidegger – today returns with a vengeance and with increased urgency (i.e. in the context of global bio-techno-media-politics). It returns as the increasingly urgent question of human self-understanding, in the face of ever greater threats of disappearance and extinction. So, while all human being is "technical" (Stiegler) – in the sense that it was the technical supplement or prosthesis that made us human in the first place, and that, today, in the "fourth age of technology", promises to make us posthuman – the "essence" of technology is still nothing technical but instead remains stubbornly "poietic" (i.e. transformative, creative, "challenging forth", in Heidegger's terms). It is important, however, when speaking of technology, technicity or the technical not to forget the processes of mediation which are their *raison d'être*. It is more than plausible that early techniques developed in the Stone Age may have started the hominising process. The techniques that have been developed since then through trial and error and steady honing, however, beyond their simple instrumental character have had an ontological and medial side effect: ontological, in terms of developing a specific human self-understanding (e.g. in the sense of a modern *homo faber*) and medial, in that they allow for the development of externalised media of communication. Marshall McLuhan referred to this media-technological understanding of technicity as "extensions of man".[358] However, as indicated above, even though technicity and mediality might overlap, they are not quite identical. During the course of modernity the relationship between technicity and mediality, for example, can be said to have 'flipped'. The development of technics and technology is basically congruent with the development of modernity – namely with industrialisation, rationalisation and globalisation. Three aspects that play a special role in this process are language, culture and embodiment, which thus render an identification of this process with technicity problematic and instead are better understood as changes in mediality.

This is even more relevant since, for Stiegler (following Heidegger), "*every technical object is pharmacological*: it is both poison and remedy at the same time".[359] A "pharmacological" analysis (based on the understanding of what Stiegler refers to as "*épistémè* numérique [the episteme of the digital]", which functions as a *pharmakon* – both poison andremedy) thus

[357] Cf. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008-2011).
[358] Cf. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
[359] Bernard Stiegler, *Pharmacologie du Front National,* suivi du *Vocabulaire d'Ars Industrialis* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), p. 421.

involves a critical analysis of the socio-political use of technologies in view of their fundamental ambiguity (as remedy, poison, scapegoat, and, as I would add, as forms of *mediality*). The digital, for Stiegler, is precisely such a challenge which concerns "la vie de l'esprit" [the life of the mind], which is essentially based on 'exteriorisation', that is to say, based on "the conditions of its expression, which are also those of its impressions": "we claim that digital evolution of technical exteriority and the processes of interiorisation that it produces in return constitute a new age of the mind, a new mind that would be made possible by this new form of writing that we believe the digital to be, and which forces us to rethink the mind itself in its totality".[360] This digital (r)evolution and the constitution of a "knowledge society", according to Julien Gautier and Guillaume Vergne, "with their promises and above all, for the moment, with their dangers, put the educational system into a new central and at the same time problematic situation":

> In particular, the new technologies whose development oscillates between stultifying mass industry and unprecedented democratization of access to knowledge, seem to spell the end of a school whose aims seem to have become obsolete and whose methods are deemed archaic. However, does a solid formation of judgment and of culture not appear so much more primordial since we have entered an age that leaves us more and more to our own devices, with our minds weighed down by a constant flow of information and incessant solicitations.[361]

The question of what teaching might mean in the digital age, for Stiegler, is the question of education's "pharmacological" desire to "*prendre soin* [take care]" of the mind, to control and form the mind's capacity for attention and taste. This means that it is essential to address the "toxic" effects of digital technologies and to place them within the service of a "knowledge society" and exploit their potential of new forms of "transindividuation" for positive political ends.[362]

It follows, therefore, that the third aspect of a posthumanist pedagogy is aimed at the development of a new aesthetic. This includes the above-mentioned ethical-ecological and political-technological aspects. It arises out of the changing forms of mediality and the new methodological issues raised by them. As indicated, Sloterdijk's insistence on the centrality of changing media, through digitalisation and globalisation, from a literary to a posthumanist, i.e. post-literary, value system, does not necessarily lead to nostalgia or a sense of loss, but may as well constitute a chance or even a necessity. This is, for example, Michel Serres's attitude in *Petite Poucette*.[363] In this short educational treatise addressed to "Thumbelina" – the name he gives to the generation growing up with the new haptic environment of keyboards, screens and mobile media – Serres states that:

> Without us noticing a new human was born within the brief interval that separates us from the 1970s. He or she does no longer have the same body, the same life span, no

[360] Bernard Stiegler, "Pharmacologie de l'épistémè numérique", in: Stiegler, ed., *Digital Studies* (Paris: FYP, 2014)., p. 14 ; my translation.
[361] Jules Gautier and Guillaume Vergne, "Avant propos", in: Denis Kambouchner, Philippe Meirieu and Bernard Stiegler, *L'école, le numérique et la société qui vient* (Paris: Mille et une nuits 2012), pp.13-14; my translation.
[362] Transindividuation is Gilbert Simondon's term, see Gautier and Vergne, "Avant propos", p. 17.
[363] Michel Serres, *Petite Poucette* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2012).

> longer communicates in the same way, no longer perceives the world in the same way, no longer lives in the same nature, no longer inhabits the same space (…). Since they no longer have the same head as their parents, he or she knows otherwise.[364]

For Serres, the move away from the "format-page" (the format of the page but also the formatting page – of which screens are the latest but also possibly the last remainder) opens up the possibility of new forms of intelligence based on invention, which, for Serres is measured by its opposition to and distance from knowledge *per se*.

In the same measure as the global media system converges in new media, a new from of media 'literacy' thus becomes a central educational demand, both for the purposes of the system itself, as well as for its critical observation and thus for a creative intervention within it. Mostly this new skill-set is still referred to as 'literacy', or as 'new literacies' and 'multiliteracies'.[365] The demand for new literacies adapted to new media-technological environments, with their new forms of sociality, cooperation and participation, whether they serve to improve the use of stationary media (e.g. computer terminals), or the rapidly increasing number of mobile media (smart phones, tablets, etc.), is closely related to media convergence, i.e. the transition from mass to open and p2p media. Henry Jenkins, one of the pioneers of media convergence, was asked to translate the challenges of this new participatory media culture into a rationale for a media education for the 21st century. Jenkins's intervention was designed to lead to a reorientation within the debate between traditionalists and skeptics about how a future-proof media education would have to proceed. The goal, as Jenkins wrote, was to "shift the focus of the digital-divide discourse from questions of technological access to those of opportunities for participation and the development of cultural competencies and social skills needed for full involvement".[366] To this end, Jenkins focused on:

> *new media literacies*: a set of cultural competencies and social skills that young people need in the new media landscape. Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking. These skills build on the foundation of traditional literacy and research, technical, and critical-analysis skills learned in the classroom.[367]

What at first glance looks like a radical change in Jenkins's approach, however, is largely taken back at the end of this passage and relinked to traditional *literacies* developed through humanist educational practice. Even the pioneer of virtual reality and of the notion of virtual communities, Howard Rheingold, in his book on the subject,[368] bases his argument on an expansion of current literacies and advocates their "supplementation" by skills that optimise

[364] *Ibid*., p. 13; my translation.
[365] David Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, eds., *Multiliteracies: Literacy and the Design of Social Futures* (London: Routledge, 2000).
[366] Howard Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (MacArthur Foundation/MIT, 2009), p. xiii.
[367] *Ibid*.
[368] Howard Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

the usage of the internet: "attention, participation, collaboration, the critical consumption of information (aka, 'crap detection'), and network smarts".[369]

Thus, whether we are dealing with arguments for developing new forms of literacy (e.g. 'ludoliteracy', i.e. enhancing literacy through gaming practices and strategies) or for integrating new participatory forms of media skills into the educational programme (see e.g. 'peeragogy'), these conceptualisations all have one thing in common: they present themselves in terms of a continuity with the idea of the literate. In my view, all these varieties of new literacy remain caught up in the dynamic of Sloterdijk's notion of (humanist) domestication outlined above. Even if this taming process might no longer constrain humans exclusively it nevertheless remains an attempt at taming the potential for change in digital and new social media. These attempts might thus all be described as weak defenses in that they stress the idea that traditional literacy skills are more in demand than ever as people move into the digital age, in which 'we' apparently do not read less, but in fact more – even though we have less and less time for more and more reading material. Of course, this does not only have stylistic, grammatical and pragmatic effects on language use, but also on cognition and the attitude towards media more generally. These effects are fundamentally *aesthetic* in nature and concern the existing linguistic and cultural ecology more generally (think for example of the dominance of English in the emerging new social media world or the spreading of a global popular culture by global media).

The positive argument that lies behind the drive towards an adequate integration of digital media within current pedagogical theory and practice[370] is thus merely the reverse side of the often quite grotesque attacks on the 'dumbing down' potential of new and, by implication, all screen media (a thesis that is well known at least since the advent of commercial television). The dumbing down argument usually refers back to the idea of an assault on the reading culture of humanism.[371]

In my view the potential benefit of a *critical* posthumanist education lies entirely elsewhere. If one takes the potential for change contained in new media and digitalisation seriously (keeping in mind the context of globalisation and neoliberalism in which these new media are functioning), there are indeed high risks but also great benefits. And this is where the political task for a posthumanist education lies: namely in taking the potential seriously and thinking it through so to speak before negating or stressing any continuities. This is also the way I understand Gautier and Vergne in their preface to Kambouchner, Meirieu and Stiegler's discussion of the "digital school":

> There is no time any more to ask ourselves whether standards are 'going down' or 'rising', nor whether we need to place the child, the teacher or knowledge at the centre of the system, nor whether we should introduce new technologies in school or not.[372]

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

[370] Cf. David Buckingham, *Beyond Technology: Children's Learning in the Age of Digital Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

[371] Cf. for example Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

[372] Gautier and Vergne, "Avant propos", p. 12; my translation.

In the face of the "digital revolution" which leaves the new "pharmacological" exploitation of technologies of memory ("hypomnemata"), described by Stiegler, to the economy, a posthumanist education would have to reclaim the critical and creative potential contained in new media technologies for pedagogical purposes. Some early attempts of this were already made in the 1980s, and can be found for example in Gregory Ulmer's work, which argued for a shift from literacy to "electracy".[373]

Katherine Hayles, whose *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) is usually seen as the beginning of a critical engagement with the cybernetic vision of posthumanism, in her subsequent work deals with the cognitive changes and their (amongst other aspects, pedagogical) potential of digitalisation. In *How We Think* she starts form the assumption that "we think through, with, and alongside media"[374] and shows how this has already affected the current educational programme, especially in the humanities. Her starting point corresponds to the posthumanist self-understanding and positioning laid out above: "The ability to access and retrieve information on a global scale has a significant impact on how one thinks about one's place in the world".[375] In the intensified interaction between human and computer and the new subjectivities and forms of embodiment that arise from this process, Hayles claims that we are witnessing a shift towards "extended" and "distributed cognition".[376] Consequently, she argues for establishing the field of "comparative media studies" as a new and central subject for schools and universities, which helps investigate the mentioned co-evolution of humans, technology and media (or, as Hayles calls it, "technogenesis").

Even though Hayles also still relies on the metaphor of expanding *literacies* to designate new competencies, she nevertheless focuses on the cognitive changes that are produced by new forms of reading behaviour. She proposes a three-tierd system of reading: traditional (humanist) "close reading", "hyper reading" and "machine reading":[377]

> Hyper reading, which includes skimming, scanning, fragmenting, and juxtaposing texts, is a strategic response to an information-intensive environment, aiming to conserve attention by quickly identifying relevant information, so that only relatively few portions of a given text are actually read.[378]

This form of reading behaviour if formalised and pedagogically supported correlates with "hyper attention, a cognitive mode that has a low threshold for boredom, alternates quickly between different information streams, and prefers a high level of stimulation".[379] This is virtually the opposite of what is going on in "close reading". While "hyper attention" is often (mis)interpreted as a deficit (if not a pathology, cf. ADHS), it would be preferable for educational purposes to focus on hyper reading as a cognitive (and possibly evolutionary) survival technique in the age of "information overload", because "attention as a focus for

[373] Cf. Gregory Ulmer, *Teletheory* (New York: Routledge, 1989); and Jan Rune Holmevik, *Inter/vention: Free Play in the Age of Electracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).
[374] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 1.
[375] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[376] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[377] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[378] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[379] *Ibid.*

inquiry opens onto a complex and urgent set of issues, including the relation of human to machine cognition and the cycles of epigenetic changes catalyzed by our increasing exposure to and engagement with digital media".[380]

Bernard Stiegler sums up what is at stake in a more enlightened educational engagement with the "post-literary" potential of new digital media and the "new attentional forms" they produce (for better or for worse):

> If in fact an appropriate therapeutic response to this pharmacology of attention is conceivable and able to be transindividuated, then the question would be to what degree can and even must these digital relational technologies also give birth to *new attentional forms* that pursue in a different manner the process of psychic and collective individuation underway since the beginning of grammatisation; new forms that make this network society arrive at a new stage in the individuation of this plural unity of the *logos* where the attentional forms we recognize as our culture abound?[381]

Conclusion

The either feared or anxiously awaited pharmacological and neuronal 'rewiring' of humans through digital media technology is necessarily related to changes within our human self-understanding. CPH should of course not start from the purely 'neurocentric' or cognitive assumption, that this change might be fully explained by a correlation of neurological adaption and media-technological change, but instead should also emphasise the cultural, contextual and aesthetic aspects of current transformations. The main task remains to learn to critically and fairly assess the potential for change in order to draw the right conclusions for posthumanist education policy. As Hayles proposes:

> The trouble, as I see it, lies not in hyper attention and hyper reading as examined but rather in the challenges the situation presents for parents and educators to ensure that deep attention and close reading continue to be vibrant components of our reading cultures and interact synergistically with the kind of web and hyper reading in which our young people are increasingly immersed.[382]

But what if it is exactly this rational attitude of compromise that is stopping us from seeing and understanding the true transformational (i.e. critical-creative) potential of the digital, and what if it was exactly this critical-creative potential that was needed to solve the massively complex and entangled problems that our future and the survival of life on this planet holds? One cannot help but think that it might be our inveterate humanist reflexes themselves that have led us into the current situation, and that it could be precisely the concealed,

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[380] *Ibid*.

[381] Bernard Stiegler, "Relational Ecology and the Digital *Pharmakon*", *Culture Machine* 13 (2012): 8; available online at: https://culturemachine.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/464-1026-1-PB.pdf (accessed 8/11/2023); see also Stiegler's later work on the very ambivalent effects of digitalisation on the ideas and practices of work in an increasingly "automated" society in *L'emploi est mort, vive le travail* (Entretien avec Ariel Kyrou) (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2015) and *La société automatique. 1. L'avenir du travail* (Paris: Fayard, 2015).

[382] Hayles, *How We Think, p.* 69.

post*humanist*, potential of an entirely other form of reason, hiding behind the dynamics of new media technology, that we need to do justice to if we want to even begin to tackle the entirely new breed and dimension of future crises may have. Herein lies, in my opinion, the urgency of the posthumanist challenge to rethinking education – namely, in developing a new impartiality outside anthropocentrism, wary of our most strongly and invisibly ingrained humanist reflexes.

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*,[383] 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*...[384]

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.[385]

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[383] 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".

[384] *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).

[385] 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?[386] 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".[387] 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".[388] 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"[389] 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"[390] and "transmedia navigation" awareness, so much so that one might speak of a general shift or "disruption".[391] 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

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

[387] Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. xiii.
[388] *Ibid*., p. xii.
[389] *Ibid*., p. 7.
[390] *Ibid*., p. 88.
[391] Pauline Van Mourik Broekman, , Gary Hall, Ted Byfield, Shaun Hides and Simon Worthington, *Open Education: A Study in Disruption*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

modern educational policy based on 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.[392] 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".[393] 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".[394] 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

[392] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
[393] Michael Bonnett, "Retrieving Nature: Education for a Post-Humanist Age", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37.4 (2003): 707.
[394] *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".[395] 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.[396]

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".[397] 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".[398] While traditional humanism and (postmodern or poststructuralist) antihumanism still depend on a previous knowledge of humanism, what Knight understands as "posthumanism" is a (Baudrillardian)

[395] William V. Spanos, *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xiv.
[396] William V. Spanos, "Posthumanism in the Age of Globalization: Rethinking the End of Edcuation", *Symploke*, 23.1-2 (2015): 37.
[397] 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.
[398] *Ibid*.

"simulacra", or "posteducation"[399] 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".[400] 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".[401] The "posthuman world" envisaged by "emergent corporatist forms of posteducation"[402] 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".[403] 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".[404] 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?"[405] There is no fixed "norm of what it is to be human" and thus pedagogy can and should not offer any "anthropological comfort".[406] 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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[399] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[400] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[401] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[402] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[403] Gert Biesta, "Pedagogy Without Humanism: Foucault and the Subject of Education", *Interchange*, 29.1 (1998): 1-16.
[404] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[405] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[406] *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.[407] In the manifesto, "Toward a Posthumanist Education",[408] 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.[409]

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.[410] Consequently, Snaza and his colleagues call upon "everyone – and everything! – implicated in the 'anthropological machine'[411] of education to begin experimenting with forms of thinking, teaching, learning, and interacting that seek to create distance between us and humanism".[412]

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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[407] 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).

[408] Nathan Snaza, et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 30.2 (2014): 39-55.

[409] *Ibid*., p. 40.

[410] *Ibid*., p. 46.

[411] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[412] Snaza et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", p. 51.

dominance and that did not disavow the human's ecological entanglements?"[413] The greatest challenge, they suggest, apart from escaping the predetermination of "learning outcomes" that close off "wonder in the face of the world"[414] and thus radical change, as well as the compartmentalisation of knowledge into "disciplines", is to acknowledge the agency of knowing in nonhuman subjects.[415] 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)".[416] 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);[417] 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.[418]

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".[419] 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*',[420] 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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[413] Nathan Snaza and John A. Weaver, eds., *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 3.
[414] *Ibid*., p. 7.
[415] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[416] Snaza et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education", pp. 51-52.
[417] See my "Interlude 2 Animism without Humans, or Belief without Belief", *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 81-111.
[418] Marla Morris, "Posthumanist Education and Animal Interiority", in: Snaza and Weaver, eds., *Posthumanism and Educational Research,* p. 43.
[419] Nathan Snaza, "Departments of Language", *Symploke*, 23.1-2 (2015): 105.
[420] 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).[421] 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),[422] 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'".[423] 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".[424] 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.[425] For Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, it is "thinking decolonially" that implies such a *Learning to Unlearn* (2012),[426] while Éamonn Dunne invokes Jacques Rancière's "ignorant school master" (Rancière 1987)[427] and Barbara Johnson's paradoxical "teaching of ignorance"[428] to the same effect, as the hardest pedagogical task of "unteaching something to your students" and to "suspend knowledge".[429] 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,[430] 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-

[421] 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.

[422] 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).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[430] 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![431]

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.[432]

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.[433] 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

[431] Dunne, "Learning to Unlearn", p. 20.

[432] Jacques Rancière, "Un-What?", in: Aidan Seery and Éamonn Dunne, eds., *The Pedagogics of Unlearning* (London: Punctum, 2016), p. 35.

[433] 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.[434]

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.[435] 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.[436] 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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[434] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 32.

[435] 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.

[436] 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".[437] 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".[438] 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".[439] 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,[440] or object-oriented-ontology, as well as new feminist materialism more generally.[441]

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.[442]

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

[437] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 71.
[438] *Ibid*., pp. 89, 90.
[439] *Ibid*., p. 93.
[440] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[441] Cf. Jessica Ringrose, Katie Warfield and Shiva Zarabadi, eds., *Feminist Posthumanisms, New Materialisms and Education* (London: Routledge, 2019).
[442] 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?"[443] 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",[444] and help them "recenter" by making them see "their own primordial essence as these formative years of posthumanity emerge".[445] 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 'anthropologcial 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,[446] 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.[447]

One of the most basic questions CPH asks of (humanist) education is "must an educated being be a human being?"[448] 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'[449] 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

[443] Brad Petitfils, "Researching the Posthuman Paradigm: The 'Subject" as Curricular Lens", in: Snaza and Weaver, *Posthumanism and Educational Research*, p. 33.
[444] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[445] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[446] Cf. Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).
[447] Roberto Marchesini, *Over the Human: Post-Humanism and the Concept of Animal Epiphany*, trans. Sarah de Sanctis (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp. 95-96.
[448] Robert D. Heslep, "Must an Educated Being Be a Human Being?", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 28 (2009): 329-349.
[449] 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.[450] 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…[451]

In other words, "our commonality with all (other) animals is cause for wonder".[452] 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".[453]

If unlearning to be human involves "jamming" the anthropological machine,[454] 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).[455] Current ecological thinking, on the other hand, is strongly advocating 'degrowth' and 'rewilding' both as a "pathway to compassion and coexistence".[456] 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.[457] Even though nothing may or should replace the first-hand experience of "nature, nonhuman animals, and our shared home",[458] and as loaded and problematic as the word and concept of

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[450] 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).

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

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

[453] 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.

[454] 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.

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

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

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

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

'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.[459]

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.[460]

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".[461] 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.[462] 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".[463] 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.[464] Suspending anthropocentrism in this encounter means unlearning "centuries of humanist propaganda", as the first epigraph by Daniel Cottom claims.[465] 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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[459] Nathan Snaza, "Bewildering Education", *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 10.1 (2013): 40.
[460] *Ibid*., p. 41.
[461] Tyson E. Lewis, "The Pedagogical Power of Things: Toward a Post-Intentional Phenomenology of Unlearning", *Cultural Critique*, 98 (2018): 122.
[462] Roberto Marchesini, "Zoomimesis", trans. Jeff Bussolini, *Angelaki*, 21.1 (2016): 175-197.
[463] *Ibid*., pp. 188, 189.
[464] Marchesini, *Over the Human*, p. 100.
[465] 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.

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.][466]
>
> Do we not see, in this original human, that 'human nature' consists only in its technicity, in its denaturalization?[467]
>
> What – if anything – is *technical* about originary technicity?[468]

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, all the statements about posthumanist practices whether positive or negative contribute in some form to

[466] Martin Heidegger, *Leitgedanken zur Entstehung der Metaphysik, der Neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft und der Modernen Technik*, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 76 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2009), p. 358; my translation.
[467] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 148.
[468] Louis Armand, in Armand and Arthur Bradley, eds., *Technicity* (Prague: Litteraia Pragensia, 2006), p. 86.

the emergence and existence of the posthuman and posthumanity.[469]

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'),[470] 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 as the radical openness and alterity of the 'to-come' (or as Derrida put it, in *Specters of Marx*, the *arrivant*).[471]

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'

[469] Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Anaylsis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 36-37.
[470] Mark Hansen, *Embodying* Technesis: *Technology Beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
[471] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994).

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 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.[472]

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

[472] 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).

> 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.[473]

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':

> 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.[474]

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

[473] *Ibid*.

[474] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 34.

> 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.[475]

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'.[476] In a deconstructive reading of Leroi-Gourhan's account of hominisation, Stiegler connects the idea of originary technicity with that of the 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'.[477]

[475] Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3.2/4.1 (2006): 19.
[476] Stiegler *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, p. 16.
[477] *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153; cf. also David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

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).[478]

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.[479]

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*)?[480]

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[481] and Quentin Meillassoux's[482] 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

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[478] 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).

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

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

[481] "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).

[482] "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.

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.[483]

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 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

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

> 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.[484]

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 [is] the relation".[485] Labarrière was Derrida's main interlocutor in an exchange about the notions of alterity and alteration, in 1984, published in *Altérités*.[486] 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…".[487] 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.[488]

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.

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[484] *Ibid*., pp. 155-156.
[485] Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Le Discours de l'altérité* (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 15 ; my translation.
[486] Jacques Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, eds, *Altérités* (Paris: Osiris, 1986); translated in Stefan Herbrechter, ed., *Alterities*, special issue of *Parallax* 33 (2004).
[487] Labarrière, in Herbrechter, *Alterities*, p. 1.
[488] *Ibid*., p. 72.

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.[489]

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.[490]

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

[489] Mark Hansen, "Media Studies", in: Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 352.
[490] J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 14-15.

> 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.[491]

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.[492]

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).[493] 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.*

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[491] Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, pp. 175-177; my bold type.

[492] Tracy Colony, "Epimetheus Bound: Stiegler on Derrida, Life, and the Technological Condition", *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011): 74.

[493] This aspect is further explored in Chapters 7 and 8 of this volume, in the context of 'posthumanism and education'.

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 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.[494]

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.

[494] 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).

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 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),[495] 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')[496] 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.[497] 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

[495] Gregory Ulmer, *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy* (New York: Longman, 2003).
[496] Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).
[497] Jacques Derrida, "The University Without Condition", *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 202-237.

rather the 'inhumanities' (in Lyotard's sense of the 'inhuman').[498] 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.

