

16 What Counts as Human/ Inhuman Right Now?

Rosi Braidotti

Introduction

Discussions about the human, and more specifically what constitutes the basic unit of reference to define what counts as human, are not what they used to be. For instance, the questions ‘What do you mean by human?’, ‘Are we human enough?’, or ‘What is human about the academic humanities?’ are *not* ones that we – humanities scholars – have been accustomed to asking. Tradition and the force of habit encourage us to delegate to anthropologists and biologists all scientific discussions about ‘Man’, while we in the humanities just take it for granted. Our focus is Mankind, or civilization (always assumed to be Western), and the question of human rights.

Of course, ancient disciplines like philosophy do question the identity of the human, but repeatedly re-cast it in the dominant format of the ‘Man of reason’ (see Lloyd 1984, 2004) within the entrenched protocols and methods of disciplinary thinking. There it conventionally falls into a pattern of dualistic oppositions that define Man mostly by what it is *not* (that is to say not a woman/animal/earth-other). Man coincides with his transcendental consciousness, whereas woman coincides with immanence, and animal with non-rational, instinct-driven life. John Mullarky (2013) wittily observes, for instance, that the animal provides an index of death for Derrida, an index of life for Deleuze, and an index of de-humanization for Agamben, to name just a few of the attempts to grapple with defining these entities. What is evident is that these binary oppositions are fundamental – definition by negation – and moreover they are structured within a humanistic vision of Man as the rational, thinking being *par excellence*.

This paper seeks to interrogate these issues in light of the recent debates informed by postphenomenology and critical posthumanism; the key motivating question – what counts as human or inhuman right now?

Two Starting Assumptions

To begin I would like to clarify two key assumptions that often insinuate themselves into the discussions without explicit acknowledgement. First, the designation ‘human’ is not a neutral term. Being recognized as human has been, and continues to be in certain circumstances, a privilege that

only some can afford to take for granted, while others have to fight for it. This term *human* is not merely *not* neutral, it is politically charged: it is a term that indexes access to rights-of-passage, of citizenship, of belonging, and is power-driven.

The second assumption that we must foreground is that the posthuman condition encourages us to move beyond these habits of designation and the philosophical anthropocentrism they entail: we simply cannot start from the centrality and the exceptionalism of the human as *the* thinking being and uphold the old dualities that separate him from the animals, the robots and the weird monsters that Descartes obsesses about (Daston and Park 1998). But this acknowledgment of the non-exceptional nature of the human does not inevitably throw us into immoral disconnection from our own kind, it does not plunge us into the abyss of neobestiality or the terror of extinction. There has to be some other middle ground, another *milieu*. Posthuman scholarship is constructing new middle grounds to come to terms with this challenge (Braidotti 2019).

Methodology

My method is materialist, but not in the reductive sense of the materialism defended in recent times by philosophers such as J. J. C. Smart, D. M. Armstrong and David K. Lewis (and those who have developed their own materialisms in response to these thinkers) or even the current neurocentrism ('You are your brain') that is dominating the human sciences; rather the materialism I draw on is materialist in the sense of being embodied, embedded, and situated, that is to say accountable. This approach, while also being conspicuous in enactivism and its progenitor phenomenology, is drawn from the feminist tradition of the politics of locations (Rich 2003) and standpoint theory (Harding 1986, 1991), also known as situated knowledge (Haraway 1988). I have reworked this feminist approach with a vital form of materialism in a nomadic philosophy of becoming (Braidotti [1994] 2011). This approach emphasizes the need to think from your own lived experience, not from some abstract, disembodied and dis-embedded position. Immanence, not transcendental universalism, is a more relevant way to approach the issue of the human. But that does not mean that we fall headlong into relativism: feminist philosophy has replaced discriminatory categories based on Eurocentric, masculinist, anthropocentric, and heteronormative assumptions, with robust alternatives. This produces grounded, cross-over positions and knowledge claims that can accommodate both the fact of material embodiment and the differential perspectivism central to this approach.