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

Chapter 8: Postfiguration, or, the Desire of the Posthuman

> It was so easy to imitate these people (…). But at the time I was not interested in the human point of view.[499]

Posthumanism is heavily invested in 'figuration' as a rhetorical and political apparatus. I would argue that figuration might even be seen as one of posthumanism's 'master tropes', especially in its feminist and new materialist varieties. This raises the question of what kind of rhetoric various politics of the posthuman and posthumanism rely on and by what kind of desire they are informed. Is it the desire to overcome the human or humanism, for example? Is it the desire *for* the posthuman that drives a specific form of theorising or is it precisely the analysis of this desire – the desire of the posthuman – that is being explored? And what might a posthuman, if such a 'thing' existed, (still) desire? In this context, figuration – and thus the question of how and what to figure is fundamental. It is fundamental in any politics without any doubt, but maybe even more so – more fundamental than fundamental – in the kind of *speculative* politics that necessarily drives posthumanism due to its basically utopian register.

As a first move, I propose to look at some examples of (the politics of) figuration in action so to speak in posthumanist theorising and thinking. More specifically, I will be referring to some examples in Haraway, Braidotti and Hayles and their respective takes on figuration. In a second move, I propose to (briefly) investigate the temporality of posthuman/posthumanist figuration, in terms of pre- and postfiguration, and its relation to the question of representation. In a final move, I will attempt a critique of figuration, on the basis of some examples taken from what one might call posthumanist and maybe 'postfigurative', animal art.

Posthumanism: Discourse and Figure

While I spent quite a few pages on explaining what I meant, by 'discourse', following and adapting Foucault's notion, in my *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*,[500] I did not really put enough effort into explaining what was meant by 'figure I feel. I assumed that the posthuman was quite self-evidently a *rhetorical* figure while posthumanism was the discourse trying to 'materialise' what started out as if not an empty then at least an entirely underdetermined trope. So maybe I should have asked a little more insistently, what a figure is and does at the time. I apologise in advance to everyone for whom this is all too obvious and belated.

My still admittedly very humanist instincts drive me towards the *OED*, which tells me that the word 'figure' comes from French *figure* and goes back to Latin *figura*, whose stem is *fingere* – to feign, which, in turn is a rendering of Greek *skhema* (scheme). The definitions it gives are:

1. a form of anything as determined by outline (bodily or geometrical) shape; appearance, attitude, state, bodily frame, person;

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[499] Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy" and "A Report to an Academy: Two Fragments", *Kafka – The Complete Stories*, ed. N.N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1983), pp. 257, 262

[500] Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Anaylsis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), first published in German as *Posthumanismus: Eine kritische Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009).

2. a represented form, image, likeness, phantasm, statue, effigy, character, emblem, type;
3. a delineated form, design, pattern, illustration, scheme, table, dance/skating movement;
4. a written character, symbol, amount, number, sum of money, scale;
5. a rhetorical figure, metaphor, image, similitude.

Figuration, also from the French *figuration*, takes its root from Latin *figurare* – to fashion, and designates an:

1. action or process of forming into figure, determination to a certain form, the resulting form or shape, contour, outline;
2. action of representing figuratively, allegorical or figurative representation; figurative style of painting;
3. action of framing figures or shapes in dreams or designs.

With its semantic territory thus staked out I can move towards sketching some political positions within posthumanism.

It seems obvious, as Roberto Marchesini points out, that: "Without doubt, the principal subject of the posthumanist debate concerns the term 'nonhuman alterity'",[501] and, as one might thus add, its "figurations". Ivan Callus and I tried to capture this in an article called "What is a posthumanist reading?" in the following terms:

> [The] posthuman 'other', understood as a threat or promise, is a product of human anxiety and desire (…) that other takes shape in figures and representations which tap into the long history of humanity's excluded (the inhuman, the non-human, the less than human, the superhuman, the animal, the alien, the monster, the stranger, God…) and reflect current 'posthumanising' practices, technologies and fantasies.[502]

Consequently, a posthumanist reading would be called upon to "evaluate examples of posthuman representation in terms of their potential for a critical *post*-humanism: a discourse that strategically and critically 'inhabits' traditional humanism and which may even contrive to find itself prefigured there".[503] This means that, as a political-rhetorical stratagem, "a posthumanist reading may be critical both of representations of the posthuman and of humanism, and instead envisages the human as something or someone that remains to arrive, as a potential that remains to be defined or realised". The strategy is based on the assumption that "through a materialist and deconstructive reading of the cultural politics that underlie the actual representations of the posthuman and the processes of ongoing posthumanisation, [a *critical* posthumanist reading] helps to envisage alternative conceptualisations of both the human and the posthuman, and of their mutually informing relationship".[504] In fact, it is a politics of figuration that is based on a re(con)figuration (of the human), because:

> The 'longing for the human' as the driving force behind humanism's constant self-replication expresses itself through the variation produced by constant self-transformation.[505]

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[501] Roberto Marchesini, "Nonhuman Alterities", *Angelaki* 21.1 (2016): 162.
[502] Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, "What Is a Posthumanist Reading?", *Angelaki* 13.1 (2008): 97.
[503] *Ibid*.
[504] *Ibid*.
[505] *Ibid*., p. 105.

With hindsight I can say that this was also our first attempt at looking at the ways in which various posthumanisms were appropriating figuration as a political, prospective or speculative mechanism to imagine, or, to use Manuela Rossini's term, to "imagineer" alternative,[506] often 'monstrous', figurations of the human as 'promises' of political change.[507]

Most prominently, this is what happens in Haraway's work, beginning with her "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) and its seminal figure of the cyborg designed to challenge and re(con)figure humanist technologies of gender. Haraway expresses herself on the practice of figuration more specifically in "Ecce Homo":

> Figuration is about resetting the stage for possible pasts and futures. Figuration is the mode of theory when the more 'normal' rhetorics of systematic critical analysis seem only to repeat and sustain our entrapment in the stories of the established disorders. Humanity is a modernist figure; and this humanity has a generic face, a universal shape. Humanity's face has been the face of man. Feminist humanity must have another shape, other gestures; but, I believe, we must have feminist figures of humanity. They cannot be man or woman; they cannot be the human as historical narrative has staged that generic universal. Feminist figures cannot, finally, have a name; they cannot be native. Feminist humanity must, somehow, both resist representation, resist literal figuration, and still erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new turns of historical possibility.[508]

Haraway's aim, in short, is figural or reconfigural, when she says: "I want to set aside (…) [m]an as we have come to know and love him in the death-of-the-subject critiques".[509] Instead of the figure of 'man', even in the ongoing process of its deconstruction, she prefers to "construct possible postcolonial, nongeneric, and irredeemably specific figures of critical subjectivity, consciousness, and humanity".[510] And since "radical nominalism is the only route to a nongeneric humanity" for Haraway, understood as a "radical dis-membering and dis-placing of our names and our bodies", the main questions that arise for her are: "how can humanity have a figure outside the narratives of humanism; what language would such a figure speak?"[511]

In "The Promise of Monsters", Haraway emphasises again that nature is a 'topos': "it is figure, construction, artefact, movement, displacement",[512] to which her "cyborg figures"[513] are so to speak, monstrous kin. Figures or figurations are thus, for Haraway "performative images that can be inhabited. Verbal or visual, figurations can be condensed maps of contestable

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[506] Manuela Rossini, "Figurations of Posthumanity in Contemporary Science/Fiction – all too Human(ist)?", in: T. Monterrey, ed., *Literature and Science* (Special volume of *Revista canaria de estudios ingleses* 50 (2005): 21-36.

[507] Cf. Donna Haraway, "The Promise of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others", in: Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 295-336.

[508] Donna Haraway, "Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape", in: Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 86.

[509] *Ibid*., p. 87.

[510] *Ibid*.

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

[512] Haraway, "The Promise of Monsters", p. 296.

[513] *Ibid*., p. 300.

worlds".[514] In what she thus calls her "own mimetic critical method", Haraway claims she is "tracing some of the circulations of Christian realism in the flesh of technoscience".[515]

In an extensive interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, Haraway describes the ontological impact figuration and its politics on her own life and work in the following terms: "I feel like I live with a menagerie of figurations. It's like I inhabit a critical-theoretical zoo and the cyborg just happens to be the most famous member of that zoo, although 'zoo' is not the right word because all my inhabitants are not animals".[516] However, she insists that "[a]ll of my entities – primate, cyborg, genetically patented animal – all of them are 'real' in the ordinary everyday sense of real, but they are also simultaneously figurations involved in a kind of narrative interpellation into ways of living in the world".[517] While she traces her "fundamental sensibility about the literal nature of metaphor and the physical quality of symbolization" to her Catholicism, the point is, however, "that this sensibility – the meaning of this menagerie I live with and in – gives me a menagerie where the literal and the figurative, the factual and the narrative, the scientific and the religious and the literary, are always imploded".[518]

It is in this sense that Haraway's metaphorical, but nevertheless real, figurations may constitute what Manuela Rossini called "imagineering[s] of the future of the human species",[519] while for Lucy Suchman Haraway's cyborg figures are "forms of *materialized figuration*, they bring together assemblages of stuff and meaning into more and less stable arrangements".[520] The strategic dimension of what one might call a "politics of re(con)figuration" thus lies in the "critical consideration of how humans and machines are currently figured in [current practices of technology development] and how they might be figured – and *configured* – differently".[521] This is due to what Suchman calls the "world-making effects of figuration":

> The effects of figuration are political in the sense that the specific discourses, images, and normativities that inform practices of figuration can work either to reinscribe existing social orderings or to challenge them. In the case of the human, the prevailing figuration in Euro-American imaginaries is one of autonomous, rational agency…[522]

Also in her later work, where Haraway moves towards a focus on companion species, and 'critters' more generally, as her guiding tropes, she comes up with the following 'confession' about her figurative practice:

> Figures help me grapple inside the flesh of mortal world-making entanglements that I call contact zones. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the meaning of "chimerical vision" for "figuration" in an eighteenth-century source, and that meaning is still implicit in my sense figure. Figures collect the people through their invitation to inhabit the

[514] Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 11.
[515] Ibid., p. 179.
[516] Donna Haraway, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 135-136.
[517] *Ibid*., p. 140.
[518] *Ibid*., p. 141.
[519] Rossini, "Figurations of Posthumanity in Contemporary Science/Fiction".
[520] Lucy Suchman, *Human-Machine Reconfigurations*: *Plans and Situated Actions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 227.
[521] *Ibid*.
[522] *Ibid*., pp. 227-228.

> corporeal story told in their lineaments. Figures are not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another. For me, figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all the force of lived reality. My body itself is just such a figure, literally. For many years I have written from the belly of powerful figures such as cyborgs, monkeys and apes, oncomice, and, more recently, dogs. In every case, the figures are at the same time creatures of imagined possibility and creatures of fierce and ordinary reality; the dimensions tangle and require response… All of these are figures, and all are mundanely here, on this earth, now, asking who "we" will become when species meet.[523]

Haraway's politics of (re-con)figuration is not an isolated case in the context of posthumanism of the new feminist materialist variety. The same connection between figures as material-semiotic tropes and a feminist politics of difference and change are at work in Rosi Braidotti's writings. Braidotti has been most explicit about the role of figuration for feminist (and other minoritarian) politics, as a "living map, a transformative account of the self".[524] The emphasis on cartography and figuration is a constant feature in Braidotti, from her early accounts of "new 'post-human' technoteratological" phenomena,[525] to her more recent work on "posthuman knowledge" and the posthuman as a "theoretical figuration" and a "navigational tool".[526]

In "Teratologies", Braidotti speaks of "(Deleuzian) enfleshed complexities" that may form a "post-human universe" with its "metamorphic dimension" of "imaginary figurations".[527] More specifically, "the notion of 'figurations' – in contrast to the representational function of 'metaphors' – emerges as crucial to Deleuze's notion of a conceptually charged use of the imagination", according to Braidotti. These figurations of "multiple becomings [following and extending Deleuze's universe] are: the rhizome, the nomad, the bodies-without-organs, the cyborg, the onco-mouse and acoustic masks of all electronic kinds". [528] For Braidotti and her political project of a feminist Deleuzian nomadology, "myths, metaphors, or alternative figurations have merged feminist theory with fictions".[529]

In *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Braidotti declares her aim therefore to be radically "re(con)figurative":

> [My] aim is to provide illustrations for new figurations, for alternative representations and social locations for the kind of hybrid mix we are in the process of becoming. Figurations are not figurative ways of thinking, but rather more materialistic mappings of situated, or embedded and embodied, positions. A cartography is a theoretically-based and politically-informed reading of the present (…). By figuration I mean a politically informed map that outlines our own situated perspective. A figuration renders our image in terms of a decentred and multi-layered vision of the subject as a dynamic

[523] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 4-5.
[524] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 3.
[525] Rosi Braidotti, "Teratologies", in: Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook, eds., *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 157.
[526] Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), p. 2.
[527] Braidotti , "Teratologies", pp. 158, 165, 168ff.
[528] *Ibid*., p. 170.
[529] *Ibid*., p. 171.

> and changing entity. The definition of a person's identity takes place in between nature-technology, male-female, black-white, in the spaces that flow and connect in between. We live in permanent processes of transition, hybridization and nomadization, and these in-between states and stages defy the established modes of theoretical representation. A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self – it is no metaphor.[530]

This quest for alternative figurations, according to Braidotti, "expresses creativity in representing the kind of nomadic subjects we have already become and the social and symbolic locations we inhabit. In a more theoretical vein, the quest for figurations attempts to recombine the propositional contents and the forms of thinking so as to attune them both to nomadic complexities. It thus also challenges the separation of reason from the imagination".[531]

"Where 'figurations' of alternative feminist subjectivity, like the womanist, the lesbian, the cyborg, the inappropriate(d) other, the nomadic feminist, and so on, differ from classical 'metaphors'", Braidotti explains, "is precisely in calling into play a sense of accountability for one's location. They express materially embedded cartographies and as such are self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of 'others'".[532] Instead they are "new figurations of the subject (nomadic, cyborg, Black, etc.) [which] function like conceptual *personae*. As such, they are no metaphor, but rather on the critical level, materially embedded, embodying accounts of one's power-relations. On the creative level they express the rate of change, transformation or affirmative deconstruction of the power one inhabits. 'Figurations' materially embody stages of metamorphosis of a subject position towards all that the phallogocentric system does *not* want it to become".[533]

What Braidotti refers to as Deleuze's "post-metaphysical figurations of the subject" is based on a distinction between the "figural", as opposed to the more conventional aesthetic category of the "figurative", in the sense that "figurations such as rhizomes, becomings, lines of escape, flows, relays and bodies without organs release and express active states of being… break through the conventional schemes of theoretical representation". More specifically, these "alternative figurations of the subject" are based on Deleuze's central figuration, which is "a general becoming-minority, or becoming-nomad, or becoming-molecular",[534] or, ultimately, "becoming-imperceptible".[535]

In chapter 4 of Metamorphoses, "Cyber-teratologies", which anticipates Braidotti's turn towards the posthuman as her main political figuration and clearly shows her affinity to Haraway, she reconfirms her "yearning and quest for new styles or figurations for the non-unitary or nomadic subject".[536] About figurations she further states that:

> they evoke the changes and transformations which are on-going in the "g-local" context of advanced societies (…). Figurations are expressive of cartographic readings of the subject's own embedded and embodied position. As such, they are linked to the social imaginary by a complex web of relations, both of the repressive and the empowering

[530] Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, pp. 2-3.
[531] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[532] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[533] *Ibid*.
[534] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[535] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[536] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

> kind. The idea of figurations therefore provides an answer not only to political, but also to both epistemological and aesthetic questions: how does one invent new structures of thought? Where does conceptual change start from?"[537]

With regard to Haraway, Braidotti further explains that "[t]ranslated into my own language, Haraway's figuration of the cyborg is a sort of feminist becoming-woman that merely by-passes the feminine in order to open up towards a broader and considerably less anthropocentric horizon".[538] Elsewhere, Braidotti also refers to Haraway as a "non-nostalgic posthuman thinker".[539]

In *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, Braidotti again stresses the centrality and multifunctionality of figuration: "Figurations are not metaphors, but rather markers of more concretely situated historical positions. A figuration is the expression of one's specific positioning in both space and time. It marks certain territorial or geopolitical coordinates, but it also points out one's sense of genealogy or historical inscription. Figurations deterritorialize and destabilize the certainties of the subject and allow for a proliferation of situated or 'micro' narratives of self and others".[540] Their political value lies precisely in their undecidability between "literality" and "figurality": "Figurations are forms of literal expression which represent that which the system has declared off-limits".[541] In this sense, "figurations are not figurative ways of thinking, but rather more materialistic mappings of situated, embedded, and embodied positions. They derive from the feminist method of the 'politics of location' and build it into a discursive strategy".[542]

While the posthuman figure already makes its appearance in the early 2000s in Rosi Braidotti's work, it only becomes the main focus in her *The Posthuman* (2013) where she wrestles with the powerful ambiguity of the posthuman trope head-on so to speak. It is a powerful figure which helps evaluate, maybe even retain, 'our' humanness in a postanthropocentric context while at the same time it promotes an affirmative politics of flexible, hybrid and multiple identity. In an increasingly "post-theoretical" climate, Braidotti repeatedly and strategically stresses "the importance of combining critique with creative figurations":[543]

> Critiques of power locations, however, are not enough. They work in tandem with the quest for alternative figurations or *conceptual personae* for these locations, in terms of power as restrictive (*potestas*) but also as empowering or affirmative (*potentia*). For example figurations such as the feminist/the woman/the queer/the cyborg/the diasporic, native nomadic subjects, as well as oncomouse and Dolly the sheep are no mere metaphors, but signposts for specific geopolitical and historical locations…[544]

For Braidotti, the posthuman follows this logic of figuration, with its restrictive power *and* affirmative potential. The posthuman "metaphor", if taken seriously, i.e. "literally", is a "conceptual persona", which stands in for a whole geopolitical and historical "location". It

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[537] *Ibid.*, p. 173.
[538] *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.
[539] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 65.
[540] Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 90.
[541] *Ibid.*, p. 170.
[542] Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, p. 13.
[543] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 163.
[544] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

becomes clear, however, that this posthuman persona or figure/figuration, for Braidotti increasingly becomes indeed the *necessary* rhetorical trope (its catachresis), indispensable for any characterisation of the situation in which the human finds 'itself' today.

Once more, Braidotti defines her use of figuration as "the expression of alternative representations of the subject as a dynamic non-unitary entity; it is the dramatization of processes of becoming".[545] Even though she does not herself use the phrase 'rhetoric of the posthuman' it could be argued that the way she emphasises the transformative potential of the posthuman figure constitutes a 'politics' of the posthuman that is entirely reliant on the ambiguity of the posthuman figure as conceptual persona, as mask, or *prosopopoeia* (of the human). In the posthuman figure, she writes, "critique and creation strike a new deal in actualizing the practice of conceptual personae or figuration as the active pursuit of affirmative alternatives to the dominant vision".[546] The posthuman figure, for Braidotti, allows "us" to be "worthy of our times" in that "we need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently on the way".[547] What Braidotti's argument presupposes is first of all a certain discursivity of the location, or the idea of a "posthuman condition", in which the figuration of the posthuman occurs. The rhetoric of the posthuman, in fact, is everywhere at work in "the changes and transformations currently on the way".

The main difference between Haraway and Braidotti, as well as between Braidotti and Hayles, whose stance I will explore next, is that Braidotti *believes* in the posthuman as a transformative figure. There is an affective investment, even a desire to wrest the posthuman away from its more banal and dangerous usage – similar to Haraway's initial investment in the cyborg in the 1980s – as a 'dispositif' of identitarian (self)transformation:

> Becoming-posthuman (…) is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self. This is in fact a moveable assemblage within a common life-space, which the subject never masters nor possesses, but merely inhabits, crosses, always in a community, a pack, a group or cluster. For posthuman theory, the subject is a transversal entity, fully immersed in and immanent to a network of non-human (animal, vegetable, viral) relations. The *zoe*-centred embodied subject is shot through with relational linkages of the contaminating/viral kind which inter-connect it to a variety of others, starting from the environmental or eco-others and include the technological apparatus.[548]

Consequently, in her *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019), Braidotti – whose theorising is characterised by insistent self-summarising that undoubtedly is designed to have a performative political value in discursively bringing about the posthuman, or one might say, in materialising the figurative – declares her interest in the posthuman thus: "As a theoretical figuration, the posthuman is a navigational tool that enables us to survey the material and the discursive manifestations that are engendered by advanced technological developments (am

[545] *Ibid*.
[546] *Ibid*.
[547] *Ibid*., p. 184.
[548] *Ibid*., p. 193.

I a robot?), climate change (will I survive?), and capitalism (can I afford this?). The posthuman is a work in progress. It is a working hypothesis about the kind of subjects we are becoming".[549] Becoming what you (already) are, inhabiting the figure that announces itself – this is the basic (Nietzschean) dynamic and strategy of transformational politics in general and of feminist 'new' materialist semiotics of the posthuman in particular. However, just like the cyborg, the posthuman has its dangerous or "apocalyptic" side, which is why Braidotti also cautions:

> It is inappropriate to take the posthuman either as an apocalyptic or as an intrinsically subversive category, narrowing our options down to the binary extinction-versus-liberation (of the human). We need to check both emotional reactions and resist with equal lucidity this double fallacy. It is more adequate to approach the posthuman as an emotionally laden but normatively neutral position. It is a grounded and perspectival figuration that illuminates the complexity of on-going processes of subject formation.[550]

The posthuman is both already here, but not clearly defined in its "becoming", clearly affectively apocalyptic while "normatively" neutral (i.e. it could be the source of radical transformation for better or for worse), but also remains still to achieve, to somehow save it from itself. In fact, it is neither here nor there but merely a theoretical projection 'screen' – a figure, in sum – the object of desire, *objet petit a*.

Its dual ontology – material and semiotic, figural and figurative – in fact turns the posthuman into a quasi-transcendental signifier (i.e. a figure or master trope) for posthumanist discourse, as Braidotti stops short of admitting herself:

> [A]lthough the posthuman is empirically grounded, because it is embedded and embodied, it functions less as a substantive entity than as a figuration or conceptual persona. It is a theoretically powered cartographic tool that aims at achieving adequate understanding of the present as both actual and virtual. In other words, cartographies are both the record of what we are ceasing to be – anthropocentric, humanistic – and the seed of what we are in the process of becoming – a multiplicity of posthuman subjects.[551]

Katherine Hayles's attitude towards the posthuman "(con)figuration", on the other hand, is much more ambiguous. As Manuela Rossini explains, there are "two conflicting imagineerings of a posthuman future"[552] in Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman*, where she writes: "If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories (…), my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival".[553]

It is probably fair to say that Hayles is the one who is least invested in the notion of figuration as such of the constitutive trio of feminist posthumanists (Haraway, Braidotti and Hayles) I am

[549] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 2.
[550] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
[551] *Ibid.*, p. 137.
[552] Rossini, "Figurations of Posthumanity in Contemporary Science/Fiction".
[553] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 5.

here considering. Instead, Hayles tends to stress the role of (alternative) narratives for political change in the face of the posthuman:

> As the sense of its mortality grows, humankind looks for its successor and heir, harbouring the secret hope that the heir can somehow be enfolded back into the self. The narratives that count as stories for us speak to this hope, even as they reveal the gendered constructions that carry sexual politics into the realm of the posthuman.[554]

In what is arguably one of the most iconic and most frequently cited passages of emergent posthumanism, Hayles identifies the posthuman first and foremost as a "point of view", so not exactly as a figure: "What is the posthuman? Think of it as a point of view characterized by the following assumptions (…)". Out of these assumptions, the fourth one is the most important for my purposes here, namely the notion that "the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines".[555]

Where Haraway and Braidotti rely on a politics of figuration, Hayles, one might say, is looking at con-figurations, or ways in which elements work together to form a whole, or, in other words, at the 'workings' of a figure. Configuration, as the *OED* explains, is an "arrangement of parts or elements in a particular form or figure; the form, shape, figure, resulting from such arrangement; conformation; outline, contour (of geographical features, etc.); [or an] arrangement of elements; physical composition or constitution (…); [as well as] a representation by a figure, an image". Most relevant, however, given the posthuman context, is the significance of configuration in computing, namely "[t]he way the constituent parts of a computer system are chosen or interconnected in order to suit it for a particular task or use; the units or devices required for this".

Correspondingly, the verb, to configure, the *OED* says, signifies "to fashion according to something else as a model; to conform in figure or fashion (to); to represent by a figure or image, to figure; to fashion by combination and arrangement; to give an astrological configuration to; to put together in a certain form or figure; [or] figurative[ly]: to give a figure to; to shape". In computing, more specifically, it means "to choose or design a configuration for; to combine (a program or device) with other elements to perform a certain task or provide a certain capability". So, it is not that Hayles is not invested in figuration: on the contrary. But given her background, she seems to come to the politics of figuration from a (technical) 'design' angle, when she writes: "'human' and 'posthuman' coexist in shifting configurations that vary with historically specific contexts".[556]

The outcome of the re-configuration that Hayles sees at work in contemporary digitalisation is therefore a fundamental conceptual shift:

> But the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and

[554] N. Katherine Hayles, "The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman", in: Jenny Wolmark, ed., *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 172.
[555] Hayles, *How We became Posthuman*, p. 3.
[556] *Ibid*., p. 6.

> choice. What is lethal is not the posthuman as such but the grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self.[557]

The curious thing is, however, that this re-con-figuration is not 'new', it has always been on the cards, which allows Hayles to claim, in what one might call a rejoinder to Bruno Latour's stand regarding 'our' modernity, that "we have always been posthuman".[558]

More specifically, Hayles's analysis of human reconfiguration is concerned with "the contemporary transformation from 'biomorphism' to 'technomorphism' (reconstituting the body as a technical object under human control)",[559] or as one might say, in bio-reconfiguration as opposed to techno-reconfiguration, or bio/techno-mimesis. Even more concretely, Hayles's aim is to explore "how metaphor and constraint work to reconfigure agency in this posthuman era,[560] to arrive at "a configuration of the human so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines",[561] or, as Hayles formulates it in a short review entitled "Refiguring the Posthuman": "performativities that re-define the human through mimetic imitation of intelligent machines".[562]

As these passages, these examples, central to three key figures in the establishing of posthumanism as a theoretical paradigm, clearly show: posthumanism and its politics is entirely figurative, or reconfigurative, which also means it is entirely 'mimetic'. But what does that mean and is that a problem?

It may be a problem in the sense that figuring or reconfiguring as a political strategy, as the most obvious and most widely used political strategy, does not escape the paradox of representation, or 'representationalism'. Investing in a figure that will always remain profoundly ambiguous (the posthuman, in fact, could turn 'nasty' at any moment, but is nevertheless put forward as our only hope) and in a figure that has been announcing itself from the very beginning even while it has always already been here – is ultimately nothing but an eschatological device. In this, it remains fundamentally modern. In fact, it is a return of the modern. All these figurations and reconfigurations are governed by a dialectic of *pre*figuration and *dis*figuration, or defacement, to use Paul de man's term[563] as detractors of an underlying process one might refer to as 'posthumanisation'.

To prefigure, in this context, means: "to be an early indication or version of, foreshadow, represent beforehand by a figure or type" and has a strong theological connotation, according to the *OED*. It also signifies "to shape or form at the front; and to imagine beforehand". In this sense, a prefiguration, apart from designating "the action of prefiguring or foreshadowing a person or thing, representation beforehand by a figure or type", also refers to "a person, thing or event which prefigures or foreshadows another; a prototype, a precursor". The figure thus always announces itself as a prefiguration. In replacing, in succeeding, it evokes and repeats

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[557] *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.
[558] *Ibid.*, p. 291.
[559] N. Katherine Hayles, "The Seductions of Cyberspace", in: David Trend, ed., *Reading Digital Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 305.
[560] N. Katherine Hayles, "Desiring Agency: Limiting Metaphors and Enabling Constraints in Dawkins and Deleuze/Guattari", *SubStance* 94/95 (2001): 146.
[561] *Ibid.*, p. 146.
[562] N. Katherine Hayles, "Refiguring the Posthuman", *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.3 (2004): 316.
[563] Cf. Paul de Man, "Autobiography as de-facement", in: *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67–82.

its predecessor. It literally re-con-figures, imitates, repeats, is compelled to repeat with all of the eventualities, the best or the worst, repetition might entail. This is the crux of the mimetic compulsion, the compulsion to repeat – in a very psychoanalytic and metaphysical sense.

Hans Blumenberg, in *Präfiguration: Arbeit am politischen Mythos* (2014), analyses the strategy of prefiguration in terms of a political programme, both as a way of reducing complexity and thus as an anthropological necessity. It is a highly risky and dangerous "scheme of interpretation" [*Deutungsschema*], as a means to bestow legitimation:

> At first, prefiguration is merely a means to assist with decision-taking – what has already been done once does not sanction, assuming the conditions remain the same, any new deliberation process, disturbance or puzzlement. It is already established as a paradigm.[564]

This means that "prefiguration invests a decision with legitimacy that might be of utmost contingency and which might thus be entirely unfounded".[565] Prefiguration thus represents a kind of analogy or 'metaphor' on which actions are based:

> If the meaningful prerequisite, the "pregnate" [*Prägnat*] is not given, but fashioned, so that should become true what was written (…), then that which is being repeated merely becomes a mythical programme through its repetition, through this contingent act of selection whose contingency has to be repressed.[566]

The posthumanst politics of re-con-figuration, that has become apparent in looking at Haraway's, Braidotti's and Hayles's strategic use of the posthuman figure, even though it self-identifies as radically transformative in the face of an apocalyptic future, can thus be said to function according to the same "mythical" principles that Blumenberg describes in his critique of prefiguration. In fact, it all has to do with the blindness at the centre of mimesis, which is of course anything but 'new'.

Disfiguration, or, What Does Mimesis Hide?

Rest assured, there are no posthumans. There are humans, nonhumans but there are no posthumans, just as there are no transhumans. The latter are 'empty' figures, the objects of 'our' desires or anxieties. They are thus 'defaced' figures, prosopopoeiae, masks or indeed disfigurations. And both the politics of posthumansim and transhumanism are vying about giving their figures a face, a shape. In doing so, they are hoping to re-con-figure, or, in the case of transhumanism, to trans-figure, the human (and thus, by implication, the nonhuman, against whom the human is traditionally, humanistically, defined). This is transparent, maybe too transparent. In a time where figuration is ubiquitous and saturated in ambient speculation, maybe it would be preferable to resist figuration, if that were possible, or at least to defer it, to show its *différance* in that the figure, the posthuman, always differs from 'itself' while it is said to be always already here. Somehow present and always deferred – a classic Derridean 'trace'. This is what one might say is at stake in the posthuman politics of mimesis.

[564] Hans Blumenberg, *Präfiguration: Arbeit am politischen Mythos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2014), p. 9.
[565] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[566] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Paul de Man was most trenchant on the figure of prosopopeia – for him the trope of autobiography, and what else is posthumanism if not the human worrying about its autobiography, is that of a mask:[567] "Prosopopeia [*prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)] is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name is made as intelligible and memorable as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, figure, figuration and disfiguration", as de Man writes.[568] To disfigure, the *OED* says, is "to mar the figure or appearance of, destroy the beauty of; to deform, deface; to mar or destroy the beauty or natural form of (something immaterial); to misrepresent injuriously; to alter the figure or appearance of; to disguise; to lose its figure, become misshapen". It is the source of great suffering and loss, loss of identity and shame. And it is related to a fear of being 'mimed' by an other, or a kind of 'mimetophobia', of being disfigured by an other. In the context of a radical politics of re-con-figuration this can flip over into its opposite, namely a 'mimetophilia', or the desire to become (like) an other. These form the two sides of any politics of mimesis and the politics of posthuman in particular.

The fundamental and necessary ambiguity of mimesis (fear and desire of (being like) the other) has been evident in the discussion of the mimetic "ever since Plato", as Derrida writes in a fascinating long footnote to "The Double Session", that compares the "logic of mimesis", as that which both promises and hinders the revelation of truth, with a "machine". According to Derrida this logic, or politics, is structured like:

> a schema (two propositions and six possible consequences) = a logical machine): 1. Mimesis produces a thing's double (faithful copy); consequences: a. double/imitator is nothing worth in itself; b. imitator's value comes from its model – imitation good if model good, bad if model bad; c. mimesis is nothing, has no intrinsic value, it is purely negative and therefore evil. 2. Mimesis and imitator are something since likeness exists, therefore nonbeing somehow "exists", hence: a. in adding to the model the imitator becomes a supplement to the model; b. in adding to an existing model the imitator cannot be absolutely the same thing, and is therefore never absolutely true; as a supplement that can take the model's place but never be its equal, the imitator is in essence inferior even if it manages to take the place of the model.[569]

To address, or at least to critique, if not deconstruct this logic, "representation and mimesis must be rethought: not in terms of adequation or imitation, but in terms of translation and displacement", or one might say, in miming "otherness".[570] "From an 'anthropological' point of view", as Gebauer and Wulf explain in their classic study, "mimesis is a central 'ability' of humans (exceptionalism) to 'appropriate' the world/to 'internalise' an exterior 'other', to 'identify with' an other and thus to 'leave' a purely human perspective behind".[571] This mimetic ability is part of the *conditio humana* and ultimately arises out of human neoteny. It is central to the learning of social action, according to Wulf.[572] It proceeds by "performative

[567] See also Chapter 4 in this volume on posthumanism and autobiography.
[568] De Man, "Autobiography as de-facement", p. 76.
[569] Jacques Derrida, "The Double Session [1970]", in : *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 186-187, footnote 14.
[570] Nico van der Sijde, "Jacques Derrida and the 'Mime' of Otherness", in: Bernhard F. Scholz, ed., *Mimesis: Studien zur literarischen Repräsentation* (Tübingen: Francke, 1998), pp. 193ff.
[571] Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Kultur – Kunst – Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1998), p. 11.
[572] Christoph Wulf, "Mimetisches Lernen als kulturelles Lernen", *Tierstudien* 11 (2017): 17.

staging and acting", learning from examples, by making oneself similar to, internalising or embodying pre-existing social knowledge or norms (without necessarily purely reproducing them). It is mainly practical or "aisthetic", as can be seen in the functioning of mirror neurons which are designed to produce what Wulf calls a "mimetic *Annähnlichung*" [making (oneself) similar] to the world and other humans (and, arguably, even if Wulf does not include this, to nonhumans) (Wulf, 2017: 20).[573] However, he does admit that cultural learning as a predominantly embodied mimetic process also exists ("albeit with great differences") in many other animals[574] – a comment to which I shall return below.

This fundamentally "creative" process (I would call it 'figuration', for obvious reasons, and relate it to everything that was said about the figurative politics of the posthuman above) is not without its own power and violence, however. This is the famous or infamous "ideological function" of mimesis where mimesis becomes pure "mimicry" – or an adaptation to something that is given and remains unquestioned – which again explains the ambiguity of any politics of mimesis: imitation as "inspirational" or creatively liberating, or as "oppressive" and stiflingly repetitive. In the case of post- or transhumanist politics of figuration, which are by necessity speculative, prefigurative, one might speak of "anticipatory mimesis"[575] – a combination of mimesis and utopian reason – with all the logical contortions this inevitably entails: how does one 'imitate' the future? How does one anticipate what, strictly speaking, remains to-come (the Derridean "*à-venir"*), without pre-empting it and stopping it from happening?

From Anthropomimesis to Zoomimesis

From where does the future arrive, so that we might be able to at least 'orient' our politics of figuration? Maybe we have been looking for the future in the entirely wrong place and direction. If the posthuman is a figure of radical alterity it also escapes temporality – cf. Katherine Hayles's "we have always been posthuman". In fact, the nonhuman or posthuman other is always somehow 'before' humanity, in both senses of 'before': spatially and temporally, as a (moral and political) task and a repressed and haunting *revenant*.[576] And so is mimesis – a task to find better ways of dealing with the other, and a haunting, a haunting insistence to remember past mimetic violence and injustice. This is where what one might call 'anthropomimesis' meets 'zoomimesis', and where they become utterly entangled.

It is also where Roberto Marchesini's approach and his "theory of zootropia" becomes relevant. As Boria Sax points out: "Marchesini's theory holds that animals embody the alterity, with respect to which human beings define themselves, on both collective and individual levels".[577] Or, as Marchesini puts it himself: "zoopoanthropology starts from the presupposition that relationships with animals have had a fundamental role in the process of hominization and cultural development".[578] Central concepts of a "zooanthropological"

[573] *Ibid*., p. 20.
[574] *Ibid*., p. 21.
[575] following Thomas Metscher, *Mimesis* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004), p. 15.
[576] This is the starting point form my 'palaeoanthropological' investigations in *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).
[577] Boria Sax, "Zootropia, Kinship, and Alterity in the Work of Roberto Marchesini", *Angelaki* 21.1 (2016): 7.
[578] Qtd. in Jeffrey Bussolini, "The Philosophical Ethology of Roberto Marchesini", *Angelaki* 21.1 (2016): 27.

analysis are therefore "theriomorphism", understood as "the flow of ideas and influences from animals to humans", and "zoomimesis", or "how humans observe and imitate nonhuman animals in ways that are formative for human identity and culture", and which entails animals as "knowledge-partners", or animals as "epiphanies" in the process of "zoopoiesis".[579]

As opposed to the idea of 'originary technology', which is often seen as one of the founding topoi of posthumanism and taken as the motivation for the general (if not uncritical) technophilia it stands for,[580] Marchesini stresses 'our' "originary animality", or indeed "zoomimesis as pre-originary 'technology': before humans developed their technology, animals were their only source of knowledge, because observing the behaviour of other species meant having at one's disposal a real knowledge base with which to understand the world and consequently to modify the probability of survival".[581]

The originary animal, the animal 'before' us and who, according to Derrida, we both follow and are (*L'animal que donc je suis*)[582] is what played into our hands and to whom we owe who and what we have become, thanks to our capacity or tendency "to enter into accord with external reality, [which] seems to be a foundational characteristic of human beings that incorporates alterity into identity, *refiguring* [my emphasis] it through a representation centred on one's own body".[583] Among many other things this recalls Agamben's (or Rilke's, or Pico della Mirandola's…) "man has no specific identity other than the *ability* to recognize himself (…) *man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human*".[584]

The (animal) encounter, the encounter with animals, on the other hand, according to Marchesini's zoomimetic scheme:

> adds two new mediating entities: (a) the introjection of the other as new structural dimension of internal predicates; (b) the excentric position of the other and its transmutation from simple phenomenon to epiphany that is the annunciation of a possible dimension, [which means that] the subject in *mimesis* is swept away by alterity that no longer presents itself as phenomenon – or as being-event that even if relevant remains external to the subject – but as epiphany, that is as apparition of the subject itself irremediably changed in the hybridization with alterity. In *mimesis* the subject discovers a new existential dimension, capable of undergoing an irreversible conversion in itself.[585]

There is a curious anthropocentrism-in-reverse, maybe even a kind of 'Socratic' move, that is at work in Marchesini, when he writes that:

> The human being must counterfeit itself in order to feel its humanity: it has to modify its skin, change some of its anatomic details, gain a kinaesthetic sense that does not belong to it, transfiguring survival strategies and altering the way it uses its voice.

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[579] Bussolini, "The Philosophical Ethology of Roberto Marchesini", pp. 28-29.
[580] See chapter 9 in this volume on a critique of the notion of 'originary techniology'.
[581] Marchesini, "Nonhuman Alterities",p. 120.
[582] Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That I Therefore Am (More to Follow)", trans. D. Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002): 369-418.
[583] Roberto Marchesini, "Zoomimesis", *Angelaki* 21.1 (2016): 185.
[584] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. K. Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 26.
[585] Marchesini, "Zoomimesis", p. 188.

> Anthropopoiesis, as a kind of metamorphosis that takes the human being outside its species-specific shell, is an act of denial of our biological condition rather than an attempt at compensation… Being human means dreaming to be elsewhere, distancing ourselves from our nature.[586]

Zoomimesis, ironically, thus appears to be what makes us human. We need the "animal epiphany" as an originary appropriation of our humanity, since an "animal epiphany is a recursive process of assimilation of difference: (a) seeing oneself in the non-human animal through a metapredication of commonality that brackets the predicates of difference; (b) feeling excited for the alienating effects of heteromorphic projection or heteronomic possession; (c) theriomorphic somatization or psychedeization".[587]

The whole process starts through a fundamentally empathic process based on the recognition of shared animality: "Animal-being implies some very strong sharing meta-predicates, such as the experience of suffering, moving in search for something, interpreting the here-and-now, self-expression, vulnerability to the world, reproduction – just to mention some".[588] Contrary to what is often argued by proponents of animal studies, the anthropomorphism that is at work in (human) zoomimesis should be seen as a valuable ally rather than be rejected as a misrepresentation, as Marchesini explains:

> the identification with animal otherness is not attributable to anthropomorphic projection – as is usually maintained – but rather to an effective meta-predicative sharing that the human being feels immediately, as indeed do other animals (although, perhaps, our species' great capacity for empathy strengthens this identification)… Animal-being means grounding our existence on openness, in the awareness of heterotrophy that makes us inevitably dependent on external biological mechanisms (…) recognizing each other is consubstantial to animal-being.[589]

Marchesini, one could thus say, is also engaged in a kind of politics of figuration based on mimesis. It is also based on pre- and re-configuration: the human is both prefigured and (re)configured in an "animal encounter" that leads to an "epiphany" or a recognition of who "we" are – namely "hybrids":

> If epiphany is the act of imagining [a] new shape, zoomimesis is the act of taking on a new hybrid form: that is, the representation of the epiphany in our own body. Therefore, mimesis is not the duplication or the passive translation of nonhuman predicates into the liquefied flesh of man, or the transformation of the Epimethean predicate into a tool – copying nature through *techne*. Rather, it is an initiatory act requiring a long process of assimilation, but mostly adaptation (…). The 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.[590]

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[586] Roberto Marchesini, *Over the Human: Post-humanism and the Concept of Animal Epiphany* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), p. 93.
[587] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[588] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[589] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[590] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

In sum, Marchesini's ethico-political programme, however, finds its formula in a movement from an "other-than-myself" to an "other-with-myself", or a process of "initiation through (animal) epiphany)".[591] As a road map for a 'successful' instance of zoomimesis, one might say, the following components are required: there needs to be (a) an animal encounter; (b) a dialogue; (c) a partnership; (d) a hybridization as outcome.[592]

After Mimesis: Postfiguration?

Needless to say that I have a lot of sympathy for these politics of figuration I have tried to outline (based on anthropo-, techno- or zoomimesis, in Haraway, Braidotti, Hayles and MArchesini). Regardless of what they claim, they are all designed for some kind of 'advocacy' – all are laying claim to radical politics and transformation. How could they not be? They all rely on a move that presupposes an alterity which calls for a response. So that the response is not confounded with a simple appropriation – i.e so that it is 'ethical' – justice needs to be rendered to the other in the form of 'primacy'. The other was there 'before' me and is peconditional to the possibility of any 'me'. However, the other also 'affects' me, the other 'becomes' me as I become (the) other – a hybridisation that in theory should work both ways, but is usually the preserve of the (modern, in Latour's sense) successor who, after a successful hybridisation process (namely the appropriation of the prefiguration that has allowed me to become what I (now) am), triggers a purification process regarding the other, who is thereby put back in its place. After any re-con-figuration one is thus presented with that which was originally called for its figuration and whose calling was heard in figuring, while the thus newly (re)configured other-than-or-with-myself who is the product of my zoo-techno-hetero-auto-mimetic desire, is put back in its place. You can easily see how close, despite all the echoes of a postmodern ethics of alterity, this (still) is to a standard Hegelian dialectic. The pre-re-con-dis-figured nonhuman alterities in this complex mimetic relaying process are entirely exchangeable, whether they are nonhuman animals, as in Marchesini, or technologies, as for example in Bernard Stiegler or Mark Hansen's notion of *technesis* based on "the *presocial* role of technology as agent of material, complexification", and for whom "technology embodies the very contact between humankind and the world on which societal forms are themselves constructed. It thus conditions the movement of desire itself".[593] Or indeed, whether it is any form of 'originary' hybridity or entanglement of nature-cultures, monsters or cyborgs – they are all symptoms of our posthumanist desire, figurations of more or less speculative politics.

So what would be the alternative? I take the beginning of an answer to this from Catherine Malabou's comment on Derrida's "The Ends of Man" (1982), when she wonders whether "we still have something to say about repetition and the human, about repeating the human?",[594] for it is repetition that we really deal with when we investigate mimesis and figuration. As Malabou continues:

[591] *Ibid*., p. 105.
[592] Robert Marchesini, "The Teriosphere", *Angelaki* 21.1 (2016): 123.
[593] Mark Hansen, *Embodying* Technesis: *Technology Beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 234-235.
[594] Catherine Malabou, "From the Overman to the Posthuman : How Many Ends?", in: Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, eds., *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 67.

> every critique of the concept of the human seems to be oriented toward a better approach to the essence of humanity (…). Does this mean that all discourses on the human, albeit metaphysical or deconstructionist, political or juridical, anthropological or psychoanalytic, would share the same impossibility: that of overcoming the thinking of man as a moving limit – this old limit, which Aristotle described as the medium between God and the animal? This moving or flickering in-between point, always tending to its end? (...) When we claim that the human is now behind us, that we are entering the posthuman age, that we are opening the 'interspecies dialogue', or that we cannot believe in cosmopolitanism for want of a universal concept of humanity, are we doing something other than trying to reconstitute, purify, re-elaborate a new essence of man?[595]

Why, in short, this continued, insistent desire of and for figuration, this mimetic desire, even in the politics of the most radical imagineerings of posthumanist re-con-figurations? Malabou suggests that: "We humans are seeking revenge from being human. From being humans", and therefore asks: "will we ever be able to be redeemed from the spirit of revenge and thus from our humanity?"[596] The urgency of the question she finds in the current context of "biomimicry", or "the use and imitation of natural processes in technology (…) as if nature repeated herself through techné":

> This repetition of the "natural" is just another example of the fact that we are not only asking the question of repetition; repetition has become the question, what questions us (…) are we able to deal with this new urgency of repetition without seeking revenge toward it? Are we able to repeat without seeking revenge? Without trying to crucify time and transiency, without trying to invent new forms of cruelty? In the trembling opening of this question appears the possibility of sculpting the nonhuman, or the nonhumanist human.[597]

In my view, Malabou is here speaking in a way about 'postfiguration', of resisting re-con-figuration, or of a critique of plasticity, the very concept that made Malabou's name, as she readily admits: "All I have tried to describe, thanks to the concept of plasticity, every act of shaping, reshaping, repairing, remodelling, might be developed here to illustrate the *return of repetition*".[598] Repetition, as Malabou explained, increasingly is no longer initiated or controlled by 'us' (i.e. humans, if it ever was). So, once the sea has, again, and maybe this time for the very last time (as every repetition promises to be), erased the figure of 'man', will we be able to resist both the desire for and the desire of the posthuman – whatever shape, form or figuration he-she-it should take – namely, of becoming-other, of becoming entirely "imperceptible" (Braidotti), or "indistinct" (Calarco),[599] and simply indifferent? Or as Malabou projects, without any prefiguration, however, "if we can one day get free from the spirit of revenge, we will become great human beings"[600] – this much of humanism's innermost desire

[595] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[596] *Ibid.*, p. 69.
[597] *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
[598] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[599] Cf. Matthew Calarco, *Beyond the Anthropological Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[600] Malabou, "From the Overman to the Posthuman", p. 71.

may be (and maybe really *should* remain) unsurpassable even though it *can* and *should* never be trusted.

Examples

Artists such as Orlan, Daniel Lee, and Matthew Barney [or Stelarc, Patricia Piccinini, Karin Andersen, photographers like Tim Flach [and, one might add, much earlier: Charles Le Brun and many others] bring to light the apparent paradox of making the human by means of zoomimesis, showing us morphopoietic outcomes that make explicit vulnerability, transitivity, non-equilibrium, opening, being 'work in progress', and the lack of a prefixed ontological direction, which is to say the most authentic predicates of the human condition.[601]

In this final section I am looking at some examples of how *figurative* art is responding to a posthumanist politics of figuration, how they explore and extend the boundaries anthropo-, techno- and zoomimesis under posthuman or at least posthumanist conditions.

A. *Camilla Adami* – Primati/*Jacques Derrida* – Tête-à-tête

…the animal comes before and after.[602]

[Image 1: Primates on selected book covers © Sara Herbrechter]

[601] Marchesini, "Zoomimesis", p. 193.
[602] Laurent Milesi, "'Saint-Je' Derrida", *Oxford Literary Review* 29 (2007; Derridanimals): 68.