The Question of Definitions

I have defined 'the posthuman condition' as our historical condition and not some future dystopia (Braidotti 2013). Furthermore, to be very clear,

I approach the posthuman as an *affirmative* condition, not as a terminal crisis. The posthuman condition is the convergence, across the spectrum of cognitive capitalism (Moulier-Boutang 2012), of post-humanism on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other. The former focusses on the critique of the humanist Eurocentric ideal of ‘Man’ as the allegedly universal ‘measure of all things’, while the latter criticizes species hierarchy and human exceptionalism. Equally inter-disciplinary in character, they are linked to separate social movements and to different theoretical and disciplinary genealogies that do not necessarily follow from each other. You can be critical of western humanism and remain perfectly anthropocentric (Said 2004) or critique anthropocentrism but cling to humanistic values (Bostrom 2014). The convergence of these critical positions is not a harmonious synthesis; it is a highly contentious domain, and it is currently producing a chain of theoretical, social, and political effects and a qualitative leap in new conceptual directions.

The controversies notwithstanding, I want to stress the convergence factor, in view of the increasing forms of new segregation that are occurring in contemporary scholarship, such as, the work on AI, on the Anthropocene, on the new political economy of post-work, on climate change, on extinction, etc. These are all producing their own respective takes on the human/non-human independently of one another. But what remains problematic is that these new separations do not help construct the kind of trans-disciplinary task force we would need to address the complexity of issues confronting us in the posthuman predicament.

The posthuman predicament confronts us with a fundamental tension: ‘we’ may well be confronting the threats and challenges of the third millennium together, but ‘we’ are not One, or the Same; we are differently positioned in terms of power, entitlement, and access to the very technologies that have come to define us. ‘We’ are not a homogeneous, unitary notion, but a complex and diverse one, which reflects the multiple differences that compose ‘us’. ‘We’ – the human and non-human inhabitants of this particular planet – are currently positioned between the *Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Schwab 2015) and the *Sixth Extinction* (Kolbert 2014). To describe these locations as contradictory does not even begin to approximate the tensions and paradoxes they generate. Neither universalistic notions of ‘Man’ nor exceptional claims for ‘Anthropos’ are credible assumptions to explain how knowledge is being produced and distributed in the era of high technological mediation and ecological disaster, also known as the Anthropocene.

Again, let me stress that this awareness need not lead us to relativism but rather to differential materially located positions: the neo-materialist politics of immanence (Deleuze 2003). This is also known as *perspectivism* – a notion dear to anthropologists (Descola 2009) that Spinoza and Leibnitz explore in philosophy and one that feminist (Haraway 2016), black, post-colonial, and indigenous thinkers are developing today (Viveiros de

Castro 1998). Unless one is at ease with such multi-dimensional complexity, one cannot feel at home in the 21st century. In what follows I detail some of the key aspects of this neo-materialist politics of immanence.

The Double Structure of the Present

The present, contrary to common assumptions, is neither a point in time nor a static bloc, but a continuous flow pointing in different directions at once. As nomadic subjects-in-process, in perpetual becoming, thinking about the present confronts but also exceeds the immediate conditions we inhabit. The actual and the virtual encompass both the loss and the regeneration, as part of the continuum generated by a philosophy of immanence and dynamic processes of becoming, not of transcendence.

I invite you accordingly to think of the posthuman present as *both* the record of what *we are ceasing to be* (the actual) and the seed of *what we are in the process of becoming* (the virtual). It is not a binary opposition but the simultaneous occurrence of multi-directional processes: and it is this compounding complexity which is shaping what it means to be human and ‘inhuman’ right now. What is happening to our sense of being human today, in this ‘posthuman’ age, marked by scientific and technological advances on the one hand, and by the recurrence of structural injustices and exclusions, climate change, and global warming on the other?

The Anthropocene and Climate Change

The Anthropocene is the geological time during which humanity’s negative effect upon the planet’s health and sustainability has reached empirically measurable levels (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). The impact is multi-layered, and it mobilizes our multiple ecologies of belonging (Guattari 2000), triggering unprecedented problems of an environmental, social-economical, as well as affective and psychological character.

My position is that the posthuman condition includes, but also exceeds, the specific framework of the Anthropocene, which is a popular – albeit controversial – notion in the scientific community. The crisis of the Anthropocene is in fact compounded by the combination of fast technological advances on the one hand and the exacerbation of economic and social inequalities on the other, making for a multi-faceted and conflict-ridden landscape. In some way, simply referring to the Anthropocene begs the question. New notions and terms are needed to address the constituencies and configurations of the present and to map future directions. We need more conceptual creativity – a renewed trust in the cognitive and political importance of the imagination.