As Ginette Michaud comments, Derrida "confronts or faces head-on [*il affronte (…) en pleine figure, ou en personne*] the very subject of mimesis when he finds himself in Camilla Adami's atelier, alone, face-to-face with these great apes of or in painting [*de peinture ou en peinture*]":[603]

> In Camilla Adami's (C.A.) atelier, I thought I was seeing her, looking at me looking at these figures or faces who wouldn't stop looking at me, especially the figures/faces of these huge apes to whom I seemed to expose myself, me, naked, for the first time (…). These exposed or exhibited bodies were looking at me/concerned me [*me regardaient*] (…). Mostly but not exclusively, they are figures, in the sense of 'faces', and therefore portraits, but these figures/faces aren't figural. They're neither fictions, nor tropes, nor metaphors, nor metonymies. Rarely has painting better escaped [*se soustraire à*] rhetoric. Speech inaudible, unheard-of sobriety. Absolute economy of painting. These are literally literal figures, unique, without any possible substitution, wordless or almost [*sans phrase ou presque*]: this woman, that man, this ape, at this moment, at this age.[604]

In his "head-to-head" encounter Derrida describes an experience of time "without common measure": "une heure incalculable et sans synchronie possible avec aucune autre (an incalculable hour, in no possible synchrony with any other)". *Before* these portraits of (fellow) primates by Adami Derrida finds time to be upset or disturbed by apes: "Singes s'ingéniant à déranger le temps, ils le détraquent, dans la même exposition, ils ne laissent pas l'histoire en paix de votre côté, ni du nôtre, ni au-dedans d'aucun autre tableau. (Apes striving to disturb time, they derail it, in this same exhibition/exposure, they do not leave history in peace on your side, neither ours, nor in any other painting/chart)".[605] The encounter with these giant portraits of primates evokes, for Derrida, the "au-delà de l'humain (…) l'humain emporté, transi, par tout autre Chose, en soi hors de soi, tellement plus grand que moi (a beyond the human ... the human carried away, numbed, by an entirely other Thing, in itself out of oneself, so much bigger than me)".[606] This "beyond" the human is not a kind of transcendence, however, it is more akin to what I see in the ambiguity of the *before*. The encounter with the primate-human-other – timeless in Adami's portraits as well as in terms of evolutionary ancestrality – produces an uncanniness that explodes anthropocentrism even though (or maybe because) it necessarily passes through anthropomorphism (Derrida is thrown back to his sense of "humanness" by the portraits but this sense no longer seems to fit – "en soi hors de soi, tellement plus grand que moi"). Further on, Derrida also speaks of a sense of exposure as well as an "abyssal spirituality" which goes beyond the usual form of interpellation in the sense of "ça me regarde (this looks at me/this concerns me)". In fact, Derrida discovers an "indifférence déchirante, un être-ailleurs, une impassibilité, un silence qui littéralement me renvoie: rejet, exclusion, expulsion, naissance aussi, non pas l'appel 'viens' mais l'ordre 'va' (a heartrending indifference, a being-elsewhere, an impassibility, a silence that literally sends me back/dismisses me: rejection, exclusion, expulsion, birth also, not the call 'come' but the order 'go')".[607] A proximity which is at the same time a rejection due to the unbridgeable gap of fundamental "asynchronicity":

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[603] Ginette Michaud, "Che cos'è la pittura? Trois manières de toucher la Chose: Nancy, Cixous, Derrida", *Etudes françaises* 42.2 (2006): 127.
[604] Jacques Derrida, "Tête-à-tête", in: *Camilla Adami*, (Milan: Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, 2001), p. 6.
[605] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[606] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[607] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

> ‘Va, je te laisse, je te renvoie à toi-même, je te laisse, je te laisse seul(e) avec toi, comme moi, en somme, dans les lointains d’un lieu infiniment inaccessible. Au fond, ce qui te regarde ne te regarde pas, et même, patience, *ça* ne t’aura jamais regardé, n’aura jamais eu un regard pour toi, vraiment, proprement pour toi (…). C’est à partir; oui, à *partir* de là, en partant de là, en t’en allant, que tu as encore quelque chance de voir et de savoir comment accéder à ce qui ne te regarde pas…’.[608]
>
> (‘Go, I leave you, I send you back to yourself, I leave you, I leave you alone with yourself, like me, in fact, in the distance of an infinitely inaccessible place. Basically, what looks at you does not look at you/does not concern you, and even, patience, it will never have looked at you, will never have had a look for you/will never have cared about you, really, properly for/about you (...). It is to leave; yes, from here, starting/leaving from here, leaving from here, in leaving that you still have some chance to see and know how to access what does not look at you/concern you ...’.)

The phrase “ça me regarde” can mean both “it/this looks at me” and “it/this concerns me”. Derrida plays on this point to express the intimacy *and* anonymity that the encounter with primates produces *at the same time*. In contrast with the maybe expected sense of evolutionary ancestrality (of human and ape), however, Derrida insists on the paradoxical contemporaneity (of their “a-synchronicity”):

> Ces singes, par exemple, n’annoncent rien, sauf peut-être le mauvais rôle qu’on leur a fait jouer dans le grand discours, humain trop humain, sur la mimesis, ils ne rappellent, malgré toutes vos tentations, ils ne singent aucun être humain. Fin de l’anthropocentrisme. Ils n’ont même aucun lien de parenté entre eux. Plus de filiation. Aucune espèce, aucun cas d’espèce. Ce ne sont pas nos ancêtres. Ça ne va ni ne vient entre nous sur quelque échelle phylogénétique. Ce sont nos contemporains même si toute synchronie reste impensable – avec eux comme avec tout autre, au fait.[609]
>
> (These apes, for example, announce nothing, except perhaps the bad part that we made them play in the great discourse, human, all too human, on mimesis, they do not recall, despite all your attempts, they do not ape any human being. End of anthropocentrism. They are not even related to each other. No filiation. No species, no kind. They are not our ancestors. It does not come or go between us on any phylogenetic scale. They are our contemporaries even if all synchrony remains unthinkable – with them, as with any other, by the way.)

“Avant/devant l’humanité” – *before* humanity – this might be the sentiment that Derrida captures here and which, in his case, leads to a rejection of what he calls the “bêtise (stupidity; “bête” = animal)” of speaking of “the animal” (or “the human”, for that matter) instead of respecting the irreducible plurality of “les vivants (the living)”:

> Chaque ‘singe’ vous regarde, unique, tout seul, mortel, depuis sa place singulière, chacun d’eux vous prend à part, il ne veut pas de son nom, il ne singe rien, il vous signifie, dans son idiome absolu, il vous signifie indéniablement, vous apostrophant sans se taire mais sans rien dire: n’essayez pas de m’assimiler, je suis une autre, je reste une tout autre origine du monde, car contrairement à ce que dit, parmi vous les hommes, tel grand penseur du siècle, j’ai, moi, un monde, je forme et me figure un monde, je suis

[608] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[609] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

aussi *weltbildend*, et ce monde est 'riche', je ne suis ni *weltlos*, ni même *weltarm*, je suis, point, j'existe, avant tout et après tout, ni libre ni captive, ou l'un et l'autre, comme vous que je vois venir, ne tenez donc pas de me rendre, par compassion, ce que vous appelez la subjectivité d'un sujet, la dignité d'une personne humaine. Je ne suis ni une bête ni personne, je suis quelqu'un mais personne: ni une personne, ni un sujet ni le sujet d'un portrait.[610]

(Each 'ape' looks at you/concerns you, unique, all alone, mortal, from its singular place, each of them takes you to one side, it does not want its name, it does not ape anything, it signifies to you, in its absolute idiom, it undeniably signifies to you, addressing itself to you not in silence but without saying anything: do not try to assimilate me, I am another, I remain an entirely different origin of the world, because contrary to what one of your great thinkers of the past century said, I do have a world, I form and figure myself a world, I am also *weltbildend*, and this world is 'rich', I am neither *weltlos*, nor even *weltarm*, I am, full stop, I exist, before all and after all, neither free nor captive, or both, like you whom I see coming, so do not insist, out of compassion, to return to me what you call the subjectivity of a subject, the dignity of a human person. I am neither a beast nor a person/nobody, I am someone but nobody: neither a person, nor a subject nor the subject of a portrait.)

Derrida here refers to Heidegger's (in)famous claim that only humans are "world-forming", while animals are "poor in world" and stones are "worldless" – a starting point for Derrida's critique in "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", and *The Beast and the Sovereign.*[611] Instead, Derrida here evokes an altogether other origin of the world – there is hardly any better way to name the abyssal structure of the kind of ancestrality that goes beyond or rather comes *before* any teleological notion of evolution.

Derrida, whom his friend Hélène Cixous once described as a "young Jewish saint (*jeune saint juif*)",[612] and the ape [*singe*] who regards and concerns him (and us):

Votre parole ne m'aura pas manqué, je ne l'ai pas mais je vous la donne, et je vous touche, et ceci, croyez-moi, qui vous parle en langues, ce n'est pas une de ces *figures* (l'absent, le mort, le revenant, la chose personnifiée, l'homme ou l'"animal"), le totem qu'un marionnettiste ferait déclamer dans ce que vous, les hommes, vous les rhéteurs, appelleriez bêtement une prosopopée.[613]

(Your word/speech will not have failed me, I do not have it but I give it to you, and I touch you, and this, believe me, who speaks to you in languages, it is not one of these *figures* (absent, dead, ghost, personified thing, human or the 'animal'), the totem that a puppeteer would declaim in what you, humans, you rhetoricians, stupidly call a prosopopoeia.)

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[610] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

[611] Derrida, "The Animal that Therefore I Am, More to Follow" (2002), *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2 vols, trans. Geoff Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009 and 2011); see also Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[612] Hélène Cixous, *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en jeune saint juif* (Paris: Galilée, 2001) ; cf. also Milesi, "'Saint-Je' Derrida" (2007).

[613] Derrida, "Tête-à-tête", p. 15.

Derrida denounces any form of appropriation at work in mimetic representation. In this animal encounter (with the human) there are no predecessors or descendants. For Derrida, these painted primates just don not belong (to anyone).[614] As Michaud comments these primates in their non-mimetic, or maybe post-mimetic representation neither become "some one" nor "some thing", are neither subjectified nor objectified, strictly speaking, but "expose 'painting itself'".[615] There is no "aping" mimeticism [*singerie*], no realism at work here, no imitation, the ape does not ape man, does not "signify" [*signifier/singifier*]: "for the event that is at work in this painting has an entirely other transfiguration in view (…) nothing less than a transfiguration in which something becomes someone or someone becomes something".[616]

It cannot be underestimated what "impact such a philosophical repositioning has on the conception of mimesis, reflection and being within deconstruction as a critique of onto(theo)logical specularity", Laurent Milesi points out:[617]

> Derrida's *tête-à-tête* with the primates invitingly calls for a parallel with Levinas's face to face with the other who can only be a human, and brings out the dissymetry between the animal as object seen by man, and not as subject endowed with a gaze…, and the human gaze, as well as the issue of anthropo-morphic or -centric concern – both being understood in the French *ca me regarde*…[618]

As Milesi concludes: "The scene of the philosopher [or any human viewer in fact] looking at the primates is reversed into that of his seeing himself being seen, as the philosophical mirror stage of mimesis, reflection, and therefore signification, is broken".[619]

The implications of this rupture are in fact what inform posthumanist animal studies, as spelt out by Kelly Oliver: "Humans are not the ascent or descent of apes or other animal beings in the sense of a hierarchy of being. Instead, we are kin through lateral relation of shared embodiment and the structures of perception and behaviour accompanying it".[620] It is precisely in this vein that I want to track and investigate three more examples of one might call critical anthropomorphic primate reflection.

B. Tim Flach – More than Human

[614] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[615] Michaud, "Che cos'è la pittura?", pp. 131-132.
[616] *Ibid.*, 132.
[617] Milesi, "'Saint-Je' Derrida", p. 56.
[618] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[619] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[620] Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 242.

[Image 2: Tim Flach, "Monkey Eyes", *More Than Human*, no. 33; © Tim Flach, reproduced with permission]

Tim Flach is a celebrated animal photographer and portraitist. In his comment on his stunning series "More than Human", published in 2012, he explains that:

> [he] makes a photographic exploration of animal species ranging from mammals to marine creatures to insects. By removing the creatures from their natural environments, and shooting in a minimal studio setting, the images take on a curiously 'portrait-like' appearance, usually distinct to humans. These images explore the idiosyncrasies of particular creatures as well as pertinent ethical, political, cultural and scientific issues surrounding the relationships between human and non human animals.[621]

As Flach elaborates in a different context: "Part of my challenge is to defamiliarize the subject. I need to make us see the world a little bit strange again, with fresh eyes and new insight".[622] Over and over Flach therefore uses the stylistic device of ambiguity to "break through our viewing patterns", Mische comments.[623] About the specific image of the Macaque ("Monkey Eyes", *More Than Human*, no. 3) Mische writes:

> The small ape is only eighteen inches high. When Flach raises the ape we see him face-to-face – it is an encounter, in the truest sense of the word, at eye level – even if it is only on the below photo frame. The relationship to animals reaches a new dimension.[624]

Another interviewer describes Flach's "power of photographic storytelling" in these visual 'animal encounters':

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[621] Tim Flach, "Artist Statement", available online at: https://timflach.com/work/more-than-human/ (accessed 9/11/2023).
[622] Tim Flach and Anja Mische, "Tim Flach: Entdecke das Tier – Explore the Beast", *Convolutum* 3 (2011): 10.
[623] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[624] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

> Tim Flach is a photographer intent on shifting the public and scientific perceptions of the natural world. With a recognisable – often very conceptual – style, he borrows elements of human portraiture to focus on animals' personalities and provoke emotional responses in the viewer.[625]

What he is really interested in, Flach admits, however, "is this idea of a sentient being which already has a certain divide because it's not human".[626]

Flach participated in a social science study on the impact of animal portraiture – often accused of anthropomorphism and also, ultimately, of the commodification of animals – as opposed to "wildlife photography". In his defence of animal portraits Flach insists on the fact that they are designed around the notion of "critical anthropomorphism":

> critical anthropomorphism (…) is an essential tool to encourage conservation efforts and that animal portraiture may be an ideal 'attention grabber', after which wildlife images can serve as 'educators' (…). With growing concern for biodiversity loss, conservationists are faced with increased pressure to depict animals in ways that evoke empathy and lead to conservation. In recent years, conservation photographers have called on scientists to assist them in identifying the best ways to depict animals to elicit an emotional response.[627]

As Whitely, Kalof and Flach report: "Those [viewers] who were exposed to animal portraits reported increased empathy and decreased positive and relaxed emotions".[628] As a photographic technique, animal portraiture is thus "an approach that frames animals in ways that *mimic* the human studio portrait and has been established as influential in invoking feelings of kinship with animals".[629] The resulting claim with regard to the impact of animal photography is that "Visual representations of animals are not only particularly salient cultural tracers (…), but they can also be used to bring about a change in the position of animals in human culture because the animal as a visual object structures human emotional response".[630] And more generally: "Visual representations of animals trigger the built-in attractions humans have for animals and the natural world".[631]

Animal portraiture, Whitely, Kalof and Flach therefore conclude:

> is a representational approach used in conservation photography that is designed to highlight animal personality and character and evoke emotion from the viewer. Although traditional wildlife photography produces a romanticized view of animals, but in a distant world, the aim of animal portraiture is to bring humans closer to understanding other animals, thus fostering an emotional connection (…). Animal portraiture is anthropomorphic—it emphasizes the animal's human characteristics,

[625] In Tim Flach and Liam Bailey, "Interview with Tim Flach", *Digital Camera* (2019): 132.
[626] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
[627] Cameron Thomas Whiteley, Linda Kalof and Tim Flach, "Using Animal Portraiture to Activate Emotional Affect", *Environment and Behavior* 53.8 (2020): 1.
[628] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[629] *Ibid.*, p. 4, my italics.
[630] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
[631] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

> bridging animal 'otherness' with 'sameness'. There is evidence that animal portraiture increases viewers' feelings of kinship or perception of sameness with animals.[632]

Similar or at least complementary to Marchesini's notion of zoomimesis outlined above, critical anthropomorphism in environmental conservation thus "promotes the attribution of human characteristics to animals to galvanize public attention and concern for conservation or protection".[633] But how does this change when the animal is literally escaping the representative logic of 'becoming someone' and 'becoming something' outlined by Derrida above and reinterpreted by Marchesini and Flach, in turn? This is maybe what is at work in the next example.

C. The "Monkey selfie"

[632] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[633] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[Image 3: Monkey Selfie; no copyright, public domain]

To summarise the issue of what has come to be known as the “Monkey Selfie” as briefly as possible I here use the account given by Christopher Hutton:

> In 2011 a six-year old macaque named Naruto, resident of Sulawesi, Indonesia, picked up a camera belonging to photographer David Slater and took multiple photographs of himself. These photographs became known as the 'Monkey Selfies', and two pictures in particular, one showing Naruto grinning at the camera, and another 'full-body' selfie, became popular on the web and were later uploaded to Wikimedia Commons as being the public domain. Slater threatened legal action on the grounds that he held copyright in the image. Counter-arguments included the claim that there was no copyright in the image at all, as the creator was not a legal person, or that Naruto himself, as the creator of the image, was entitled to all profits from the dissemination of the image. In the United States, the animal rights organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) filed a lawsuit on behalf of Naruto, claiming that his copyright had been violated. In their brief, PETA argued that the Monkey Selfies 'resulted from a series of purposeful and voluntary actions' which resulted in 'original works of authorship not by Slater, but by Naruto' (para. 2). It quoted from Slater's own book where he talked of the need for the recognition that animals such as macaques have 'personality' and 'rights to dignity and property' (para. 6), their 'self-awareness' and enjoyment of their own images with 'some sort of fun and artistic experiment' (para. 34). On behalf of Naruto, PETA claimed Slater's profits, to be used 'solely for the benefit of Naruto, his family and his community, including the preservation of their habitat (para. 7). In the decision, the judge dismissed the claim, noting that the US Copyright Office specifically restricted authorship in copyright to works created by a human being fixed in a tangible medium of expression. There was in effect no copyright protection for the image, since policy dictated that works produced by 'nature, animals, or plants', including 'a photograph taken by a monkey' (para. 6), could not be registered. PETA in effect argued that Naruto had an intentional, second-order understanding of what he was doing, even if it was not fully comparable to that of a human being. However, the court did not render its opinion in these terms, since Naruto was not recognized a legal person. Recognition of authorship in law is restricted to natural persons, though of course ownership of copyright can be assigned to corporations. Posthumanism however imagines further categories of socially recognized beings, including cyborgs, robots, and AI systems.[634]

There is a possibility that under UK or EU law, the photographer may have copyright based on precedents where photographs have been deemed 'original' if they are the author's own intellectual creation and reflect his or her personality with regard to free and creative choices, angle of shot, filter effects, creation of the scene, selecting background or pose, lighting, being in the right place at the right time etc., which in the end are more important than pressing the actual button. One way of 'verifying' would be by asking the question: what would the picture have looked like without the photographer's (or human) intervention?

David Slater during the US court case emphasised the primate's "narcissism" by claiming that: "seeing her reflection [Slater claims 'Naruto' was wrongly identified by PETA as male, or indeed wrongly identified, full stop] in the camera lens (…) she stared at herself with a new found appreciation, and made funny faces – in silence – just as we do when looking in a mirror.

[634] Christopher Hutton, "The self and the 'monkey selfie': Law, integrationism and the nature of the first order/second order distinction", *Language Sciences* 61 (2017): 99.

She also, importantly, made relaxed eye contact with herself, even smiling (...). She was certainly excited at her own appearance and seemed to know it was herself".[635]

PETA, on the other hand, insisted on the question of 'appropriation':

> Naruto – who has been accustomed to cameras throughout his life – saw himself in the reflection of the lens, drew the connection between pressing the shutter release and the change in his reflection, and made different facial expressions while pressing the shutter release (…). If successful, this will be the first time that an animal is declared the owner of property, instead of being declared a piece of property himself (…). Crested macaques like Naruto are highly intelligent and (…) their numbers have decreased by approximately by 90 percent over the last 25 years because of human encroachment. In an out-of-court settlement with Slater he agreed to donate 25 percent of any future gross revenue from the picture.[636]

The US appeal court rejected the settlement motivated by the concern of how to prevent people (or organisations, like PETA) from using animals to advance their human agenda.[637]

The outcome of the entire episode, ironically, is that the photograph may have saved the crested black macaque from extinction – Slater's and PETA's original intention, after all – because the locals now cherish the monkeys as touristic 'income source'.

The entire dynamic, however, changes if one looks at these photographs not as (involuntary) 'monkey selfies' but as (intentional) 'self-portraits'. In fact, from a techno-aesthetic point of view, Slater acted more like the 'curator' than the author/artist of the 'selfie' or 'self-portrait' (or, a kind of 'auto-hetero-portrait). The actual photograph is the product of several actors: the body of the monkey, the automatic settings of the camera pre-selected by Slater and the actual operation of the 'exposure' by the embodied monkey mind. What happened in the human world of combined copyright and techno-aesthetics is that the 'image-work' was created by Slater, who has given it 'meaning' and thus appropriated it by 'resemanticising' it, which is taken by Fontcubera as the standard procedure of what she calls the "post-photographic condition".[638]

Looking at the 'Monkey Selfie' as a selfie, one understands it as a "gestural image" based on "kinaesthetic sociability", following Paul Frosh, for whom "selfies (…) integrate still images into a techno-cultural circuit of corporeal social energy (kinaesthetic sociability)":[639]

> The selfie is a form of relational positioning between the bodies of viewed and viewers in a culture of individualized mobility, where one's 'here' and another's 'there' are

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[635] United States District Court (Northern District of California) "Naruto vs. Slater", Case 3: 15-cv-04324 (2015), p. 7.

[636] PETA, "PETA Appeals 'Monkey Selfie' Case on Grounds That Monkey Owns Copyright" (2017); available online at: https://www.peta.org/blog/peta-appeal-monkey-selfie-case-grounds-monkey-owns-copyright/ (accessed 11/11/2023).

[637] United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, "Naruto v. Slater" (2017); available online at: https://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2018/04/23/16-15469.pdf (accessed 11/11/2023).

[638] Joan Fontcuberta, ed., *La condition post-photographique – Le mois de la photo à Montréal: Biennale Internationale de l'Image Contemporaine* (Kerber: Photo Art, 2015), p. 14.

[639] Paul Frosh, "The Gestural Image: The Selfie, Photography Theory and Kinaesthetic Sociability", in: Kamila Kuc and Joanna Zylinska, eds., *Photomediations: A Reader* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016), p. 253.

> mutually connected but perpetually shifting (…) [it] foregrounds the relationship between the image and its producer, since its producer and referent are identical. It says not only 'see this, here, now', but 'see me showing you me'. It points to the performance of communicative action rather than to an object, and is a trace of that performance… and the culmination and incarnation of a *gesture* of mediation.[640]

The selfie thus becomes "a **figure** of mediation itself: it is simultaneously *mediating* (the outstretched arm executes the taking of the selfie) and *mediated* (the outstretched arm becomes a legible and iterable sign within selfies – of, among other things, the 'selfieness' of the image)".[641] However, "the outstretched arm (or prosthetic stick mount) doesn't just show the photographer depicting himself. It also draws the viewer in as a gesture of inclusion, inviting you to look, be-with, and act",[642] which means that "the selfie is self-referential *as an image*. It makes visible its own construction as an act and a product of mediation".[643] Selfies are thus "a genre of *personal* reflexivity (…), they show a self, enacting itself",[644] just like in the case of the narcissistic monkey as attributed by Slater. If selfies therefore display, as Frosh concludes, the "centrality of imitation and mirroring to human cognition, emotion and communication (…) [including] make-believe as the basis for mimesis", as "gestural image", the selfie also "inscribes one's own body into new forms of mediated, expressive sociability with distant others: these are incarnated in a gestural economy of affection as the reflex bodily responses by which we interact with our devices and their interfaces, through the routinely dexterous movements of our hands and eyes".[645] What thus happens, in selfies whether taken by humans or nonhumans, is "the production of the *mediated phatic body* as a visible vehicle for sociable communication with distant others, who are expected to respond". They are thus "a sign of the further transformations of everyday figural representation as an instrument of mediated, embodied sociability".[646]

A happy new media politics of (posthuman) figuration where humans, nonhumans, machines and algorithms interact figurally to create new (posthuman?) forms of assemblages and 'socialities' might therefore ensue, provided, as I pointed out, that we look at the photograph not as a 'selfie' but as an 'animal portrait', an animal self-portrait. Should we go down this route, what exactly would constitute the difference between what Naruto managed to do and Tim Flach's macaque photograph and its critical anthropomorphism? To further investigate this I want to look at one last example.

D. Daniel Lee – Manimals *(1993)*

[Images available online at: https://www.daniellee.com/projects/manimals]

Ming Turner writes the following about Daniel Lee:

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[640] *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.
[641] *Ibid.*, p. 255, my bold type.
[642] *Ibid.*, p. 258.
[643] *Ibid.*, p. 259.
[644] *Ibid.*
[645] *Ibid.*, p. 260.
[646] *Ibid.*, p. 262.