Moreover, even as a relative neologism, the Anthropocene has already become another meme: *Anthropomeme* (Macfarlane 2016), spawning

several alternative terms, such as *Chthulucene* (Haraway 2016); *Capitalocene* (Moore 2013), *Anthropo-scene* (Lorimer 2017), *Anthrobscene* (Parikka 2015), *Plastic-ene* (New York Times 2014), *Plantationcene* (Tsing 2015), and *Mis-anthropocene* (Clover and Spahr 2014).

The terminological vitality here reflects the speedy and self-replicating mental habits and discursive economy of our times. It also expresses both the excitement and the exasperation involved in attempting to account for the posthuman predicament within the Anthropocenic frame. I propose therefore to widen the picture and add some complexity by looking at the posthuman as a convergence. To analyze it, I propose to focus on the issue of subjectivity – what kind of subjects are we becoming in this internally fractured context?

At the core of our predicament is the unprecedented degree of technological mediation we have reached and the intimacy we have developed with the technological devices. The posthuman condition, with its distinctive combination of speedy transformations and persistent inequalities, is planetary and multi-scalar (Fuller 2005; Terranova 2004). It affects social and environmental ecologies as well as individual psychic and shared emotional landscapes. But because ‘we’ differ in our materially embedded positions of power/access/entitlements, ‘we’ experience the Anthropocene in dramatically different ways. Wealth, class, race and ethnicity, gender and sex, good health and physical abilities all affect our relationship to the spectre of extinction – of humans as well as non-humans.

To some, this apocalyptic vision is unthinkable (Ghosh 2016) but also unstoppable as a dramatic planetary issue (Lovelock 2009; Latour 2017) affecting all the human and non-human inhabitants of the planet – fish, bees, animals, and plants (Alaimo 2016). The excess and waste of capitalist consumption (plastic, discarded electronic devices, etc.) and the ravages of extraction economies are the main cause. To others, however, this fear of extinction looks like a massive attack of white (Bignall, Hemming and Rigney 2016; Whyte 2013; Todd 2016), middle-aged, anthropocentric panic (Klein 2019). While for yet another constituency, the posthuman is a pretext for enhancement (Bostrom 2014), space-travel, techno-immortality, genetic enhancement (Kurzweil 2005), gender re-assignment (Halberstam and Livingston 1995), cyborg implants, etc. What is becoming increasingly evident is that one way or the other, this particular conjuncture forces us to address what binds us together, to what an extent we can say that “we” are in this predicament together. One of the most important and complex intersections in this discussion is between European philosophy, transnational environmental justice (Nixon 2011), and indigenous epistemologies (Moreton-Robinson 2003, 2009; Todd 2015; Whyte 2016, 2017), especially in Australia.

The point is this: we need to learn to address these contradictions not only intellectually, but also affectively and to do so in an affirmative manner. This conviction rests on the ethical imperative that I draw

from contemporary readings of Spinoza by Lloyd (1994, 1996) and Deleuze (1988, 1990). It is important to be worthy of our times, the better to act upon them, in both a critical and a creative manner. We should approach our historical contradictions not as some bothersome burden, but rather as the building blocks of a sustainable present, even if this approach requires some drastic changes to our familiar mind-sets and established values. We need affirmative values. At the same time, 'we' should acknowledge that our current sense of togetherness is fractured and fraught with contractions. And so, there is an urgency underscoring all efforts to construct a sense of subjectivity/citizenship that can help us here and now.

General Melancholia

It is undeniable, however, that the posthuman condition makes for swinging moods, which alternate moments of euphoria at the thought of the astonishing technological advances 'we' are accomplishing and periods of anxiety in view of the exceedingly high prize 'we' – both human and non-humans – are paying for these transformations. We are caught in contradictory pulls and spins that take their toll emotionally and psychically and call for constant negotiations with the technological apparatus that seems to control our existence.

As inhabitants of this planet, alongside many non-human ones, we are fatally attracted to the depiction of self-destruction. The imaginary of science-fiction disaster is alive and well in the context of posthuman issues, as illustrated by the success of movies such as 'Collision Earth' (2010), Mad Max 'Fury Road' (2015), the game 'Fallout 4' (2015), 'The Wave' (2015), 'Geostorm' (2017), and just last year 'The Wandering Earth' (2019). Catastrophe films make huge financial gains because they are a much sought-after genre. They play a significant role in shaping the social imaginary about the posthuman convergence, notably on the Anthropocene side.

Serious social thinkers from different political backgrounds, however, such as Habermas (2003), Fukuyama (2002), Sloterdijk (2009), and Derrida (in Borradori 2003) have also expressed concern bordering on moral panic about the status of the human in our advanced technological times. Recently, Pope Francis (2015) joined this debate, supplementing Catholic dogma on Natural Law with Naomi Klein's analysis of the destructive role of capitalism (Klein 2014).

My argument is quite the opposite: while it is undeniably true that the technological devices today are very alive and the humans quite inert (Haraway 1988), the evidence provided by posthuman scholarship shows not only a 'crisis', but also a remarkable upsurge of inspiration and action. This can be shown by the range and quality of the posthuman scholarship being produced, but also by the mass mobilization of youth

and others across the globe. We need only mention the impact of Greta Thunberg (2019) on politicians to honour their climate change commitments and implement more vigorous measures to tackle the emergency. Though on the other side of the equation, we can lament the extraordinary and reprehensible greed, ignorance, and ethnocentrism that has seen voters across the globe and tragically in Australia give support to right-wing, climate-change-denying leaders. The catastrophic bush-fires of the Australian summer of 2019–2020 – as well as Black Saturday 2009 – will for years to come bear harrowing testimony to the dangerous ‘inertia’ alerted to by Haraway (1988).

Bio-power and Necro-politics

There is much to feel mournful about, but at least some of the manic-depressive moods we are in are a direct effect of the new economy based on bio-genetic and media and information technologies. Advanced capitalism is a spinning machine that perverts global nature as well as global culture (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 2000) and subsumes all living materials – human and non-human – to a logic of commodification and consumption. The acceleration in the consumption of commodities to prop up our quantified selves, while promising to deliver hyper-individualism and uniqueness, makes for an unsustainable system – a ‘future eater’ (Flannery 1994) – that erodes its own foundations and sabotages the conditions of possibility for its own future.

It might be argued this is nothing new; however, what *is* new is the speed of the flows of change and the scale of coercive consumption. This acceleration is marked by rapidly changing fashions and ‘next generation’ items, the planned obsolescence of our electronic devices, the overwhelming information overload, as well as the unsustainable speed and pressure of our working lives (see also Wuyts 2020, this volume).

As some have cogently argued, what constitutes capital value today is the informational power of living matter itself, its immanent qualities and self-organizing capacity. The bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism, supported by global information networks, enhances the ability to generate profits from the scientific and economic comprehension of all that lives – humans and non-humans alike. This includes many classes of disposable humans: underpaid, often unregistered migrant workers who service and provide the manual labour in agriculture, building, transportation, and assembling work. These ‘disposable’ workers constitute the digital proletariat of today. This real-life exploitation co-exists with higher degrees of technological mediation and automation, causing distressing levels of social and economic disparity. The trend is manifest also in what were previously privileged occupations such as those in our government and educational institutions. Again, we note the same paradox of a sophisticated technological apparatus coexisting with the brutal

casualisation of a precarious work force from whom economic value is mined and extracted to support the privileged few at the top of the corporate hierarchy. Universities in the age of neoliberal governance are not exempt from this (Gill 2010): the existence of a large under-paid untenured staff being often justified as a means of not burdening the university/institution with expensive academics so as to invest in technologies, new 'smart' buildings, and the research time of the chosen few (Silvester 2019).

The exceptionally high level of technological mediation we are experiencing is inscribed within the profit axiom. Knowledge about the vital power of matter gets transposed into data banks of bio-genetic, neural, and mediatic information. 'Data-mining' includes profiling practices and risk assessments that identify different types or characteristics as strategic targets for investment, but also for our security and surveillance practices.

Advanced capitalism, however, is equally ruthless in its exploitation of non-human resources. Our culture has moved even beyond what Vandana Shiva calls 'bio-piracy' (1997) and its global proletariat onto more advanced mastery of living matter – through synthetic biology, stem-cell research, gene-editing, robotics, and bio-engineering. Today we re-create lifelines by codes of a bio-genetic and informational nature. Writing and editing code is what we do best. Technological mediation is our second nature – from de-extinction to genetically modified food, Facebook, and Wikileaks.