> China-born and Taiwan-educated artist Daniel Lee has been based in New York since the early 1990s. He became internationally well-known for his 1993 series *Manimals*, which comprised hybridized forms of humans and the signs of the twelve animals in the Chinese Zodiac (…). Lee believes that people's personalities and physical characteristics can be linked to the animals of the Chinese Zodiac, including the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, cock, dog and boar.[647]

Karin Anderson – long-term artist collaborator of Roberto Marchesini and co-author of *Animal Appeal*[648] – adds:

> La particolarità degli esseri di Lee si fonda su un teriomorfismo che non ha una connotazione di valore in termini antropomorfici: non sone mostri cattivi oppure freaks (nel senso di errori o capricci della natura), ma nemmeno angeli, la loro teriomorfia è semplicemente un dato di fatto, un fenotipo come tanti altri.[649]
>
> The particularity of Lee's beings is based on a teriomorphism without any connotation of value in anthropomorphic terms: they are no evil monsters or freaks (in the sense of aberrations or *caprices* of nature), but neither are they angels, their teriomorphia is simply a given, a phenotype like any other.

Lee's "Manimals" are singularities, like Camilla Adami's primates as Derrida refers to them in his face-to-face encounter. In Lee's case, however, they are also the product of a techno-morphosis enabled by a digital fusion of human and nonhuman primates, chimera in Marchesini's sense. They are thus part of the new posthuman 'zoo' that Haraway hints at. The question, however, remains: are they still 'figures' and if so, in what sense? Or are they 'signs' that the process, and thus also the politics of, figuration is breaking down, maybe has already broken down? That would mean that they are signs postfiguration or symptoms of a postfigurative desire.

This is maybe the point at which to return to Agamben's "anthropological machine". As a brief reminder: Agamben bases his explanation of his 'hominisation device or dispositif' as one might also call it on a reading of Ernst Häckel's conception of the 'ape-man' as the 'missing link' that explains the origin and difference of the human. As Agamben writes:

> the passage from animal to man, despite the emphasis placed on comparative anatomy and paleontological findings, was produced by subtracting an element that had nothing to do with either one, and that instead was presupposed as the intensifying characteristic of the human: language. In identifying himself with language, the speaking man places his muteness outside of himself, as already and not yet human.[650]

This particular strategy of a combination of inclusion (of 'human' language) and exclusion (of 'animal' muteness) is what Agamben identifies as the "modern anthropological machine"[651] (as opposed to the "ancient [i.e. premodern] anthropological machine"). This machine exists or functions on 'aporias' like the one concerning language which is both necessary and strictly

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[647] Ming Turner, "Transforming Human and Beast: Hybridization and Diasporic Identities in Daniel Lee's Art", *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 1.2-3 (2004): 202, 206.

[648] Roberto Marchesini and Karin Andersen, *Animal Appeal: Uno Studio sul Teriomorfismo* (Bologna: Hybris, 2003).

[649] Karin Andersen, "Il teriomorfo della cultura", in: Marchesini and Anderson, *Animal Appeal*, p. 394.

[650] Agamben, *The Open*, pp. 34-35.

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

speaking impossible to use as a differentiation from the 'speechless' missing link that forms both the link but also the radical difference between man and animal. Language plays both the part of that which identifies the difference and that which needs explanation most. Its presupposed existence is necessary for its own explanation, so to speak. Imagining man without language merely leaves him with his animality. This is the point of 'fracture' where only two options arise: the animalisation of man (cf. the ape-man figure) or the humanisation of the animal (e.g. man-apes, or maybe, to use Lee's term: "manimals"):

> Precisely because the human [or language] is already presupposed every time, the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside.[652]

While the "modern" anthropological machine functions by "excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human: *Homo alalus* [speechless human], or the ape-man", the "ancient" version of the machine works by obtaining the inside "through the inclusion of an outside", and thus produces the "non-man (…) by the humanization of an animal: the man-ape, the *enfant sauvage* or *Homo ferus*, but also and above all the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form".[653] As the example of Daniel Lee shows, both versions of the machine remain "available" for use in an anthropocentric or humanist environment or contemporary (posthumanist?) culture. Both strategies are being 'used' more or less ironically in the visual representation of the man-ape, ape-man or hybrid. However, the photographs too in combination with our viewing function according to the same logic – an ironic reference to the "anthropological machine". In fact, one could say that these visual examples function by 'aping', mimicking or parodying the anthropological machine, with the aim of 'jamming' or at least 'reconfiguring' it.

The workings of these machines/this machine of figuration is that it establishes, according to Agamben, "a zone of indifference at [its] centre, within which – like a 'missing link' which is always lacking because it is already virtually present – the articulations between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being, must take place. Like every place of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the cesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew".[654] This space or zone of exception rather than producing either human or animal life, in fact, only produces "life that is separated and excluded from itself – only a *bare life*", as an "extreme **figure** of the human and the inhuman".[655] We know that Braidotti would want to claim this bare life, *zoe*, as the basis of zoopolitics and of new forms of solidarity, or, in other words, as the 'playground' of the posthuman.

We also know, that Agamben would resist this. In his version of "anthropogenesis", "man suspends his animality and, in this way, opens a 'free and empty' zone in which life is captured and a-bandoned (…) in a zone of exception".[656] Anthropogenesis, for Agamben, is thus what

[652] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
[653] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[654] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
[655] *Ibid.*, p. 38, my bold type.
[656] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

"results from the caesura and articulation between human and animal" which "passes first of all *within* man",[657] while ontology (or Western metaphysics) is the "operation in which anthropogenesis, the becoming human of the living being, is realized" through the "overcoming of animal *physis* in the direction of human history".[658] Therefore, as Agamben explains, following and adapting Foucault: "In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics".[659]

What characterises the contemporary (post)historical moment in Agamben's view in which he sees the anthropological machine as "idling", is that "man no longer preserves his own animality as undisclosable, but rather seeks to take it on and govern it by means of technology" [which would be the preferred route for transhumanism]. "Man (…) appropriates his own concealedness, his own animality, which neither remains hidden nor is made an object of mastery, but is thought as such, as pure abandonment".[660]

Faced with this abandonment or "eclipse", the "total management" of biological life, or the very animality of man in the form of biotechnology becomes "our" political "burden" or challenge. However, as Agamben concludes:

> It is not easy to say whether the humanity that has taken upon itself the mandate of the total management of its own animality is still human, in the sense that *humanitas* which the anthropological machine produced by de-ciding every time between man and animal; nor is it clear whether the well-being of a life that can no longer be recognized as either human or animal can be felt as fulfilling.[661]

This is thus Agamben's challenge launched on animal studies, zoomimesis or posthumanist postanthropocentrism: would the political desire of "indistinction" not lead to a state where "the total humanization of the animal coincides with the total animalization of man"?[662]

Indistinction, in this context, is of course Matthew Calarco's term. In 2007, Calarco wrote:

> Inasmuch as humanism is founded on a separation of the *humanitas* and *animalitas* within the human, no genuinely post-humanist politics can emerge without grappling with the logic and consequences of this division (…) addressing the question (…) of how the human/animal distinction functions in determining what it means to be human (…) alone will not suffice to call anthropocentrism into question (…). If one is to address the philosophical and political question of the animal I any meaningful way, it will be necessary at the very least to work through both (a) the ontology of animal life *on its own terms*, and (b) the ethico-political relations that obtain between those beings called 'human' and 'animal'.[663]

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[657] *Ibid*., my italics.
[658] *Ibid*., p. 79.
[659] *Ibid*., p. 80.
[660] *Ibid*.
[661] *Ibid*., p. 77.
[662] *Ibid*.
[663] Matthew Calarco, "Jamming the Anthropological Machine", in: Calarco and Steven DeCaroli, eds., *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 166.

More recently, Callarco has been promoting what he calls a *politics* of indistinction *beyond* anthropological difference:[664] a desire that also seems to be in tune with Braidotti's (Deleuzian) ethical ideal of a "becoming-imperceptible".[665]

As one may imagine, I have no conclusion to offer that would in some way outdo, explode or surpass this compulsion to re-con-figure, to a point where figuration wears so thin that any distinction (between human and nonhuman animals, for example) really becomes imperceptible or indistinct.

[664] Calarco, *Beyond the Anthropological Difference* (2020).
[665] Braidotti, *Transpositions*, p. 173.

Chapter 9: Perfectibilities, or, How (Not) to Improve Humans

> [H]umanism is dead, has been so since the late nineteenth century, and it is about time to quit it. Let us bury it with appropriate rites, which means honouring the little that was good, and understanding what went wrong and why. It was a seductive beast and we do not want to fall for its charms a second time.[666]
>
> Il peut nous sembler préférable, à certains égards, de demeurer *bêtement* humains.[667]

Positionings

At a purely discursive level or in Foucauldian terms, humanism, posthumanism and transhumanism, comprise everything that is being said about that which their respective –ism names. In doing so they consolidate, homogenise and legitimate what they posit: i.e. the human, the posthuman, the transhuman. These, in turn, human, posthuman and transhuman, functions like figures, metaphors, or, in Derridean terms, transcendental signifiers – governing their respective discourses while always remaining out of their definitive and definitional reach.[668] A *critical* posthumanism (CPH) situates itself not outside this discursivity or interdiscursivity but positions itself as a critical but implicated observer and commentator, aware of the fundamentally political and conflictual nature of social discourses and their materialities. The important thing is that is aware of its own implication and positionality – lessons it has learned from cultural studies and, more specifically, cultural anthropology. Something it has also learned, this time from postmodernism (another discourse), on the other hand, is the strange temporality that drives the prefix 'post'. There is an ambiguity in the very term 'post-human-ism'. It can 'post' or position itself obliquely to either the figure of the 'human' or the discourse of 'humanism'. This oblique position is the result of the ambiguity contained in the very notion of the post and which conditions the act of 'posting'. This is true of any 'post-ism' – postmodernism, posthumanism, postanthropocentrism...

Trans-, on the other hand, is an entirely different kind of prefix. It stands for a move that erases differences by 'transcending', displacing, sublimating or indeed repressing them, whether these differences are sexual, linguistic, cultural, spatial, temporal or other.

Perfectibilities

I prefer using perfectibilit*ies* in the plural, because, this is my claim, there are always more than one. There is also more to perfectibility than what the *OED* writes, namely that it is the "capability of being perfected or brought to a state of perfection; esp. the capacity of humanity to progress towards physical, mental, or moral perfection", or indeed all three of these. An advocate of, or believer in, human perfectibility thus understood is called a "perfectibilitarian", according to the *OED*. In a philosophical context, in Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014), Bertrand Binoche contributes

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[666] John Carroll, *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture*, London: Fontana Press, 1993), p. 232.

[667] Laurence Hansen-Løve, *Simplement Humains : Mieux vaut préserver l'humanité que l'améliorer* (Paris : L'Aube, 2019), p. 119, my emphasis (It may seem preferable to us, in certain respects, to remain stupidly [literally: animally] human], my translation.

[668] See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in: *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 351-370.

an entry on perfectibility and traces its origins and developments across three main national philosophies (French, German and English). Most noteworthy in what Binoche has to say is surely the semantic development that happened to Rousseau's original term, namely from an initially quite ambiguous "blessing" to an almost "necessary tendency towards perfection" or "indefinite perfectibility".[669] In other words, from an understanding of human perfectibility as a faculty of self-improvement, or as a kind of "metafaculty on which development of all other faculties depends", the notion becomes in the later 18th Century and throughout the Enlightenment something like "the passive faculty of 'being improved'",[670] an almost 'cosmological' concept, therefore, that paints the human as fundamentally educable and in need of enlightened rulers and guidance – an understanding that also chimes well with the Christian morality of emulating divine perfection and the innate human desire of happiness and virtue. Thus, what had been a purely "reactive faculty, now became a spontaneous tendency, a sort of eminently positive instinct that was henceforth constantly opposed to Rousseau",[671] a "mute impulse that leads humans to perfection". Apart from this remoralising tendency, in 18th Century Protestant England the faculty of self-improvement was combined with the notion of individual freedom to form the kind of "liberal humanism" that arguably still dominates human self-understanding today. The more liberty is given to everything and everyone, this 'Priestleyan' liberalism argues, "the more perfect it will become".[672] This, then, turns into a political argument according to which "human progress is the immanent work of society as opposed to government: the latter has no task other than to provide the conditions" for "ensuring a maximum liberty". Humans are now perfectible in the sense that by themselves they are "politically authorized and morally obliged to freely examine ideas, they move from truth to truth toward the heavenly Jerusalem".[673] From this nascent antagonism between individual liberty and "the withering away of government" to contemporary neoliberal capitalism, liberal democracy and modern humanism including its projected transcendence by transhumanism there is, quite evidently, a direct line.

What exactly has been 'lost' in this process of perfecting perfectibility since Rousseau? This might also be a way of asking what humanism and its transhumanist 'perfecting' desire continues to repress. In fact, as Binoche explains elsewhere,[674] Rousseau's notion is a somewhat paradoxical perfectibility *without* perfection, in that perfectibility is at once a necessary condition of humanity (a faculty that distinguishes humans from other animals), a central faculty that is responsible for radical human potentiality *and* the greatest source of human unhappiness. In short, perfectibility certainly does not translate easily into perfection. Perfectibility is 'blind', so to speak; it in no way points towards any specific goal of perfection. It resists easy teleological or evolutionary interpretations. In fact, Rousseau is rather inclined to argue the reverse, namely that perfectibility in individuals at least in most cases, manifests itself in the opposite of perfection, namely in decline. However, only if decline is a reality, can there also be a notion of progression or progress, both at an individual as well as at a species

[669] Bertrand Binoche, "Perfectibility", in: Barbara Cassin, ed. *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 769.
[670] *Ibid*.
[671] *Ibid*.
[672] *Ibid*., p. 771.
[673] *Ibid.*
[674] Bertrand Binoche, "Rousseau: Perfektibilität ohne Perfektion", in: Konstanze Baron and Christian Soboth, eds., *Perfektionismus und Perfektibilität* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2018), p. 99.

level. One could almost say, ironically, that only in regressing can humans perceive their perfectibility. Perfectibility is therefore a very mixed blessing.

This is also something Derrida seizes upon in his deconstructive reading of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* in *Of Grammatology*, where he works through the fact that for Rousseau nature and perfectibility form a "hypothetical point of purity" to which he opposes the "corruptions of humanity: our vain and arrogant quest for more knowledge than we need, our invasive mining of the earth (…) our vanity, greed, and artificiality", as Penelope Deutscher writes. However, "perversion of nature is inevitable", she concludes.[675] Nature, however, is both "opposed to perversion and incorporates pervertibility".[676] In the same way, human perfectibility necessarily draws us out of our original state of "innocence" and opens the way to vice and error. Without it, however, there can be no virtue or wisdom either:

> It would be sad for us to be forced to agree that this distinctive and almost unlimited faculty [i.e. perfectibility] is the source of all man's misfortunes; that this is what, by dint of time, draws him out of that original condition in which he would pass tranquil and innocent days; that this is what, through centuries of giving rise to his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues, eventually makes him a tyrant over himself and nature.[677]

So, even though perfectibility and the pervertibility of nature are interconnected, it is only because of perfectibility that "we do have the potential for the imagination, memory, reflection, and regulated rationality that allow us to understand ourselves as a perversion of nature's dictates".[678] Derrida seems to embrace this aporia when he says that he loves "the process of perfectibility"[679] in the same way that he speaks about a messianism without messiah, or impossible necessity more generally – a contamination at the heart of purity, an impossible but necessary fidelity to the one (one language, one truth, one God, one human). The impossibility of the desire for perfection and progress does not negate, cannot overcome their indetermination, their corruptibility. It only increases their necessity – a necessity that ultimately, however, cannot be trusted. There only ever is, therefore, limited or conditional perfection, or one could say, more mundanely, moments of brilliance. Progress could turn either way and the future is radically unpredictable – this is what actually makes it futural (*à-venir/avenir* as opposed to *futur*), but in order to let the future arrive, perfectibility and progress remain absolutely necessary, as regulative ideas so to speak, or as perfection-to-come.

The problem with perfection is thus that we do not know. We do not know from where the future arrives, we do not know if it arrives, whether it arrived in the past, in the present or the future. It is not something that can be anticipated. On the other hand, anticipation definitely

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[675] Penelope Deutscher, "Loving the Impossible: Derrida, Rousseau, and the Politics of Perfectibility", in: Stephen H. Daniel, ed., *Current Continental Theory and Modern Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), p. 226).

[676] *Ibid*.

[677] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men", in: *The Basic Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 45; 23-109, cited in Deutscher, "Loving the Impossible", p. 227.

[678] Deutscher, "Loving the Impossible", p. 227.

[679] Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars*, ed. Paul Patten and Terry Smith (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001), p. 100, cited in Deutscher 2005: 227)

stops it from arriving. And nevertheless it is almost inevitable that we should anticipate it. Does one not have to prepare for the future, for the best or the worst to happen? Thus in returning to the question of perfectibility one is forced to tackle two other problems, which I am going to outline in turn in what follows. One is the question of politics and the future, the other problem takes us back to the idea of humanism and its discontents.

Future perfect: Constructions of the (Human) Future

Let me emphasise that human future and future human are two very different things. This is precisely what posthumanist politics and the politics of the posthuman are about. The figure of the posthuman is evidently contested. What the future of the human and its others will or indeed should be like is the key difference between CPH and a largely techno-enthusiastic or techno-utopian transhumanism. After a period of anti-utopian and often techno-sceptic sentiment after WWII, especially in those countries that were most affected by widespread destruction and shocked by the ambient threat of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War, utopianism under posthuman conditions is back in two major forms: one is a return of the question concerning technology that sees in the essence of technology no longer a Heideggerian 'challenge' but a 'task' – this is where transhumanism seems to wish to situate itself, namely as an advocate of technological progress even in a time of dwindling (natural) resources. The other form of utopianism one might call eco-utopian in the sense that it seeks alternatives to human hubris, speciesism, or human exceptionalism and tends to be against modern, liberal-humanist techno-progressivism.

The reaction to the gradual realisation of human-induced climate change and the advent of the so-called 'Anthropocene' could not be more different depending on which form of utopianism one is willing to embrace. The science fiction film *Interstellar*[680] might serve as an illustration of how these two positions are unfolding. Science fiction is quite naturally an important battleground between the two perspectives with their respective future-politics. It is worth noting of course that while SF is an important attempt at anticipating future scenarios, at controlling futures and thus at intervening in the present, it is also a key genre that deliberately blurs fiction and fact – which has also made it a powerful resource for futurological science, hence my use of the term "science faction" as an important characteristic of post- and transhumanist discourse.[681] In *Interstellar*, the ecologically damaged planet seems to face a stark choice – let us call it a combination of 'degrowth' and 'rewilding' *versus* investing in the search for 'exoplanets'. A third scenario the film does not engage with but which one should also add to the techno-utopian fantasies is that of geoengineering. Both the colonisation of exoplanets and the geoengineering of planet Earth are reliant on the notion of technological (re)constructibility at a planetary level. Both usually are dismissive of preservationist ideas and a defence of and return to a strong idea of 'nature'. Timothy Morton discusses *Interstellar* at length in his *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* in these terms.[682]

Solidarity with contemporary and future humans and nonhuman people is the key ethical aspect of a future politics, the politics of the future or the future as radically contested political

[680] *Interstellar*, dir. Christopher Nolan (Paramount Pictures, 2014).
[681] Cf. Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[682] Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017).

ground between post- and transhumanist visions. Both are in this sense about constructions of the future, i.e. creating some kind of consensus about, and thus a legitimation of, the use of limited resources (as well as gathering and retaining 'attention' – given the central role of the media in this context and in digitalised 'information' societies more generally), in times of existential threats, deep uncertainty and increasing ideological polarisation. What Morton calls the "symbiotic real" of an ecological "humankind" – understood both as a generic term but also literally as "kind" humans[683] – functions precisely according to the idea of Rousseauist perfectibility that transhumanists would probably want to ignore or resist. Where do you stand with regard to an unreserved ethical responsibility of humans towards fellow humans past, present and future and with regard to a political solidarity with nonhumans – this, one might argue, is the predicament of 'our' time situated between "the fourth industrial revolution and the sixth mass extinction" as Rosi Braidotti formulates it.[684] And this has everything to do with the role of humanism and anthropology – the last and possibly ultimate grand narrative – and the story of the human and its future they are telling, in the face of 'our' increasing 'incredulity' towards its various anthropocentric versions, especially the heroic ones.

Room for improvement, or There Is Always Some

What is wrong with humanism? And what is wrong with humans? Which humanism and what humans?, one might immediately follow up. Humanism is based on a protean or promethean notion of the human, a chameleon who is always becoming something or someone else, whose 'essence' is always contested, and who therefore always has to reinvent itself – which makes both the human and its discourse, humanism, ungraspable 'as such'. However, there are some recurring motifs, even if, as Tony Davies writes, humanism is "one of those words, like 'realism' or 'socialism', whose range of possible uses runs from the pedantically exact to the cosmically vague".[685] As a result:

> On one side, humanism is saluted as the philosophical champion of human freedom and dignity, standing alone and often outnumbered against the battalions of ignorance, tyranny and superstition (…). On the other, it has been denounced as an ideological smokescreen for the oppressive mystifications of modern society and culture, the marginalisation and oppression of the multitudes of human beings in whose name it pretends to speak, even, through an inexorable 'dialectic of enlightenment', for the nightmare of fascism and the atrocity of total war.[686]

This means that anthropocentrism, the value and sanctity of human life over everything else, but also a certain investment in the beneficial aspect of culture, cultivation, education or '*Bildung*', a cherishing of individual freedom and personal development, a striving for perfection or genius, the pursuit of happiness and justice, rather in this life than the 'next' – all without any doubt admirable and worthwhile pursuits – are all candidates for or elements of an impossible definition of humanism. As Davies, explains:

[683] *Ibid*. p. 3.
[684] Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).
[685] Tony Davies, *Humanism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 3.
[686] *Ibid*., p. 5.

> The several humanisms – the civic humanism of Confucian sages quattrocento Italian city-states, the Qur'anic humanism of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, the Protestant humanism of sixteenth-century Northern Europe, the rationalistic humanism that attended at the revolutions of enlightened modernity, and the romantic and positivistic humanisms through which the European bourgeoisies established their hegemony over it, the revolutionary humanism that shook the world and the liberal humanism that sought to tame it, the humanism of the Nazis and the humanism of their victims, the antihumanist humanism of Heidegger and the humanist antihumanism of Foucault and Althusser, the secularist humanism of Huxley and Dawkins or the posthumanism of Gibson and Haraway – are not reducible to one, or even to a single line or pattern (…) the problem of humanism remains (…) an inescapable horizon within which all attempts to think about the ways in which human beings have, do, might live together in and on the world are contained.[687]

This implies that humanism, given its protean form but also its obvious benevolent intent, is quite unsurpassable. And this is also its problem, the road to hell, as the old saying goes, is paved with good intentions. There is not a crime, as Davies does well to remind us, that has not been committed in the name of humanity.[688] The way all humanisms come across 'pragmatically' or 'politically' is as missionary and imperialist, universalist rather than particularist. Humanism is without doubt necessarily 'speciest' in its valuation of humans over everything else even when it acknowledges that there are ethical responsibilities for nonhuman others. However, the fact is that things like "the freedom to speak and write, to organise and campaign in defence of individual or collective interests, to protest and disobey: all these, and the prospect of a world in which they will be secured, can only be articulated in humanist terms".[689]

All this notwithstanding, given the specific moment of historical, economic, geological, ecological and radically political uncertainty we find ourselves in today, the grand narrative of liberal humanism with its intrinsic and inevitable self-contradictions and aporias is at a breaking point and a consensus seems to be emerging that it no longer holds the answers to current and future challenges. This leads me back to the main focus of my argument, namely the question of perfectibility, perfection or future enhancement.

Desire of the Posthuman, or Yearning for Perfection

And a yearning or a pious wish it is and remains by most, since there can never be any consensus about what might actually constitute perfection. Except for some, that is, who seem to already have decided that they know which way perfection lies. For a start, are we talking about social, individual, technological or planetary progress, enhancement and perfection? Should humans (and maybe nonhumans, too) be physically or morally enhanced, or both at the same time? And what would that imply as far as the relationship between embodiment and mindfulness is concerned? At what point does 'moral' enhancement turn into something like a rather 'immoral' enhancement?

[687] *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.
[688] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[689] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Self-declared transhumanists are often taken to task for their outrageous utilitarianism and also their naïve techno-enthusiasm. However, in a sense, they are only taking the mainstream humanist notion of perfectibility to its logical conclusion. In the end, we all yearn for some form of improvement if not perfection in humans and elsewhere. It is almost impossible for politicians, teachers, priests (or imams or rabbi), doctors and so on not to believe and act with a notion of moral improvement in mind. The big difference between critical posthumanists – those who believe one should probably go on being human but not necessarily in the humanist sense – and transhumanists – those who are not really positioning themselves against humanism, rather against what they see as human 'meekness' or humility – seems to be that the latter are driven by some desire for the posthuman and its achievability. Both can be accused of misanthropy in a sense, only that transhumanists believe the solution lies in supersession (of the species) and some form of 'immateriality', whereas critical posthumanists tend to favour maybe a less drastic, biocentric, sustainable and (new) materialist form of deanthropocentring.