This produces a new political economy: 'the politics of Life itself' (Rose 2007), also known as 'Life as surplus' (Cooper 2008) or quite simply as the post-genomic economy of 'biocapital' (Rajan 2006). The true capital today is the vital, self-organising power of converging technologies whose vitality seems unsurpassable. Examples are synthetic biology, stem cell research, nanotechnologies, robotics, and the neural sciences. The advances are staggering. Artificial meat was first made in 2013 at Maastricht University in the Netherlands from real meat stem cells grown in a lab and mixed with calf serum. The first prototype cost \$325,000 but by now that price has dropped to just over \$11 for one synthetic burger (\$80 per kilogram of meat). It is claimed that these technological advances will bring to an end the exploitation of natural resources and even allow for de-extinction (Minteer 2015) and re-wilding practices (Frasier 2010; Monbiot 2013) in a way that formalizes the de-naturalization of matter. Although this idea is in equal parts liberating and problematic, I am struck by the slightly disgusted reactions it is often met with in public debates. Genetically recombined food? Artificial meat? Most humans shrink at the thought of having their food de-linked from the material animals, plants, or organisms that till now have produced it. A visceral kind of eco-nostalgia seems at work here.

The paradoxical result of mining the basic codes of life itself is that it induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the categorical

distinction between the human and other species when it comes to profiting from them. Seeds, cells, plants, animals, and bacteria – but also codes, algorithms, and networks – fit into this logic of commodification, alongside various specimens of humanity, producing an opportunistic form of post-anthropocentrism that spuriously unifies all the species under the imperative of profit.

Evidently, the excesses of the Capitalocene threaten the uniqueness of *Anthropos*, as well as the sustainability of the planet as a whole.

The Inhuman(e)

A few decades ago, Jean-Francois Lyotard (1989) alerted us to the dehumanizing inhumanism of contemporary capitalism and its reductive objectification of humans through technological mediation. But Lyotard also stressed the potential for another kind of inhuman, as the creative capacity to reinvent the human beyond the grand narratives of Eurocentric humanism. As for Deleuze, the actual and the virtual work together in redefining the kind of humans we are capable of becoming.

The contemporary world, however, has more than its fair share of inhumane cruelty to account for. The brutality of new power relations has established a necro-political mode of governing, which targets not only the management of the living but also multiple practices of managed decline and dying. Consider the generalized material destruction of human bodies, populations, and the environment through the industrial-scale warfare led by drones and other unmanned vehicles. Think also of the global effects of migration as a result of dispossession, wars, expulsions due to climate change, and terror (Sassen 2014). The refugee camps and other zones of detention are multiplying, as are our militarized borders and humanitarian interventions. Whole sections of humanity are downgraded to the status of infra-humans, extra-territorial, like the refugee and the asylum seekers, whom we treat as alien others, not meant to be here at all.

The in-human(e) aspects of the posthuman condition is one of the reasons why I want to foreground the question of the subject and subjectivity, so as to work out what the posthuman may mean for our collective self-understanding and ethical accountability. It is called the ‘necropolitics’ of today – the managed destruction of life (Mbembe 2003).

Let it be clear therefore that, far from marking the extinction or the impoverishment of the human, the posthuman condition is a way of reconstituting the human – for some as a return to neo-humanist universalism coupled with forms of enhancement; for others a down-sizing of human arrogance coupled with the acknowledgment of solidarity with other humans. There are many dynamics of subject formation coming into being in this posthuman conjunction, as a result of the dislocation of the grounds on which the human used to be composed and experienced socially.

Becoming Posthuman

The posthuman transition does take a lot of hard work, and our hearts may fail at the thought of what this might demand of us.

The feeling of dispossession is acute, with so much information, knowledge, and thinking power now being produced and situated outside the traditional container – which used to be the human mind, embodied in an anthropomorphic frame. What happens when thinking, reasoning, assessing risks, and opportunities are done by algorithmically driven computational networks instead? And when so much of life, living processes of cell formation and spitting, is operated synthetically via stem-cell research? Test-tube babies? Artificial meat? As the IA and robotics industry are cloning the neural and sensory systems of other species – dogs for scent, dolphins for sonar, bats for radar, etc. – the human body strikes us as a rather old-fashioned anthropomorphic frame, not quite suited to contain the fast-moving intelligence of our technologies.

Obviously, the image of the container is inadequate and needs to be replaced by flows and processes instead. But a switch to process ontologies conceals deeper conceptual challenges: neither on one hand, the holistic organicism reminiscent of early twentieth-century proto-fascist philosophies of Life; nor on the other hand, their polarized opposite – the dismissal of subjectivity altogether, in favor of protocols on non-human reason, is equal to the challenge. What I propose is a shift towards post-human subject positions, not in order to passively accommodate these transformations, but on the contrary, so as to be able to affect them and shape them in the direction of ethically affirmative and politically sustainable alternatives.

Indeed, ‘we’ (the human heirs of western post-modernity) are increasingly burnt out and fatigued while ‘they’ (the technological artefacts we have brought into being) are smarter and more alive than ever (Haraway 1992). Questions about life, living, liveliness, smartness, and of being and remaining alive – and possibly growing even smarter – emerge as necessary and painful knots of contradictions in the multi-layered ecologies that structure the posthuman predicament.

Being a posthumanist, I contend, is a non-nostalgic way of acknowledging this pain, of extracting knowledge from it, and re-working it affirmatively.

Posthuman Knowledge Production

What is the question of the posthuman? It is a multiplicity, not one single question. It is producing a range of posthumanist positions in keeping with the wide range of humanist positions I already highlighted – for example, insurgent posthumanism (Papadopoulos 2010), speculative posthumanism (Sterling 2012; Roden 2014), cultural posthumanism

(Herbrechter 2013), literary posthumanism (Nayar 2013), trans-humanism (Bostrom 2014), meta-humanism (Ferrando 2013), and a-humanism (MacCormack 2014). There is already a posthuman manifesto (Pepperell 2003) and a post-humanities book series (Wolfe 2010).

A significant alliance between queer theorists and the science fiction horror genre constitutes a fast-growing posthuman feminist strand. Since the 1970s, feminist writers and literary theorists of science fiction (Kristeva 1980; Barr 1987, 1993; Haraway 1992, 2004; Creed 1993) supported the alliance between women, as the others of Man, and such other 'others' as non-whites (postcolonial, black, Jewish, indigenous, and hybrid subject) and non-humans (animals, insects, plants, tress, viruses, and bacteria). Queer theorists, ever alert to the opportunity of exiting the Oedipalised sexual binary system, have equated the posthuman with post-gender and proposed an explicit alliance between extraterrestrial monsters and freaks, social aliens, and queer political subjects (Halberstam 2012). Queering the non-human is now in full swing in a series of variations that include re-thinking sexual diversity based on animal and other organic systems (Giffney and Hird 2008). An array of alternative sexualities and multiple-gender systems have been proposed but also degrees of sexual indeterminacy or indifferentiation, often modelled on the morphology and sexual systems of non-human species including insects (Grosz 1995; Braidotti [1994] 2011, 2002).

The creativity and exuberance of the field is such that I attempted to provide a full overview of contemporary enquiries in a new *Posthuman Glossary* (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018). The institutional answers are equally diversified and dynamic. The Oxford trans-humanists led by Nick Bostrom have set up the Future of Humanity Institute, devoted to human enhancement. The Cambridge Centre for the Study of Existential Risk attempts to strike a more egalitarian note. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the Swedish project of the Post Humanities Hub, directed by Cecilia Asberg, makes a strong social democratic point about equal access and participation in these new technologies. The federally funded German Anthropocene and Technosphere projects, based at the German National Museum and HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt) in Berlin, are collaborating with a vast array of academic institutions, combining the arts, research, and activism in a very innovative manner. Posthumanist research institutes and groups exist now in universities as different as Brock in Canada, N.Y.U., and West Sydney. A *Journal of Posthuman Studies* already exists, based at the Ewha Institute for the Humanities, Korea, as does the *Trans-Humanities* journal. A website on *Critical Posthumanism* is operated by the Critical Posthumanism Network at the university of Bern.

Posthuman scholarship constitutes a trans-disciplinary field that is more than the sum of its parts and points to a qualitative leap towards the construction of different subjects and fields of knowledge – the critical

or nomadic posthumanities (Stimpson 2016). So, this need not be a crisis, but it is in fact a huge growth area.