I think the best argument against a transhumanist notion of perfection or meliorism understood as "enhancement of the human *as* human"[690] is the one given by Michael Hauskeller in his *Better Humans: Understanding the Enhancement Project*, namely that there is no standard by which we could possibly measure what it would mean to be a "better human". Even if it was possible to agree on some collective imaginary state of what "better humans" meant, there would not be any consensus about how to achieve this and whether achieving it was actually that desirable:

> The main problem with the project is not that human enhancement is morally wrong, but rather that we lack any clear idea of what it would actually consist in without being aware of the lack. There is no such thing as human enhancement, understood as the enhancement of the human as a human.[691]

What is at stake in the transhumanist ideal is, as Nicolas Le Dévédec rightly points out, "the critical and political relationship to the world inherited from the humanist ideal of perfectibility, which underlies more fundamentally the modern project of democratic autonomy".[692] Even worse, in the current context of neoliberal capitalist biopolitics, dematerialisation can be seen as an attempt at depoliticisation, by submitting perfectibility to utilitarian technological and technocratic decisions as to which way physical and moral enhancement most probably lie. This precisely is what is being contested as the most political feature of future politics. We can only be "unfit for the future" if we are talking about a pre-empted future, a teleological or post-political one. Or, as Hauskeller adds: "Only if we feel that we have been treated unfairly by the world (and possibly its creator) can we believe that we are entitled to posthuman bliss",[693] which is clearly an age-old Gnostic theme. The "case against perfection" to use Michael J. Sandel's phrase[694] is not against perfectibility as a necessary principle of human, and also undoubtedly nonhuman, life but lies in its inevitable

[690] Michael Hauskeller, *Better Humans: Understanding the Enhancement Project* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), p. 2.
[691] *Ibid*., pp. 185-186.
[692] Nicolas Le Dévédec, "Unfit for the Future? The Depoliticization of Human Perfectibility, from the Enlightenment to Transhumanism", *European Journal of Social Theory* 21.4 (2018): 501.
[693] Hauskeller, *Better Humans*, p. 188.
[694] Michael J. Sandel, *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

reductionism, and more specifically in its *depoliticising* reduction of plurality and contingency, or the suppression of the future as radical possibility and unpredictability.

This, as I have argued, is because of the concept of perfectibility itself. Even here, there is always more than one, or, it is the necessary and impossible oneness of the idea of perfectibility that already produces the irreducible plurality of perfections.

Could Do Better: Humanism without Humans or Humans without Humanism

What does this mean in political terms? Where does this leave me with my differentiation between critical post- and techno-utopian transhumanism? Keeping the horizon of perfectibility open by resisting and pluralising the notion of perfection makes it possible to distinguish between different kinds of politics. "Throughout the history of civilization", as Ruuska, Heikkurinen and Wilén, three economists based in Helsinki, claim, "politics has been a human-centred process",[695] it has been, in short, "anthropolitics" – or an anthropocentric approach to politics based on domination, power, and supremacist exploitation by (some) humans over other humans and nonhumans. However, if there is agreement on something like the Anthropocene, politics now depends on the awareness that it affects everything on this planet. And although humans, of course, continue to be important actors in this situation and alone have to bear the ethical responsibility for their actions, their interests can no longer be automatically at the centre of all political processes. We can thus begin to imagine a postanthropolitics in a de-anthropocentred world. This, obviously, will be meeting plenty of resistance and can also be taken into all kinds of dangerous directions. One of these is certainly transhumanist, or: how I stopped being human and learned to love artificial intelligence, a continuation of humanism and anthropocentrism by other, extreme, means. One could call this "humanism without humans".[696]

However, there are also less nihilistic versions I would hope, namely in thinking humans without humanism. Our responsibility is towards others, both human and nonhuman with whom we share a world that is not ours alone. "We are animals together with other animals, in all sorts of ways", as David Wood rightly reminds us.[697] But we also have to see that any voluntary move towards postanthropocentrism is taking place at a time when we are already losing control of 'our' systems. The Anthropocene, ironically, is just that: the phantasm of humans reigning supreme, while arguing themselves out of the picture. The predominant political and economic system is *already* 'posthumanist' in the worst possible, dehumanising and necropolitical, sense. Extracting ourselves by a misguided version of disembodied perfectibility in the hope of escaping the mess we have created looks pretty shabby. Instead, I would suggest, with David Wood, that we are better off reminding ourselves that, yes, we are animals with animal bodies depending on a 'natural' (i.e. biological) environment that we are responsible for 'denaturing', which in some sense makes us special but does not lift us above anybody else apart from ethical and ecological responsibility: "We are both more animal than we can imagine and more than animal. Maintaining this tension is arguably more

[695] Toni Ruuska, Pasi Heikkurinen and Kristoffer Wilén, "Domination, Power, Supremacy: Confronting Anthropolitics with Ecological Realism", *Sustainability* 12 (2020): 1.

[696] See the conclusion to this volume for further discussion of a 'humanism without humans'.

[697] David Wood, *Thinking Plant Animal Human: Encounters with Communities of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), p. 5.

productive than developing zones of indistinction", as Wood puts it.[698] I would add, echoing Rousseau, this tension is the source of our perfectibility without perfection, our 'potentiality'. Or, in other words, the future of our animality is the key and the main battleground of any (post)anthropolitics.

So what, indeed, is left of being human? Obviously, as long as the human forms the centre of anthropolitics, left and also right of it, there are two main figures it defines itself against (two 'others'): the animal and the posthuman. These two are, in a sense, what is left of humans and their being, they are also therefore what is left of being human. If I am made to choose between these two, the choice is easy. I, for one, will always care more about animals than posthumans. For me, the former are infinitely closer to 'us', even if, in the eyes of some, that might make me a 'bioconservative'. So be it, if bioconservative means caring about biological life and its future that is a price worth paying and a stance worth defending.

[698] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Chapter 10: Making Humans Better: Posthumanism 'Beyond' Violence

What Is Wrong with Humanism? or, We Have to Get Better

In a not particularly subtle scene from the science fiction classic *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*,[699] young John Connor, future leader of the human resistance in 'our' final war against intelligent machines, watches his peers pretend-shoot each other with toy guns. Disillusioned, he remarks to his cyborg protector and *Ersatz* father figure, Arnold Schwarzenegger: "We're not gonna make it, are we? People I mean." In doing so, he invokes the topos of violent humanity that is condemned to ultimately destroy and exterminate itself. The fighting machine's rather laconic answer is not without a certain irony: "It's in your nature to destroy yourselves".

Here we have, in a sense, a summary of everything that seems to be wrong with 'us' as a 'species'. From an evolutionary standpoint we are 'unique' by all standards of biology, culture and science, capable of the greatest achievements as well as the most abject deeds, rulers of nature as well as its most brutal destroyers, almost godlike at times as well as capable of radical evil, successful yet incredibly vulnerable, and so on. An animal yet also something entirely other – an animal that no longer wants to be one and detests and rejects its own animality. An animal that wants to exorcise its own residual animality, a "monster [*Untier*]," as Ulrich Horstmann called it, in his most radically negative of all negative anthropologies. A Non-animal that attributes everything it hates about its human self to its repressed animal nature from which it constantly wishes to escape. Horstmann links this most human of attitudes to what he calls an "anthropofugal perception of the world [anthropofugale Weltwahrnehmung]", or 'our' escapism from our human-animal condition.[700]

What are we to think of all this aggression then that humans keep displaying, this destructiveness, this sadism, all the suffering and this 'inhumanity' everywhere? From where can we still draw hope? Sarah Connor, the mother of John, future saviour of humans in the *Terminator* films, mentioned above, seems to go to the heart of the, as one might call it, 'transhumanist' matter: "if a machine can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too". Machines are thus, according to this view, to serve as 'our' moral navigation systems and to show humans how best to behave in a humanly humane way…

Critical Posthumanism Between Post- and Trans-, or, Better Not...

Taking apart this primitive but crucial scenario above that the *Terminator* film plays out, this little piece of cultural technology, as one might call it, with all its basic assumptions and values, and putting it back together differently, i.e. deconstructing it, is the task of a critical posthumanism (CPH). The logic of self-overcoming through a perfection or improvement of humans and their so-called 'nature', however defined, as well as the role that technology is supposed to play in this process of 'hominisation', are the two aspects that need to be problematised from the perspective of CPH, because both – human improvement and the

[699] *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, rir. James Cameron, Tri Star Pictures (1991).

[700] Ulrich Horstmann, *Das Untier: Konturen einer Philosophie der Menschenflucht* [1983] (Berlin: Johannes G. Hoof, 2016), p. 10; all translations unless indicated otherwise are mine. The German '*Untier*' is untranslatable, it 'undoes' the notion of '*Tier*' (animal) in a similar way as Freud's '*unheimlich*' (uncanny) undoes the notion of '*heimlich*' (homely, secretive). In fact, it functions not unlike the 'un' in 'unlearning' which is the common thread of this volume (see esp. Chapters 6 and 8).

instrumentalisation of technology – have in fact been and continue to be major sources of unspeakable violence, against 'ourselves' and against myriad nonhuman 'others'.

At least since the two World Wars, the Holocaust and the (abiding) threat of nuclear self-destruction, humanism, including all its neohumanist attempts at its revival, has found it very difficult to legitimate itself. Even important humanist achievements such as universal human rights now seem more like a postcolonial rearguard action in view of the ongoing violence of humans against fellow humans, and the ever-growing economic, social and ecological inequality and injustice between different human groups and populations. All of this makes it very difficult to still speak of (a) humanity and (shared) humanness in the universalist humanistic sense. Instead, the current planetary ecological crisis and the accelerated technological development further expose the precarious situation of (some) humans, 'their' environment, as well as the enormous social, economic and ecological differences between groups and even individual 'specimens'. It suffices to look at the geographical distribution of people who are most affected by 'climate change' in the era of the so-called 'Anthropocene' when, As Rosi Braidotti puts it, "'We' Are In *This* Together, But We Are Not One and the Same".[701] Humanism, as a discourse that is based on a concept of a universal and exclusive human nature or 'essence', and which thereby seeks to distinguish humans from both (nonhuman) animals and (non-organic) machines, has become untrustworthy in many respects. The various posthumanist reactions consequently take up the conceptual problems and self-contradictions within humanism, radicalise, but also eventually relativise, them.

CPH in particular sees itself as the inheritor of this human chaos for which humanism is at least partly responsible, and therefore also of the injustice and the existential threats to human and nonhuman life it has helped to cause or at least did not prevent. The pragmatic value of the prefix 'post' does therefore not so much signal an overcoming (of humanism, even less of the human); it rather signals a working through process in the psychoanalytic sense. It is a gradual, 'parasitical' or deconstructive process that detects gaps and contradictions in humanism itself and exposes them in the hope of, ultimately, producing an entirely different (self)understanding of humans and their humanity.

Transhumanists, on the other hand, seem to want to rely solely on an "affirmation of technology", to which, as Stefan Sorgner claims, there is *de facto* "no alternative":

What is crucial is that we are on the path to becoming superhuman. Either we evolve or we die out. We need the latest technologies to adapt to constantly changing environmental conditions and improve our quality of life (…). Only through appropriate use of technology can we achieve inclusive sustainability in the long term.[702]

Sorgner, like most transhumanists, thus sees no alternative to anthropocentric modernity and indeed advocates a further radicalisation of it as the only way 'forward'. Transhumanism is therefore incompatible with any posthumanist, that is postanthropocentric, ethics, which seeks a new balance between humans, technology and nature and is concerned with the intrinsic value of all (current and future) life.

[701] Rosi Braidotti, "'We' Are In *This* Together, But We Are Not One and the Same", *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 17 (2020): 465–469.

[702] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Übermensch: Plädoyer für einen Nietzscheanischen Transhumanismus* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2019), p. 105.

Rosi Braidotti, certainly one of the main representative of CPH, formulates the current challenge of our "posthuman condition" in the following stark terms:

The posthuman condition implies that 'we' – the human and non-human inhabitants of this particular planet – are currently positioned between the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Sixth Extinction (…). Striking a balance between these conflicting forces, so as to keep the broader picture in mind, is the current posthuman[ist] challenge.[703]

Within these two discourses – post- and transhumanism – CPH is, however, only one and relatively minoritarian position, one that tries to steer a course between posthumanisation and dehumanisation.[704] Alongside it there are also, apart from the transhumanist technoeuphorians, many uncompromising misanthropes, apocalyptists and collapsologists who tend to give free rein to their nihilism. This is not at all surprising since wherever one looks, the spectre, the anxiety and the fascination of extinction – of humans, of life, of the planet – are omnipresent. Ulrich Horstmann's '*Untier*' is part of these nihilistic responses to 'our posthuman condition'. It is an "announcement of the imminent self-abolition of the 'monstrous' human [*das Untier Mensch*]".[705] With this spectre – a world without humans – both, in a sense behind us, given the ubiquity of extinction scenarios fed to us by science fiction, as well as the memory of past and current genocides, *and* still awaiting us, I would argue (without in the least wishing to deny the temptation and sometimes even the strategic benefits of a little nihilism), that (radical) nihilism, ultimately, is something we had better not give in to. Instead, let us take a closer look at the entrails of the so-called "anthropological machine", as Giorgio Agamben calls it,[706] the (humanist) *dispositifs* or appartuses that are supposed to 'make us human', and we might well realise that…

There's Something Wrong with Perfectibility, or: Get Better Soon!

Miriam Meckel's novella *Next: Erinnerungen an eine Zukunft ohne uns* (Next: Memories of a Future Without Us)[707] looks back from the future on the digitalisation of humans from the dual perspective, of that of the algorithm and that of the 'last human':

Virtually everyone wanted to perfect themselves. Perfection was the mantra of this time. And as long as they felt like they could control the process, they went for it like crazy.[708]

These 'last humans' are an allegory of 'us' and of 'our time', of course. If, as Sorgner provocatively claims, transhumanism is "the most dangerous idea in the world",[709] then it is probably because it seems to take Nietzsche's 'explosive' potential and his idea of the impending arrival of the superman (maybe a little too) literally.[710] However, given the current global threat of climate change and the return of war to Europe, one would almost be inclined

[703] Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), p. 2.
[704] Cf. The Conclusion to this volume on post- versus dehumanisation.
[705] Frank Müller in Horstman, *Das Untier*, p. 143.
[706] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. K. Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).
[707] Miriam Meckel, *Next: Erinnerungen an eine Zukunft ohne uns* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2011).
[708] *Ibid*., p. 50.
[709] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Transhumanismus: „Die gefährlichste Idee der Welt"!?* (Freiburg: Herder, 2016).
[710] Cf. Sorgner, *Übermensch*, p. 7.

to agree with Sorgner when he writes that "[e]ither we continue to evolve and adapt to our environment, or we will soon no longer exist".[711]

A typical response to this predicament, and this is what constitutes the core of a specifically transhumanist approach, "lies exclusively in affirming the use of the latest technologies in order to promote the likelihood of a good life", Sorgner writes.[712] This is the trust that transhumanists display in their 'affirmative' approach to the technologically induced transformations of the present and future and their biological and social potential.[713] It is based on the belief that "in the not too distant future we will overcome numerous previous limits to our humanity".[714] In this sense, transhumanism de facto becomes the main proponent of a call for a contemporary "renewal of humanism":

[Transhumanism] embraces and amplifies central aspects of secular and Enlightenment humanist thought, such as belief in reason, individualism, science, progress, as well as self-perfection or cultivation.[715]

What, however, could be so dangerous about the good old humanistic idea of self-improvement? Are humans as such not defined by their desire for self-optimisation or by the old Rousseauist principle of perfectibility, at least from a humanist perspective?[716]

Peter Sloterdijk, on the other hand, sees humanism merely as what he calls a traditional form of "anthropotechnics",[717] or as a technique of "self-taming", but "[w]hat can tame man, when the role of humanism as the school for humanity has collapsed?", Sloterdijk asks, in his provocative "Elmau speech", published as "A Response to the [Heidegger's] *Letter on Humanism*":

What can tame men, when their previous attempts at self-taming have led primarily to power struggles? What can tame men, when, after all previous experiments to grow the species up, it remains unclear who or what educates the educators and for what purposes?[718]

From a CPH perspective, one would have to further ask about Sloterdijk's attempt to find "rules for the human zoo" – and this question, again, concerns the fundamental difference between posthumanism and transhumanism – who exactly is this 'self' that sesms to constantly presuppose the need for its own 'self-optimisation'?

This question about the human self-awareness of its imperfection is, so to speak, the necessary prerequisite for any idea of perfectibility, improvement, optimisation or enhancement of the human 'as such', and – this is the key issue – it is a question that is inextricably linked to the question about the origin of violence and the desire for justice I opened up above. The point here is not to question this question as such, because basically

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[711] *Ibid*.
[712] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[713] Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 7-8.
[714] Sorgner, *Übermensch*, p. 11.
[715] Ranisch and Sorgner, *Post- and Transhumanism*, p. 8.
[716] Cf. Also the previous chapter in this volume (Chapter 11).
[717] Cf. Kevin Liggieri, "Anthropotechnik", in: Martina Heßler und Kevon Liggieri, eds., *Technikanthropologie: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020), p. 309.
[718] Peter Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: a response to the *Letter on Humanism* [1999]", trans. Mary Varney Rorty, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 20, translation modified.

we all somehow wish for humans to become better, fairer, less violent, more prudent, more ecologically compatible, more sustainable, more intelligent, more empathetic, more satisfied with themselves and others, and so on. This in itself is already a form of 'moral' or 'ethical enhancement', one might say. However, it appears to have become increasingly urgent in times of climatic extinction threats and recurring or ongoing military conflicts between humans.

Would not the greatest improvement to the human be to make 'it' a little less aggressive and thus to prove the terminator wrong, namely that it is not necessarily in our so-called 'nature' to kill each other and in that process to also willingly accept the (collateral) damage done to nonhuman others, environments and objects this causes. The point here is not, as for example Michael J. Sandel does in his argument against perfection,[719] to call for or against a more precisely defined ways of enhancing the human, ways which are now supposedly available through so-called new technological, genetic of pharmacological, means. It is also not a question of whether a 'posthumanist' or even a 'posthuman' war (two very different notions) would be somehow 'better' than Russia's still fairly conventional war of aggression against Ukraine and the Western support for Ukraine's legitimate self-defense. It is rather unlikely that either a posthuman war (e.g. 'cyberwarfare') or indeed a posthumanist understanding of it would be less cruel to human and nonhuman animals and their environments just because it could be operated with drones, robots, cyborgs and AIs, rather than human soldiers andtheir 'conventional' weapons, even if this vision undoubtedly forms one of the militaristic aspects that has been inherent in posthumanist discourse since its beginnings in the 1980s.[720]

In the specific context of my argument here, however, I am more concerned with exploring the question of why war and violence persist *despite* humanism and *despite* the apparently innate desire for perfectibility and self-optimisation in humans. There are it seems two fundamentally different approaches in this respect: one that simply wants to further optimise this human 'self' and does so in following and continuing an Enlightenment trajectory, underpinned largely by Darwinian arguments and a notion of technology firmly based on instrumentalisation, even though, increasingly, technology and its development is seen as somehow 'autonomous'. This, transhumanist, approach places all its bets on technology and actively works towwards an evolutionary replacement of humans, on the grounds that human intelligence and moral nature are simply not well prepared enough for the inevitable outcome of technological progress, or in other words, they are simply 'antiquated' beyond any retrofitting.[721]

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[719] Michael J. Sandel, *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[720] Cf. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century [1985]", in: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-182; and Chris Hables Gray, ed., *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1996). For the idea of 'posthuman war' and animal suffering see Tim Blackmore, *War X* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) and Erika Cudworth und Steve Hobden, "The Posthuman Way of War", *Security Dialogue* 46.1 (2015): 513-529.

[721] The notion of human 'antiquatedness' or 'obsolesence' can be found in Günter Anders's work, although the conclusions he draws from, what he calls the "Promethean shame", that humans experience with regard to technological objects that surpass their creators' abilities, is of course very far removed from any transhumanist techno-euphoria. Cf. Christopher John Müller, *Prometheanism:*

The other, CPH, approach aims for an improvement not only of humans, but of the entire planetary situation, namely through a dismantling of the human(ist) self-image, or for its further 'decentering' and the deconstruction of anthropocentrism. The motivation for this is ethical, but its implementation is of course radically political. And it is in this sense, *pace* Sorgner, that one can certainly perceive CPH as much *more* dangerous or radical than any form of transhumanism and its idea of human self-surpassment.

Posthumanistic Politics Beyond Good and Evil, or, Let's Do the Correction Now!

If one looks for approaches to posthumanist politics, one immediately notices that there are very different forms. Braidotti's neo-materialist feminism following Haraway and others has already been mentioned. Bruno Latour's 'ecological turn' in his more recent texts towards 'terrianism'[722] embraces the strategy of making humans reconnect with nature, as Delphine Batho says in her *Écologie intégrale: Le Manifeste*: "The aim is to turn our belonging to Nature into the new engine of history".[723]

On the other hand, the impending natural and cultural catastrophes mean that we cannot avoid a confrontation with technology and the proponents of its apparent ever-increasing autonomy. Already early on in current the age of nuclear threat, Ernst Tugendhat wrote in *Nachdenken über die Atomkriegsgefahr und warum man sie nicht sieht* (Reflections on the Danger of Nuclear War and Why We Can't See It):

There is no rethinking of the fundamentally new forms of politics that would be required today. So humanity will probably perish because it can't seem to free itself from the political pressures and forms of behaviour that were adapted to a technological environment that now belongs to the past.[724]

Tugenhat's anti-nuclear stance today, ironically, serves as one of the most important arguments used by transhumanists for moral enhancement: technical and especially pharmacological intervention, they claim, is necessary to catch up with the pragmatic advantage technology has gained over the human and its moral obsolescence, or, as Jamie Suskind put it in *Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech*: "We are not yet ready – intellectually, philosophically or morally – for the world we are creating".[725] Which means that this is all about future politics – taken literally, namely, about the politics of the future, the future of politics and the future *as* politics. This cannot work without different

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Technology, Digital Culture and Human Obsolescence (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). See Chapter 13 for a more detailed discussion.

[722] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), and Latour, *Où suis-je? Leçons du confinement à l'usage des terrestres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2021).

[723] "Il s'agit de faire de notre appartenance à la Nature le nouveau moteur de l'histoire". Delphine Batho, *Écologie intégrale: Le Manifeste* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 2019), p. 13.

[724] "Ein Umdenken über die grundsätzlich neuen Formen der Politik, die heute erforderlich wären, findet nicht statt. So wird die Menschheit wahrscheinlich daran zugrunde gehen, daß sie sich offenbar von den politischen Druck- und Verhaltensformen nicht lösen kann, die zu einer technischen Umwelt paßten, welche der Vergangenheit angehört". Ernst Tugendhat, *Nachdenken über die Atomkriegsgefahr und warum man sie nicht sieht* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1986), p. 84.

[725] Jamie Suskind, *Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 1.

levels of anticipation, or more precisely, without *constructions* of the future. What is central in this political process is the distribution of power when it comes to the 'cultural technology' of anticipation. No wonder that science fiction is a key genre of our time, except that it is no longer about fiction but about *faction* – the deliberate and strategic blending of fiction and fact – or, 'science faction'.[726]

In the meantime, however, the war of aggression, as mentioned above, has returned to Europe – even though it had of course never completely disappeared, but was merely repressed from Europeans' minds. The war in Ukraine threatens (along with the conflict between Israel and its 'neighbours' again flaring up) to expand into a war that despite, or precisely because, of the intensifying global entanglement of technological, economic, social and microbiological 'networks' is becoming a war of all against all: military, civilians, hackers, states, media, terrorists and increasingly dangerous 'invisible' enemies such as viruses, algorithms and 'disruptive' technologies that threaten to bring about the so-called 'great disruption' [*der große Umbruch*], as Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret call it.[727] Interestingly, the English title of the book, *The Great Reset*, uses a computer analogy to highlight the digital context in which this upheaval is taking place. The idea behind the 'great reset' is thus to transform or disrupt the global digitalised 'base', or the planetary infrastructure, and 'reset' it. It is worth pointing out, however, that the idea of a reset is also one of the central ideologemes of what Frédéric Neyrat calls contemporary transhumanist 'geoconstructivism'. In *La Part inconstructible de la terre: Critique du géo-constructivisme*[728] Neyrat speaks of an underlying dangerous phantasm, namely that "geo-constructivism (…) maintains that the Earth, and everything on it – ecosystems and organisms, human and nonhuman – can and must be rebuilt, reshaped and reformed. Entirely".[729]

It is, however, a purely phantasmatic future policy, for this other, new planet does not exist, of course, and evoking it solely aims is to distract us from current power structures and inequalities – all in the name of a "biopolitics of catastrophes", as Neyrat calls it,[730] and always ultimately motivated by and in the name of some humanism.

War, aggression and counter-offensive, violence and retribution are ultimately always waged for more or less cynically 'humanistic' reasons – claimed by both sides! There *is* no opposition between humanism and war, rather a kind of problematic interdependence between violence and justice, an aporia that Walter Benjamin was well aware of[731] and one that Derrida fully

[726] Cf. Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 107-134.

[727] Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret, *Covid-19: Der große Umbruch* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2020); Schwab and Malleret, *Covid-19: The Great Reset* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2020).

[728] Translated as *The Unconstructable Earth: An Ecology of Separation*, trans. Drew S. Burk (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

[729] "[L]e géo-constructivisme […] soutient que la Terre, et tout ce qu'elle contient – écosystèmes et organismes, humains et non-humains –, *peut* et *doit* être reconstruite, réformée et reformée. Entièrement". Frédéric Neyrat, *La Part inconstructible de la terre: Critique du géo-constructivisme* (Paris : Seuil, 2016), p. 11.

[730] Frédéric Neyrat, *Biopolitique des catastrophes* (Paris: Éditions MF, 2008).

[731] Walter Benjamin, "Zur Kritik der Gewalt [1920/21]", in: *Sprache und Geschichte: Philosophische Essays* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992), pp. 104-131.

exposed.[732] The cynicism of contemporary cosmopolitan and humanistic 'war-peace [*Krieg-Frieden*], as Ulrich Beck called it, is, so to speak, the ultimate example of this aporetic alliance between violence and justice:

The hope that after the end of the bipolar order a cosmopolitan world idyll would emerge and that nations would join hands in peaceful coexistence under the canopy of international law has fallen apart. At the beginning of the third millennium, it is not the peace of law, but open, unlimited, molecular violence that forms the signature of the emerging second modernity (…). A trap of double blackmail has opened up: if you are against humanitarian interventions, then you are for ethnic cleansing, for crimes against humanity; however, if you are against ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, then you must approve of the new 'war-peace' of 'military humanism'.[733]

How can one still make any coherent sense of this? How can one accept the inevitability of military, technological, microbiological or ecological catastrophes, or indeed a combination of all of these, and still believe in a new, better humanity? But maybe the politics of the future are not about future utopias at all, but rather about a certain *unlearning*.

Unlearning *Humanism and the Question of Justice, or, Better Does not Necessarily Mean Good*

It is not just digitalisation or biotechnology or their combination that is causing humanism and its educational policies to fail as 'taming techniques', to use Sloterdijk's term. A new "digital humanism" as called for by Julian Nida-Rümelin and Nathalie Weidenfeld would have to be "both technology and human-friendly".[734] However, even if that were possible, this would still fall short of tackling the real question of moral enhancement and human improvement. Because all of this is still avoiding the analysis of the origin of human violence and the willingness to use it against its own and other species, a behaviour that has made humans so successful from an evolutionary, demographic and economic perspective. Successful as well as devastating, harmful and cruel from an ecological as well as social point of view, both for (at least a significant part of) humanity itself and for its nonhuman companions, slaves, rivals and enemies.

Today, more and more humans seem to be thinking that the world would probably be a better place without humans, or that there would be less violence and more justice 'after' or 'without' humans. Maybe, some argue, it might even be better if humanity or humans had never existed – the ultimate form of repression, one might say. Better (for whom?), obviously, does not necessarily mean good. Achieving non-violence, or at least radically reduced violence, and ethical-political-social justice would must remain central, earthly, goals for CPH. Even if CPH evidently cannot position itself 'beyond' violence, it is committed to the ongoing "critique of violence" in the sense of a Benjamin, a Derrida and also a Judith Butler. However, this cannot simply mean that there will be an entirely other, non-violent, posthuman future

[732] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'", in: Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson, eds., *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-67.
[733] Ulrich Beck, *Der Kosmopolitische Blick, oder: Krieg ist Frieden* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 232-233.
[734] Julian Nida-Rümelin and Nathalie Weidenfeld, *Digitaler Humanismus: Eine Ethik für das Zeitalter der Künstlichen Intelligenz* (München: Piper, 2018), p. 15.

without violence, as for example some transhumanists might imagine, based on the idea that technologically enhanced posthumans will be *beyond* violence. Nevertheless, non-violence necessarily must remain the horizon of any moral human improvement, as Mahatma Ghandi famously demanded, in 1946, with the atrocities of WWII still freshly in mind: "The world of tomorrow will be, must be, a society based on non-violence."[735]

Judith Butler's approach to the question in fact comes very close to conceiving a no-longer-quite-humanistic notion of non-violence. In *The Force of Non-Violence*[736] she takes up her concept of "grievability",[737] and pursues her inquiry of "when is (a) life grievable?" and situates it within the framework of a theory of non-violence. She begins by outlining the original social connection between violence and non-violence:

There is a sense in which violence done to another is at once a violence done to the self (…). [I]f the one who practices non-violence is related to the one against whom violence is contemplated, then there appears to be a prior social relation between them; they are part of one another, or one self is implicated in another self. Nonviolence would, then, be a way of acknowledging that social relation, however fraught it may be, and of affirming the normative aspirations that follow from that prior social relatedness.[738]

Butler thus presupposes an interrelation that actually *precedes* any possible use of violence and which is a precondition for the emergence of a separation between self and other in the first place – which, in fact, represents a combination of Levinasian and Derridean ethics. The question of (legitimate) self-defense, which is normally used in this context to undermine or delimit the idea of non-violence, is not ignored by Butler, but it is itself questioned: the self, which is always already presupposed in the idea of self-defense and which, precisely, is what must necessarily be defended with 'just' force, is, however, *itself* the result of a previous selection process. This selection process alone can create the kind of 'ipseity' or the possibility of autoaffection', as Derrida would probably call it, that is necessary to speak of and as a self. Hwever, it is this selection that is then, only subsequently, used to define what can count as a self, and which then becomes 'grievable' once violence is used against it, or when its right to a life of non-violence becomes enforceable. Butler consequently asks:

Once we see that certain selves are considered worth defending while others are not, is there not a problem of inequality that follows from the justification of violence in the service of self-defense?[739]

Thus far Butler's far-reaching questioning of the connection between violence, non-violence and legitimate self-defense is probably still compatible with (even if a somewhat radicalised understanding of) humanism. However, in the process, Butler also opens up an entirely other perspective, without consistently pursuing it herself, when she writes: "The relations that bind and define extend beyond the dyadic human encounter, which is why non-violence pertains not only to human relations, but to all living and inter-constitutive relations".[740] And this, I

[735] Mahatma Ghandi, "World of Tomorrow", *The Selected Works of Mahatma Ghandi*, vol. 5, *The Voice of Truth*; available online at: https://www.mkgandhi.org/voiceoftruth/world.htm (accessed 12/11/2023). .
[736] Judith Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020).
[737] Cf. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).
[738] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[739] Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, p. 11.
[740] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

would argue, is exactly where CPH's criticism of violence would have to begin to pursue an idea of non-violence *before* and perhaps even *without* humans so to speak.

Even in the extreme case of war (between humans), as we know, there is never only human loss to mourn. Not only do humans commit unspeakable violence against other humans, but (even in what human my call peacetime), they inflict even greater violence on nonhumans. Within an anthropocentric-humanist paradigm, however, nonhuman life forms are rarely 'grievable' in Butler's sense. And that is exactly what needs to change, not out of pure love for nonhuman animals or some sentimentality – this is not some 'luxury problem' in the age of global violence – but for very pragmatic as well as normative reasons. What is needed, one could say, is a transition from the predominant forms of 'anthropolitics', which always focus on human interests, to a 'postanthropolitics', a move that would also go beyond the usual violent dialectic of dehumanisation and animalisation. In other words, the greatest moral improvement for humans and nonhumans would be if humans could finally overcome their ambivalent attitude towards their own animal bodies. This is precisely where the metaphysics of humanism is most to blame. It is the humanist notion of human exceptionalism that has always relied on and sanctioned the repression of our own biological physicality and our resulting fundamental and violent separation and exclusion from nonhuman animals – an exclusion mechanism that as a 'technique' can also function in all sorts of other contexts, as Florence Burgat says in her foreword to Patrice Rouget's *La Violence de l'humanisme*: "[W]hy do we have to persecute animals? (…) what metaphysical humanism forges is the mechanism of exclusion, which then can slide like a cursor".[741]

Cary Wolfe goes to the core of this process in an interview with the *New York Times* with the title "Is Humanism Really Humane?":

As long as you take it for granted that it's O.K. to commit violence against animals simply because of their biological designation, then that same logic will be available to you to commit violence against any other being, of whatever species, human or not, that you can characterize as 'lower' or more 'primitive' form of life.[742]

According to Lynn Worsham, anthropocentrism is ultimately based on a kind of "deflection", a form of "self-distraction" or repression that allows one to speak of "humans" (as such) in opposition to "animals" (as such). It is this categorisation that legitimises violence and which is closely linked to a logic of substitutive victims.[743] This can only be explained as a distraction from the primal traumatic realisation that we are all transient as biological beings. It is a "reaction-formation" that serves to "deflect awareness" and to repress "what we human and

[741] "[P]ourquoi nous faut-il persécuter les animaux? […] ce que forge l'humanisme métaphysique, c'est le mécanisme de l'exclusion, dont il fait uniquement varier le curseur". Florence Burgat, "Preface", in : Patrice Rouget, *La Violence de l'humanisme: Pourquoi nous faut-il persécuter les animaux ?* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 2014), pp. 9-10.

[742] Cary Wolfe, "Is Humanism Really Humane?" Interview with Natasha Lennard, *The New York Times* (9 Jan 2017); available online at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/opinion/is-humanism-really-humane.html (accessed 14/11/2023).

[743] Lynn Worsham, "Toward an Understanding of Human Violence: Cultural Studies, Animal Studies, and the Promise of Posthumanism", *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 35.1 (2013): 721ff.

nonhuman animals share", in Worsham's words. It our "problematic relationship to our own animality".[744]

This must therefore form the starting point for CPH's critique of violence, namely to keep insisting on the common vulnerability and finiteness of all living things so that we may come to terms with and continue to deconstruct the traumatising logic of victimisation and the expressions of violence it sustains. Again, it is precisely here – to return to the differentiation between CPH and transhumanism – that the transhumanist dream of a technological transfer of our animal body into some kind of digital immortality runs the risk of being nothing else than merely a continuation of this violence-producing primordial repression.

And Finally: Best Wishes… from the Terminator

To return one last time to the terminator and to let 'him' have the last word in a kind of test case scenario – which, after all, is 'his' purpose, namely to have and be the last word on the question of humanity and its hope that the machine will make it somehow better. At the end of the film, the terminator is duly 'sacrificed' according to the same logic that all other 'subhuman' species are subjected to according to their 'killability' under anthropocentric-humanist conditions. Even the terminator thus falls victim to human violence – symbolically at least. After the machine has shown us what might actually make us human, it must pay the ultimate price and disappear. And, since Arnold is now a 'good' machine, 'he' sees, or even suggests, this 'himself', and switches 'himself' off voluntarily. However, more and more humans seem to doubt that the 'machine' will carry on doing us this favour in the future. Some can hardly wait for this to happen. However, until the history of human violence is fundamentally addressed and worked through, it is difficult to imagine how any posthuman (again, certainly not the same as a posthuman*ist*) future could be in any way better than the past.

[744] *Ibid.*, pp. 730ff.

Conclusion: Dehumanisation, or, Humanism Without Humans

> Müssen wir Unmenschen werden, um die Menschheit zu retten?[745]
>
> [I]t has become much easier for us to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories.[746]

Is (un)learning to be human as a 'programme' for CPH not more than a little counterintuitive but maybe outright suicidal at a time when we, humans, are witnessing again some of the worst kind of dehumanisation on around us? The ongoing war of attrition in Ukraine, the images of the barbaric actions committed by Hamas terrorists, the humanitarian crisis as a result of Israeli retribution, these might be seen to spell an entirely undesirable form of 'unlearning to be human'. Is it enough for me to dissociate myself from this stubbornly humanist take on the phrase by saying: this is not at all what I mean by (un)learning? Will CPH not inevitably be placed alongside these general and apparently timeless tendencies of 'dehumanisation' that our so-called 'posthuman times' seem to imply? From a humanist point of view, dehumanisation is taking away what is ultimately most precious about humans, their dignity, the dignity of the human victim just, as much as that of the human perpetrator of violence, a violence that works both psychologically (by 'seeing' the other human as somehow 'less than human', or at least as a 'human that does not count as fully human') and physically (by treating the other human as nonhuman animal, as object, as 'material'). The only antidote to this from of humans' falling short of their own (humanist) moral standards is a reminder of what 'we' *really* are, namely… and this is, precisely, where it becomes difficult. Humanists must appeal to some form of 'essence', an essential truth and a universally attributed sense of self or identity, shared by all members of the species, and of which dehumanisation is, consequently, a "fundamental moral misrecognition".[747]

The impossibility of this (humanist) logic, for Richard Rorty, is reason enough to stop asking "what humans actually are" (or what is our 'nature'?) and instead focus on "what humans can actually do" (or what can we make of ourselves?) – following through on the liberal pragmatism his work stands for. Rorty transforms the question of why some humans treat other humans as animals into why do humans who are aware of the fact that some humans treat other humans as animals still do not do anything about it. In other words, and more concretely, what should the liberal democratic cosmopolitan "West" do in a conflict like the one, for example, between Israelis and Palestinians, or between Russians and the Ukranians, where, like in any war of humans against humans, dehumanisation happens on both sides, or as Rorty puts it: "there seems to be no point in human beings getting involved in the quarrels between animals".[748] Rorty cuts to the chase so to speak by dismissing the entire argument about Kantian versus Nietzschean notions of why humans should be 'good' and returns

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[745] "Do we have to become non-humans to save humanity?" Hans Jonas, cited Carl Amery, *Die Botschaft des Jahrtausends: Von Leben, Tod und Würde* (Paul List: Munich, 1994), p. 102.

[746] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality", in *Truth and Moral Progress: Philosophical Papers 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 185.

[747] Adrienne de Ruiter, quoted in Sophia Smith Galer, "The Harm Caused by Dehumanising Language", *BBC Future* (31 October 2023); available online at: https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20231030-the-real-life-harm-caused-by-dehumanising-language (accessed 16/11/2023).

[748] Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality", p. 168.

instead to the classical (Renaissance) starting point of human "malleability": "we are coming to think of ourselves [again, one might say] as the flexible, protean, self-shaping animal rather than the rational animal or the cruel animal", Rorty claims.[749] From such a 'pragmatic' point of view "nothing relevant to moral choice separates human beings from animals except historically contingent facts of the world, cultural facts".[750] The political challenge is thus not to 'purify' but to *extend* the kind of 'moral community' of humans by embracing the fact that the values that people in the West predominantly see as worth defending and worth disseminating. These are the values 'we' associate with 'humaneness' in the sense of human rights and humanitarian ethics, and they do not need asking questions about 'human nature' or essentially 'inhuman' behaviour or motivations. Instead of asking metaethical questions (the ones that dominate the discussion about dehumanisation that follows below), Rorty proposes that the best way to extend the positive message of 'human rights culture' is not by increasing moral knowledge (e.g. about what the true nature of humans might be) but by telling 'sad stories' about how humans treat themselves and thus to create empathy where there wasn't any or at least not enough before. As in any of Rorty's arguments here also is a good deal of provocation, of course. It would be wrong, however, in my view, to dismiss his ideas on the basis that they seem to be based on, to sanction and to even promote traditional 'Western' ideals of cultural supremacy and universalism. Rorty's real target here as elsewhere is 'foundationalism' or 'essentialism' and this, in my view, remains an important element for CPH and its project of '(un)learning to be human'. It undoubtedly requires an element of "sentimental education", as Rorty calls it, not only about how to extend the moral community called 'humanity' but also, importantly, to go beyond its exclusivity. Empathy, between members of the same species, but maybe even more importantly across species and which may ultimately include even (some) technical 'objects', 'processes', environments, assemblages, networks and so on, works best if it is not an innate and species-specific trait. But, and this is Rorty's main message as I read it, we need to know what we want and fight for it without anchoring it to some form of moral superiority, or indeed to human exceptionalism. Rorty hints at this himself, when he says: "The relevant similarities are not a matter of sharing a deep true self that instantiates true humanity, but are such little, superficial similarities as cherishing our parents and our children – similarities that do not distinguish us in any interesting way from many nonhuman animals".[751]

(Un)learning to be human – and I am insisting on the brackets around the 'un' – signals the problem that humanism always needs to presuppose some human 'essence' that must be defended from dehumanisation while it is precisely this 'essence' that always remains humanism's big secret. Humanism defends something it does not really know, even worse, that is defined in a way that it must remain unknowable. As a discourse that sets out to explain what it means to be human, humanism places the human at its centre as 'that which remains to be defined'. In fact, in order to keep itself alive, or to legitimate itself as the most powerful, accurate and authoritative source of an eventual answer to this question of 'what makes us humans human?' it must do two things at the same time: it must 'posit' *the* human as its

[749] *Ibid.*, p. 170.
[750] *Ibid*.
[751] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

'object' of knowledge, while speaking to human 'subjects' (in their irreducible plurality and difference) and make them see and agree on what they *really* are. In order to both see and *become* what they really are, however, humans need to accept the moral values humanism promotes as 'natural' and 'universal' (even though they are of course the outcome of a very particular cultural history – a history with quite a few very unsavoury aspects). Humans are thus asked to become what they have always already been, in fact, if they had had the knowledge that they nevertheless had to be 'taught' (by humanists). Apart from this obvious tautological reasoning at work here which alone should be enough for some 'intrinsic' scepticism there is also the challenge from 'outside' so to speak: given the fact that humanism did not emerge within a cultural historical void but in post-Renaissance and colonial Europe the 'universalism' of its 'human nature' will always have an undertone that will make those humans who were originally the main victims of dehumanisation (women, slaves, non-whites) feel a little 'uncomfortably' to say the least.[752]

What I thus mean by (un)learning is not denying the fact that one has to learn (and thus to be taught) to be human even though 'biologically' one may be born into this 'species', but as we know from paleoanthropology, species including our own have always had somewhat fuzzy edges.[753] Feminists following Simone de Beauvoir will recognise the analogy of this move. We will need narratives that explain humanity *outside* the dominant humanist versions. This is what CPH is all about. However, (un)learning is also not simply re-learning because there is nothing secure to go back to. We have *never* been human in the way humanism told us we were or weren't. Another thing that (un)learning does not mean, however, is that we can be anything we want to be since we have never been what we were told. (Un)learning is not a denial of all those things humans have been and will be responsible for, on the contrary. It is not about giving humans back some form of 'freedom' to decide what they want to be, but rather it is a way of finally holding them to account for what they have done – to the planet, to nonhuman others, and themselves. It is a learning process and a process of undoing, at the same time. As a teacher one should never underestimate the educational value of negativity, as long as that does not give in to radical nihilism. This is also not to deny that there are numerous human 'achievements' even though being 'proud' of them might be somewhat displaced given their costs to humans, nonhumans and the planet. (Un)learning to be human should, however, not be seen as a new form of 'Promethean' or indeed 'Epimethean shame'[754] in the sense that it may be some form of atonement for 'our' sins. It is not meant as a Catholic or religious exercise leading to some piety or sanctity. Nobody cares about the whole planetary quandary we are responsible for but us, humans. As far as (moral) responsibility goes we are the only ones capable of that, if we are really looking for some degree zero of exceptionalism. We need to care precisely because we are the only ones who can and in doing

[752] To give just one powerful and recent example of such a critique let me refer to Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in the Anti-Black World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

[753] Cf. my *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[754] Cf. Günther Anders for "Promethean Shame", in Christopher Müller, *Prometheanism: Technology, Digital Culture and Human Obsolescence* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) and Bernard Stiegler for what one might call "Epimethean Shame". Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time I, The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

so, we will also start caring more both for ourselves and our selves. However, this should not be taken as a Trumpist call to make humans great again. Far from it, is all about humility, but not meekness.

(Un)learning is thus a process of deconstruction – the deconstruction of humanism – to save the world from humans and humans form themselves. In the rest of this conclusion I would like to briefly sketch some of the implications of the idea of (un)learning to be human as it has informed the individual chapters of this volume and CPH more generally – a very rudimentary roadmap for the immediate future, one might say.

Humans Without, not: Without Humans

> [Le bourreau] peut tuer un homme, mais il ne peut pas le changer en autre chose.[755]

First we need to acknowledge once again the central insight of (early) humanism and confirmed throughout the ages, namely that we do not really know what humans are and that we very likely will never know, or maybe better, that we will never be able to agree upon some kind of 'essence', 'nature' or exceptional 'ability' that should definitely make us 'human'. However, we also need to acknowledge, in the absence of all those intelligent life forms we may or may not one day encounter, that it is highly unlikely that any other species is asking itself any similar questions about their essence and identity, at least not at a philosophically abstract, metaphysical, level than us. What is important, however, is that the second aspect is not a necessary precondition for the first, in other words, this is not a justification for looking down on other species as somehow 'less evolved' or 'less than human'. It is enough to recognise the human 'difference' without attributing values of superiority to it.

One might call this minimal conception of humanness as 'human without', using Martin Crowley's term.[756] Crowley takes his cue from a passage in Jean-Luc Nancy's *Être singulier pluriel*,[757] which he translates thus: "In order for the human to be discovered, and in order for the phrase 'human meaning' to acquire some meaning, everything that has ever laid claim to the truth about the nature, essence, or end of 'man' must be undone".[758] This is Nancy's (and Crowley's) attempt at freeing the concept of the human from centuries of humanism while redefining human responsibility in postanthropocentric times. In other words, after divesting the human from all its traditional humanist characteristics used to set it apart as unique from both nonhuman animals and machines, the only thing to redefine both the human and its relationship to the planet is that of an unreserved, but no longer anthropocentric, responsibility. One might call this a 'residual' humanness which however cannot be translated into some kind of 'characteristic'. It can only be affirmed through the process of (self)divestment of the human without (qualities), or the human as "vestigial", as Crowley

[755] "The executioner can kill a human, but they cannot change it into something else." Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* [1947] (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 230.
[756] Originally, '*l'homme sans*' in Martin Crowley, *L'Homme sans: Politiques de la finitude* (Paris: Lignes, 2009).
[757] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 11.
[758] Quoted in Martin Crowley, "The Human Without", *Oxford Literary Review* 27.1 (2005): 68.

writes:[759] "The *human without* is the human exposed to global injustice, and the vestigial, angry resistance to this injustice… [it is] the resisting name of the exposure we share with every being".[760] One might call this, with Nancy, a residual or vestigial "humanity without humanism",[761] which, as will be very clear, is quite the opposite of all the ambient ('posthuman') extinction scenarios that play with the idea of a 'world without humans'.