I spoke of ‘creativity’ to designate the proliferation of posthuman terms, concepts, and titles – with an exceptionally high level of neologisms. But is this even the right term? Is this a sign of vitality or a schizoid spin (Deleuze and Guattari 1987)? What kind of accelerations is contemporary posthuman scholarship caught in? What are we to make of this proliferation of discourses?

I see it as a paradox of over-exposure and evanescence, which are best read in the context of the complex temporality of the posthuman convergence. As stated at the beginning of this paper, to do justice to the complexity of our times we need to think of the posthuman present as *both* the record of what *we are ceasing to be* (the actual) and the seed of *what we are in the process of becoming* (the virtual). This is not a binary opposition, but the simultaneous occurrence of multi-directional processes: complexity is indeed the issue. As nomadic subjects-in-process, in perpetual becoming, thinking about the present makes us confront but also exceed the immediate conditions we inhabit. If the present is a complex process, critical philosophy cannot stop at the critique of the actual (of what we are ceasing to be) but needs to move on to the creative actualisation of the virtual (of what we are in the process of becoming). The interplay between the present as actual and the present as virtual spells the rhythms of subject formation.

In other words, the posthuman predicament is constructed by a major paradox because there is widespread production of knowledge and speculation both in the academy and in society about a category – the human – at the very time when this category has lost all consensus and self-evidence. The paradox at work here is the simultaneous over-exposure and evanescence of the ‘human’ in posthuman discourses and practices: the category emerges as urgent just as it enters a terminal crisis. It does not even hold as a category, other than as an expression of anxiety about survival, plus the fear of loss of privileges. This paradox is not only logical but also ethical-political, and it can be put as a polemical question: ‘Whose crisis is it?’ To what an extent can one speak of an undifferentiated humanity (‘we’) that is allegedly sharing in a common condition of both technological mediation and crisis and extinction (‘this’)?

Think, for example, of the classic posthumanist example of Foucault’s (1970) image of the face of ‘Man’ drawn on the sand by the seashore, which is gradually erased by the waves of history. Is it about extinction or renewal? Never mind the social constructivist point about ‘Man’ being a recent invention – what matters here is how Foucault’s genealogical method grapples with this conceptual paradox: it is at the moment of its dissolution that ‘Man’ becomes thinkable as such and emerges as a present concern. Up until that moment it had not surfaced to the critical eye because it functioned as an implicit dominant notion.

Maybe this is why, as I stated at the beginning, we have not been trained to question directly the identity of the human in the humanities – this was simply not a question. This is another kind of middle-ground, or *milieu*, which points to the future – that is to say, to what we are capable of becoming in and out of what we are ceasing to be. On the basis of vital neo-materialism, a number of consequences emerge.

It is a becoming other than the *Homo Universalis* of humanism or other than the *Anthropos* of anthropocentrism. To cope with it, we need a subtler and more diversified affective range that avoids the polarization between mourning (apocalyptic variant) and celebration (euphoric variable) in relation to humanity as both a vulnerable and an insurgent category. What we do need above all is to develop a specific form of complexity proper to the humanities. The humanities are the subtle, *not* the soft, sciences.

What we do have is complexity, embodied and embedded diversity, and multiple becomings. We are facing the conceptual challenge of having to hold simultaneously in our minds potentially contradictory ideas like materialism and vitality, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* and the *Sixth Extinction*.

The task consists in tracking the multiple, grounded, and hence specific and diversified ways in which we are becoming knowing subjects, as ‘otherwise other’ than the dialectical oppositions and pejorative differences posited by classical humanist ‘Man’ and the supremacist assertions of ‘Anthropos’.

What this means for the task of posthuman thinkers is that we must be worthy of our times – to interact with them in order to resist them, to differ from them especially when they perpetuate injustice and negativity. We need to detox our thinking from the poison of negative passions like resentment, envy, hatred, despair, but also sheer tedium. The ethical ideal is to aspire to the joyful affirmation of virtual possibilities, of what ‘we’ are capable of becoming. We have to labor towards becoming a new kind of subject that is both immanent to the world – that is to say confident about the world – but critical of its injustices and negativity. Such a subject can only become actualized together with others, in praxis, and action in the world, confronting our differences the better to equalize them.

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