Nancy's (and Crowley's) approach is the result of a very specific line of argument that comes down to us from the experience of the Holocaust in writers like Robert Antelme, Primo Levi, Jean Améry and others, taken up by Levinas, Blanchot, Foucault, Derrida and others in the discussion of the 'end(s) of man' (and the notion of 'survival' [*survivance*]) in the 1970s and 1980s). The most iconic (and most paradoxical) statement in this respect and which addresses the unthinkable (and therefore that which is in most urgent need to be thought) shared humanity of both victims and executioners is Blanchot's comment on Antelme's *Espèce humaine* (1947): "l'homme est indestructible et (…) pourtant il peut être détruit",[762] which does away with the triumphalism of traditional humanism, and instead focuses on shared vulnerability, as Levinas, writes, for example: "in spite of all its generosity, Western humanism has never managed to doubt triumph or understand failure or conceive of a history in which the vanquished and the persecuted might have some value".[763]

A comparable trajectory for a necessary human 'divestment' – the kind of (un)learning I have been advocating – could also undoubtedly be constructed through a closer investigation of the predominantly German speaking tradition of 'negative anthropology', following on from Helmuth Plessner and taken up by Theodor Adorno, Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Ulrich Sonnemann, Ulrich Horstmann, Odo Marquard, Hans Blumenberg, Dietmar Kamper, Norbert Bolz and others,[764] ultimately translating in the kind of 'critical humanism' advocated by the Frankfurt School with its very own working though of the Enlightenment tradition, its ideals and shortcomings – a complex undertaking that I will have to postpone to another time and occasion.[765] However, it is quite obvious that the idea of an ultimately

[759] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[760] *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
[761] Nancy, *Les Muses* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), p. 122; quoted in Crowley, "The Human Without", p. 77.
[762] "The human is indestructible and yet it may be destroyed". Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 192. See also Daniel Dobbels, ed., *Robert Antelme : Textes inédits sur* L'Espèce humaine – *Essais et témoignages* (Paris : Gallimard, 1996), and Martin Crowley, *Robert Antelme : Humanity, Community, Testimony* (Oxford : Legenda, 2003), as well as Améry's *Radical Humanism: Selected Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Another key text in this debate is of course Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* [197s] (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).
[763] Emmanuel Levinas, "Antihumanism and Education", *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* [1963] (London: Athlone, 1990), p. 282.
[764] This is something I referred to in "Posthumanism's German Genealogies", a keynote delivered at "Posthumanism and the Posthuman: Chances and Challenges", University of London, March 2023, which awaits its further elaboration and publication but can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_2VRY-u-II (accessed 17/11/2023).
[765] For an overview see Hannes Bajohr and Sebastian Edinger, eds., *Negative Anthropologie: Ideengeschichte und Systematik einer unausgeschöpften Denkfigur* (Berlin:; De Gruyter, 2021) and

undefinable human, its constant 'disappearance', can easily be found in Plessner's notion of the *homo absconditus* or Anders's notion of human '*Weltfremdheit*' (alienation from the world). They thus, in turn, call for a kind of (un)learning of the traditional humanistic ways of making sense of the human and question traditional forms of legitimation of anthropocentrism. The 'strange' evasiveness that compromises any attempt to pin down a human 'nature', for negative anthropology becomes the most human characteristic as such. Contemporary readers of negative anthropology can therefore draw a direct line between the beginning of the 20th and the 21st centuries in which a different (arguably, through the process of (un)learning now deconstructed) notion of the human returns in the new context of the 'Anthropocene'.[766] For the kind of CPH I have been arguing for in my own work, however, even a negative anthropology, which does not pretend to know who or what the human *is* or *might be* is still, of course, inevitably focused on the *Anthropos* and its (increasingly problematic) 'centrality'. Hence my suggestion of an (un)learning process, at a time when humans realise and learn afresh their relationality and entanglement with nonhuman others, without however ignoring their 'difference', and also without deducing any exceptionality from this apart from a heightened sense of responsibility. CPH might thus re-engage with the human in the form of a 'negative *post*-anthropology', whose aim it must be to work through our 'residual' humanness as divested of any known form humanism. Whether this would still be a recognisable 'anthropology' is another question, since nonhumans would play at least as central a part in it as humans.[767]

Dehumanisation

> [A]nimalization is not incompatible with humanization: what is commonly deemed dehumanization is, in the main, more accurately interpreted as the violence of humanization or the burden of inclusion into a racially hierarchized universal humanity.[768]

Christian Dries, *Die Welt als Vernichtungslager: Eine kritische Theorie der Moderne im Anschluss an Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt und Hans Jonas* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012).

[766] This is the underlying argument in a number of recent publications, like Hannes Bajohr's, *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän: Die Wiederkehr des Menschen im Moment seiner vermeintlich endgültigen Verabschiedung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), but also already in Dietmar Kamper and Christian Wulf, eds., *Anthropologie nach dem Tode des Menschen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), Andreas Steffens, *Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts oder Die Wiederkehr des Menschen* (Leipzig, Reclam, 1999), Bernd Flessner, ed., *Nach dem Menschen: Der Mythos einer zweiten Schöpfung und das Entstehen einer posthumanen Kultur* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2000) and Bernhard Irrgang, *Posthumanes Menschsein? Künstliche Intelligenz, Cyberspace, Roboter, Cyborgs und Designer-Menschen – Anthropologie des künstlichen Menschen im 21. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005). Also noteworthy in this context are Raimar Zons, *Die Zeit des Menschen: Zur Kritik des Posthumanismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001) and Stefan Rieger, *Kybernetische Anthropologie: Eine Geschichte der Virtualität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003).

[767] Again, there are noteworthy and ground-breaking beginnings in, for example, Tim Ingold's work. Cf. his recent *Anthropology as/and Education* (London: Routledge, 2018), and the "Interlude 2: Animism Without Humans, or Belief without Belief", in my *Before Humanity*, pp. 81-112.

[768] Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in the Anti-Black World*, p. 18.

'Extracting' the human from its traditional humanist discourse and before 'refilling' it with any alternative positive content, so to speak, we have to, in a second move, repose the question of dehumanisation, because CPH will inevitably be accused of either downplaying and ignoring, or, indeed, exacerbating existing dehumanising trends.

As far as the undeniably necessary resistance to dehumanisation is concerned, this is not without conceptual problems. If CPH's ethical and political programme is 'postanthropocentrism' then this inevitably involves a (further) 'decentring' of the human, a (further) prolematisation of humanist notions of human exceptionalism and a (further) erosion of traditional boundaries between humans and nonhuman others. Humanists would see this as a kind of (re)opening of the gates to hell: a return to the barbarity of violence against humans, genocide, a challenge to human rights, humanitarianism, an attack on the inviolable sanctity and dignity of human life and so on, or the slippery slope of 'dehumanisation'. If (un)learning were to be *mis*understood along these lines (the brackets around the 'un' of (un)learning is my way of highlighting but also of addressing this anxiety) this would mean that we go along with the equation that underpins humanist morality, namely that challenging humanism and its value system is the same as challenging the human, or 'humanity' *as such*. CPH would look like a 'crime against humanity'. No wonder there is so much resistance, but it is a misguided one, because it actually undersells the human and what it can and should do. Ultimately, the humanist notion of the impossible but necessary idea of human perfectibility betrays a fundamental distrust in 'human nature'. Humans need to be humanised by (moral) education because anything else would play into the hands of its opposite, namely dehumanisation, barbarity, animality. It would mean not achieving our 'potential' – a cardinal sin in humanism's eyes, which always seems to have a clear idea of what this potential actually is. There is a German saying for this that captures everything that is problematic about this view: *den inneren Schweinehund überwinden*. It means to overcome one's baser instincts, but literally it is about overcoming this strange beast or chimera of a 'swine-dog', i.e. the combined negative stereotypes attributed to dogs and pigs.

Most theories of dehumanisation and violence of humans committed against humans start from the idea that humans are capable of inhuman behaviour because they somehow deny some humans their full humanness (which of course requires that there is at least some vague notion of what humanness entails to start with). Nick Haslam discusses dehumanisation from a social psychological view as an "everyday social phenomenon, rooted in ordinary social-cognitive processes".[769] He usefully (but also somewhat predictably) differentiates between 'animalistic dehumanisation' which denies members of an outgroup 'uniquely human characteristics' like cultural 'refinement', 'moral sensibility' or 'rationality' by 'animalising' members of a perceived outgroup, whereas 'mechanistic dehumanisaton' denies uniquely human traits like 'agency', 'individuality', 'depth' and so on by 'objectifiying' them. It is the classical Cartesian way of sanctioning human exceptionalism through a rational 'human nature' denied to both machines and animals as our main (significant) nonhuman others:

[769] Nick Haslam, "Dehumanization: An Integrative View", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10.3 (2006): 252.

> Animalistic dehumanization involves denial of UH [Uniquely Human] attributes, typically to essentialized outgroups in the context of a communal representation of the ingroup. It is often accompanied by emotions of contempt and disgust that reflect an implicit vertical comparison and by a tendency to explain others' behaviour in terms of desires and wants rather than cognitive states. Mechanistic dehumanization, in contrast, involves the objectifying denial of essentially human attributes to people toward whom the person feels psychologically distant and socially unrelated. It is often accompanied by indifference, a lack of empathy, an abstract and deindividuated view of others that indicates an implicit horizontal separation from self, and a tendency to explain the other's behaviour in nonintentional, causal terms.[770]

To be fair to Haslam, the usefulness of this classification lies – this is its social psychological objective – in explaining and interpreting existing social behaviour, or, as he writes in a more recent study, in demonstrating the importance of "folk conceptions of humanness and dehumanization".[771] David Livingstone Smith deflects the debate about dehumanisation by complicating what actually 'happens' during acts of "conceiving of people as subhuman creatures rather than as human beings".[772] The important insight Smith contributes (he is of course not alone nor the first I doing so) is that "[t]aking away a person's individuality isn't the same as obliterating their humanity. An anonymous human is still human".[773] One might just as well say: a dehumanised, or "an inferior human is still human"[774] – which is precisely the point of the discussion about Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* outlined above. Perpetrators of Nazi violence against Jews in concentration camps were very much aware that their victims were humans, just that they somehow perceived their humanity as less important, less developed, less worthy of what it *truly* means to be human, precisely because they seemed to be certain of what true humanity entails and what subhumanness therefore lacks. And this is of course where the availability of subhuman characteristics matter. Where are you going to find those characteristics that you can liken subhumanness to? Smith explains dehumanisation, ultimately, through a misguided essentialism: "Dehumanized people are imagined as subhuman animals, because they are conceived as having a subhuman essence [i.e. they are human only in 'appearance']".[775] For Smith dehumanising ultimately is "an

[770] *Ibid.*, p. 262.

[771] Cf. Haslam and Samuel Wilson, "Is the Future more or less Human? Differing Views of Humanness in the Posthumanism Debate", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 39.2 (2009): 247. Again, quite predictably, Haslam and Wilson exclusively focus on the technological side of the "posthumanism debate" and expose the differing notions of 'human nature' that underlie people's attitude towards human-technological enhancement. This time the argument is more about essentialised and non-essentialised views of human nature which determines whether people are in favour of transhumanist ideas or whether they oppose them, or, whether becoming 'posthumans' would be a process that would extend humanness or would be a process of (self)dehumanisation by technological means, so to speak.

[772] David Livingstone Smith, *Less than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011), p. 26. See also his *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) which further develops Smith's approach but in my view does not substantially extend or change it.

[773] *Less that Human*, p. 27.

[774] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[775] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

unconscious strategy for dealing with psychological conflict", namely as a way to "override inhibitions against committing acts of violence".[776] He is, however, not entirely prepared, as opposed to Rorty in his pragmatic and social constructivist account of human violence referred to above, to let go of a biological and evolutionary account of human 'nature' because as he argues, rather than asking "what can we make of ourselves?" (i.e Rorty's focus), we need to acknowledge that "what we can make of ourselves is constrained by what we are".[777]

There is thus what Adrienne de Ruiter refers to as a "paradox of dehumanisation", since it seems that dehumanisation requires that "perpetrators simultaneously deny and acknowledge the humanity of their victims".[778] The model she proposes is based on a distinction between different types of human status that can be denied in dehumanisation. Humans can be denied their biological status, their psychological subjectivity and their normative standing, so that de Ruiter can say that:

> while dehumanisers generally (although not necessarily) acknowledge the biological status that people typically share, such as a highly developed consciousness, a sense of identity and particular semiotic and moral sensibilities, this does not entail that perpetrators are also bound to recognise the human status of their victims in a normative sense. Dehumanisation thus loses its paradoxical character, given that persons can consider others as less than human in a moral sense without necessarily regarding them as falling outside the human species or lacking human subjectivity.[779]

So rather than the denial of some human 'essence', as Smith thinks, it may be the 'moral status' (or 'subjectivity') that may be denied to victimised or dehumanised humans.

I think what becomes clear from this sketch of what is an ongoing debate largely within psychological corners about how to explain what dehumanisation is, why it is going on and what can be done about it, is that, fundamentally, whether it is nature or culture, whether it is stereotyping or scapegoating, innate evil in the species or only certain abnormal individuals – the human, if such a thing exists,[780] cannot be trusted. A certain level of (at least strategic) misanthropy (of which more below) is undoubtedly a motivation behind CPH and the notion of '(un)learning to be human' as advocated here.

One way of trying to get closer to this paradox – not just the paradox of dehumanisation, but rather the one of humanisation in the first place – is by asking: what are we *before* we become humans, in the humanist sense, or before the entire dialectic of humanisation and dehumanisation (or animalisation) called history plays itself out? We are certainly animals, but we cannot be just some *nonhuman* animals with a somehow learned humanity added on, so to speak. Dehumanised or animalised humans are still *human* (animals). If we cannot be

[776] *Ibid*.
[777] Ibid., p. 272.
[778] Adrienne de Ruiter, "To Be or Not to Be Human: Resolving the Paradox of Dehumanisation", *European Journal of Political Theory* 22.1 (2021): 74.
[779] *Ibid*., pp. 74-75.
[780] Ultimately it is of course just as big a *bêtise* to speak of 'the human' as it is to speak of 'the animal' to follow Derrida.

nonhuman animals the only other way to conceptualise the 'prehuman' or 'protohuman' state or stage of ours would be the 'inhuman', in Lyotard's sense.

In *The Inhuman* Jean-François Lyotard actually differentiates between two forms of inhumanity: the inhumanity of the (technoscientific capitalist) 'system' whose mantra is 'development' (one might also say: continuous (self)transformation characterised as 'progress'), and the inhumanity of 'infancy' (the 'protohuman' state of children who are born into but have yet to be 'educated' by the system).[781] For Lyotard, the infant inhuman is not a form of original *de*humanised state, if anything it would be radically *un*human (*not* to be understood as: not yet 'fully' human, in the sense that e.g. prehistoric humanoids were considered to be not (yet) fully human).[782] In fact, the liminal positioning of the early inhuman is the only hope for resistance to the increasingly inhumane inhumanity of the system, for which the human is becoming more and more dispensable. In fact, for the future survival of the 'civilisation of development' the central question becomes "Can Thought Go on Without a Body",[783] given that survival on this planet is ultimately impossible in our current embodied (i.e. biological) form because of its inevitable 'heat death'. What Lyotard seems to derive from this analysis of 'our' situation is not a posthumanism, maybe, but it is also no revived or reconstructed form of humanism. Maybe one might best call it an 'inhumanism' – in the sense of a return to some more 'originary' humanness. Derek Ford in *Inhuman Educations* sees this as a specifically Lyotardian notion of pedagogy, a pedagogy that "resist[s] the inhumanity of the system *by means of* the inhumanity of the infant". [784] Inhuman infancy in Lyotard's understanding is a human otherness, or an other humanness, that is threatened with obliteration by the system's 'education' but is also preserved by the system as a source of (human) creativity because it might serve the system in perpetuating and perfecting itself.[785] By "bearing witness" to this inhuman infancy, which persists in its repression, Ford writes, "we can resist the inhuman of the system" and "remain human".[786] Quite obviously I would like to claim Lyotard's 'inhumanism' as a form of '(un)learning to be human' – an anamnesis of the systemic (liberal) humanism that tells 'us' that we have to *become* who we *are* (and which, of course, knows exactly what we are not). Lyotard's inhumanism is one way of understanding CPH and its motivation for an ongoing deconstruction of humanism as a form of resistance against transhumanist ideals of 'overcoming', 'transcending' or 'surpassing' the human, which

[781] Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* [1988] (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

[782] For a problematisation of the 'reverse teleology' (a view that sees the present as an inevitable outcome of the past) at work in such an (anthropocentric) evolutionary notion of 'becoming human' see again my *Before Humanity*, *passim*.

[783] Lyotard, "Can Thought Go on Without a Body?", *The Inhuman*, pp. 8-23. See also Lyotard's "A Postmodern Fable", *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 83-102.

[784] Derek R. Ford, *Inhuman Educations: Jean-François Lyotard, Pedagogy, Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 2.

[785] This is where Lyotard's understanding meets neocybernetics and second order (Post-Luhmannian) system's theory and their specific relevance for a posthumanist position in Cary Wolfe's and Bruce Clarke's work. Cf. e.g. Wolfe's *Critical Environments: Postmodern Theory and the Pragmatics of the "Outside"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) and Clarke's *Posthuman Meatmorphosis: Narrative and Systems* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

[786] Ford, *Inhuman Educations*, p. 11.

is precisely the trajectory that the system of (increasingly autonomous techno-scientific neoliberal capitalist) development portrays as 'inevitable' to today's humans. Dehumanisation, in this context, takes on an alternative meaning depending on one's understanding of the 'human' in 'dehumanisation': to excavate another humanity by bearing witness or by re-membering the inhumanity of human infancy, by working through the inhumanity of the humanism of the system, requires a form of dehumanisation (which I have called (un)learning) that has nothing to do with some kind of a return of the repressed or some idea of 'animalisation', or as a return to 'barbarity'. It all depends on which direction one thinks 'barbarity' lies and whose notion of (in)humanity one may trust,[787] a humanism that ultimately envisages a future without humans, or humans that are able to divest themselves of 'their' humanism (but not their humanity) and a 'humanism' which is no longer humanist but 'inhumanist'.

Humanism Without Humans, Humans Without Humanism, Humanism Without Humanism

> That immense and unquestionable suffering has been caused by human animals on other human animals and nonhuman animals alike throughout history attests to the disconnect we are able to muster between what we feel and how we evaluate what we do.[788]

What I have been working towards in this volume is of course what one might call a politics worthy of our time, a *post*humanist politics, inscribed into the pedagogical argument of '(un)learning to be human'. What are the options for such a politics and what are its odds? In other words, how to escape a humanism that itself has either become hijacked by or has allied itself to an inhuman(e) system and which sees no major problem in humans translating themselves into better (post)humans by becoming more and more (like 'their') technology – a humanism (ultimately) without humans?

Frédéric Neyrat in discussing his *Homo Labyrinthus*[789]says that "Humanism is the human who dreams that he is capable of being what he should have been".[790] I propose a minor addition: humanism is what tells the human that it is capable of being what *humanism* thinks he should have been, which prompts the need for unlearning to be human in this humanist sense. It is a re-education process along the lines of a postanthropocentric ethics and politics that CPH

[787] On Lyotard's notion of 'inhumanity' see also Scott Brewester et al., eds., *Inhuman Reflections: Thinking the limits of the Human* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), Stuart Sim, *Lyotard and the Inhuman* (London: Icon, 2001), Ashley Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition: Reflections on Nihilism, Information, and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). On the notion of 'inhumanism' see Julian Murphet, "A Modest Proposal for the Inhuman", *Modernism/Modernity* 23.3 (2016): 651-670; and the conclusion to my *Before Humanity* ("Becoming Inhuman"), pp. 208-218.

[788] Andrew Oberg, "All Too Human? Speciesism, Racism, and Sexism", *Think* 43 (2016): 47-48.

[789] Frédéric Neyrat, *Homo Labyrinthus: Humanisme, Antihumanisme, Posthumanisme* (Paris: Éditions Dehors, 2015).

[790] Neyrat, "Escaping Humanism: An Interview with Frédéric Neyrat", *PCA-Stream* (n.d.); available online at: https://www.pca-stream.com/en/articles/frederic-neyrat-escaping-humanism-91 (accessed 22/11/2023).

stands for even though this would not be a process of education in the traditional humanist sense and would probably require a major rethink and a further deconstruction of existing educational institutions. To humanists it would probably look more like 'de-education' (as in 'de-skilling'. In CPH's terms, however, it would precisely be a 're-skilling' in the sense of what humans are capable of once they start thinking of themselves as decentred, entangled, distributed and so on.

How, therefore, think about humans without humanism? Is this not a contradiction in terms? Is not, following the logic of discursivity any thinking about humans necessarily humanist in the sense that humanism is that discourse that produces knowledge about what it means to be human as outlined above? And is not that discourse inevitably anthropocentric since it takes the human as its central transcendental signified and its truth? Undoubtedly, but what would be the alternative since any posthumanism is condemned to repeat, even *critically*, while working through, humanist notions of the human? Inhabiting (humanism and its remainders) strategically and deconstructively seems the only option. A certain 'strategic misanthropy' might be CPH's only option to get closer to, and to get at, Lyotard's inhuman. Strategic misanthropy is, in my view, what Daniel Cottom has in mind when he writes that we need misanthropy "so as not to close our hearts to the cultural hope that is to be found, both within and without us, only in what appears at any given moment to be unhuman".[791] Again, I would like to make a strategic minor adjustment: the hope for another human to be found both within us (i.e. within humanist conceptions of the human) and without (postanthropocentric or posthumanist notions of what it means to be human) lies maybe not in the unhuman, but Lyotard's inhuman at our given moment, i.e. that which resists its own posthumanisation, or Crowley's (or Nancy's, or Antelme's…) *l'homme sans*, with its residual 'humanity', maybe in the form of a (radicalised) co-existentialism.[792] In this sense, misanthropy would no longer be a 'hate' of humans, but of *Anthropos*, along the lines of 'hating the sin, not the sinner'.

The position that remains for CPH is a paradoxical one. It resists traditional humanism because:

- humanism does not do justice to humans in their irreducible difference and plurality;
- in its liberal version humanism has allied itself to technoscientific capitalist modernity which ultimately wishes to transcend the human;
- humanism's anthropocentrism disregards the entanglement with and the importance of nonhumans.

On the other hand, CPH is ethically motivated by care for the excluded of humanism, which also includes, ironically, humans themselves, since it believes (with Lyotard, Latour and many others) that we were never human (in the modern, humanist, sense). Instead of a humanism without humans, one might say, it works towards humans without humanism. But since politics is about collectivities, solidarities and futures, CPH cannot change anything without a narrative that speaks to humans. A certain kind of humanism that explains to humans what

[791] Daniel Cottom, *Unhuman Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 158.
[792] Cf. Sam Mickey's *Coexistentialism and the Unbearable Intimacy of Ecological Emergency* (Lanham: Lexington, 2016).

they should do and strive for in our current 'climate' and 'condition' is therefore *required*. The challenge is whether it can be a humanism 'without' humanism. For me this would be a stance that is critical but not dismissive of humanism by being carefully but certainly not triumphantly posthumanist, i.e. by taking the ethical imperative of a de-anthropocentered worldview seriously and constructing the best possible political future for everyone, including humans. It is, one could say, 'what we owe the future', provided that the future is not purely about humans and that future politics or politics of the future are no longer exclusively 'anthropolitics'.[793]

Which also means of course that technology should not be posthumanism's exclusive, maybe not even its dominant, concern. This is how I read Kate Soper's critique of posthumanism as it is often understood, namely as, if not as outright 'techno-utopian', then at least as 'technocentric':

> It is far from clear why the erosion of the organic and inorganic distinction should be thought of as offering any very pleasurable or liberating opportunities for individual self-realisation let alone provide a platform for a collective post-capitalist utopian agenda.[794]

As long as the 'techniques' of objectification and animalisation continue to be available they need to be addressed, resisted and undone, unlearned, but this cannot be achieved by a simple erasure of differences (between humans and machines, and between human and nonhuman animals, and indeed between animals and machines one might add). Didier Fassin's critique of posthumanism as "eluding history and circumventing politics", as a consequence of a "lack of interest in human agency",[795] is not true of all posthumanisms. It is certainly not true of CPH as I understand it. It is simply wrong to say that posthumanism in general "has little to say about forms of domination and oppression as well as of resistance and emancipation – phenomena that are human, after all".[796] The motivation behind the programme of '(un)learning to be human' is CPH's way of demanding and extending human responsibility. It is the forging of new forms of solidarity (between humans and nonhumans) and resisting the inhumanity of an increasingly posthuman system – a system that wants to do away with 'us' (the biological, the living) even while some of 'us' seem to find this perspective enticing. This is why the 'animal side' of posthumanism is so important to counterbalance what would otherwise be a new form of technocentrism. Bio-techno-politics in its currently predominant form, namely a toxic alliance between technocapitalist neoliberalism and technoeuphoric transhumanism needs to be resisted by CPH and the only way to achieve this is to strengthen our solidarities with the nonhuman by stressing our shared "creatureliness"[797] and vulnerability with the living, or, in Lynn Worsham's words: "the way forward, beyond anthropocentrism and humanism to posthumanism, consists in our collective

[793] Needless to say that William MacCaskill's, *What We Owe the Future: A Million-Year View* (London: Oneworld, 2022) comes a great deal closer to such a politics as James Susskind's, *Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[794] Kate Soper, "Humans, Animals, Machines", *New Formations* 49 (2003): 107.
[795] Didier Fassin, "Humanism: A Critical Appraisal", *Critical Times* 2.1 (2019): 36.
[796] *Ibid*.
[797] Cf. Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

efforts to appreciate this difficulty of reality [i.e. the reality of our vulnerability and eventual death], to keep in focus this history of shared woundedness and finitude"[798]. The solidarities of "interdependence", as David Wood calls it,[799] and as Timothy Morton also advocates,[800] ultimately are the reason why I have been insisting on CPH - a *critical* post-human-ism – as the most coherent stance for our time, and on unlearning to be human (in the humanist sense) as its main programme. It begins with what one might call, with Jean-Christophe Bailly, by being in touch with our "animal side": "we should move beyond human exclusivity (…) we should let go of the eternally renewed credo according to which our species is the pinnacle of creation and has a unique future [and instead realise that] the world in which we live is gazed upon by other beings, that the visible is shared among creatures, and that a politics could be invented on this basis, if it is not too late". [801]

[798] Lynn Worsham, "Toward an Understanding of Human Violence: Cultural Studies, Animal Studies, and the Promise of Posthumanism", *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 35.1: 51-76.

[799] In David Wood, *Thinking Plant Animal Human: Encounters with Communities of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

[800] Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017); see also my "Solidarity", *Genealogy of the Posthuman* (2022); available online at: https://criticalposthumanism.net/solidarity/ (accessed 24/11/2023).

[801] Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), p. 15.

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