



Genealogies of Posthuman

Narratives, Critical Theory, Animal Studies and the (Beyond of) Neolithic Revolution

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Some people are born posthumously¹
Friedrich Nietzsche

RESUMEN

En la presente contribución se pretende reconstruir una genealogía de los discursos que hasta ahora han establecido como objetivo el análisis y el desarrollo teórico del concepto posthumano. Se dará particular consideración a tres paradigmas que el autor ha caracterizado, a saber: el desarrollo del discurso póstumo a partir de su primera formulación teórica, el discurso narrativo de la ciencia ficción, el de la crítica feminista a la subjetividad entendida como un bloque "falocéntrico" (Derrida) y el de la crítica anti-anropocéntrica llevada a cabo por estudios en animales. En la última parte de la contribución, se presentará una tesis original sobre una declinación póstuma específica que está en diálogo con el reciente debate sobre el tema antropocénico.

Palabras clave: Posthumano, feminismo, estudios en animales, Antropoceno, Neolítico

RESUM

En la present contribució es pretén reconstruir una genealogia dels discursos que fins ara han establert com a objectiu l'anàlisi i el desenvolupament teòric del concepte posthumà. Es donarà particular consideració a tres paradigmes que l'autor ha caracteritzat: el desenvolupament del discurs pòstum a partir de la seva primera formulació teòrica; el discurs narratiu de la ciència ficció, el de la crítica feminista a la subjectivitat entesa com un bloc "falocèntric" (Derrida) i el de la crítica anti-anropocèntrica duta a terme per estudis en animals. En l'última part de la contribució, es presentarà una tesi original sobre una declinació pòstuma específica que està en diàleg amb el recent debat sobre el tema antropocènico.

Paraules clau: Posthumà, feminisme, estudis en animals, Antropocè, Neolític

¹ Nietzsche (2005), 100

ABSTRACT

Particular consideration will be given to three paradigms that have characterized this discourse since its very first formulation: the narratives of the science fiction, the feminist criticism to the "phallogocentric" (Derrida) subjectivity and the critical position against the anthropocentrism brought ahead by the animal studies.. In the last part of the contribution, will be presented an original thesis on a specific posthumous decline that is in dialogue with the recent debate on the "Anthropocene" concept.

Keywords: Posthuman, Feminisms, Animal Studies, Anthropocene, Neolithic

Introduction

The number of "posts" – with their "logies", their discussions, their pros and cons – have multiplied since 1979, when Jean-François Lyotard sounded the death-knell for modernity through his manifest, *The Postmodern Condition*².

Post-history, post-colonialism and post-structuralism, as well as post-human, were thus subjected to widespread discussion.

The "logies" of "posts" have been accompanied by a somewhat scathing yet detailed criticism³ as the case may be.

It is not my intention to rebuild here the history of "post" or of its criticism, I would rather start by directly analyzing what has come after this "post": that -history, that -colonialism, that -structuralism and finally that -human, that support the "post".

Therefore, my main objective in this paper is to rebuild the main guidelines that, in my opinion, have characterized and still characterize the discussion on the "posthuman" since its very beginning, through the help of the main experts of the field⁴.

According to those experts, such guidelines lead to three main macro-categories:

1. The narrative of the *science fiction* genre (both literary and cinematographic and recently related to TV series); the term "Narrative Posthumanism" will be used to indicate this particular declination of the theme.
2. The critique of subjectivity as interpreted within the western philosophical tradition, carried out by the development of poststructuralist, deconstructionist and feminist criticisms of the notion of the subject that was started

² See Lyotard (1984)

³ See Derrida (1984)

⁴ For similar considerations see Clark/Rossini (2017), XI-XXII

in the second half of the 1900's by Michel Foucault⁵, Jacques Derrida⁶ and Judith Butler⁷. This second declination of the theme will be called "Critical Humanism".

3. The critical stance toward anthropocentrism put forward by *animal studies*⁸, which questions the "special status" of mankind in the universe⁹. This declination of the theme will be indicated as "Antianthropocentric Posthumanism".

In order to orientate ourselves throughout the many theories – namely, specific studies and ramifications in disparate fields that posthuman has carried out because of its hybrid status not related to a specific study field, and because of the lack of a univocal definition of the concept – a specific method will be used. Such a method consists of both a "telescopic and a microscopic approach"¹⁰, to use Carlo Ginzburg's definition. In fact, for each of the three-above-mentioned categories, there will be a brief historical and theoretical introduction, which will allow the reader to contextualize the topic. The origin and the theoretical structure of each position will be analyzed. At the same time, I will highlight what I think are the most important points in the area through the *close reading* of a work that I think is a perfect example for each of the three macro-categories. I have chosen a different cultural-product for each of the sections (film, book and work of art) in order to stress, also stylistically, how posthumanism has rendered the hybridization of the narrative registers and the multi-faced structure of the media one of its fundamental point.

Finally, in the conclusions, I will present my theoretical proposal¹¹, which will attempt to connect the philosophic discourse on the posthumanism with the theme

⁵ See Foucault (2002)

⁶ See Derrida (1982), 1-28, 109-136, 207-272, 307-330

⁷ See Butler (1991), Butler (1993), Butler (2005)

⁸ See in general, for a panoramic overview on the connections between *animal studies* and posthumanism, Haraway (1991), Haraway (2003), Haraway (2007), Wolfe (2003), Wolfe (2010)

⁹ See Max Scheler's programmatic work (Scheler 2009). Such text comes from a conference held 1927 in Darmstadt. The title was slightly different from the one that actually got published, but it was extremely significant: *Die Sonderstellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. The word "Sonderstellung" literally means "special position". Such word will be replaced in the printed version, which will be published after the death of the author, by the simple word "Stellung" ("place, "position")

¹⁰ Ginzburg (1989), X

¹¹ The conclusions of this work will resume the concepts presented in the introduction of *Umano Post Umano*, See Lucci (2016), 11-27

of the Anthropocene¹² and with a new interpretation of the Neolithic Revolution's anthropological category¹³.

1. On the narrative core of Posthumanism: science fiction, dystopias, horror

The concept of posthuman doesn't find one of its expressive forms in the form of a theory, but rather in the world of narrations: novels, short stories, films and – more recently – videogames and TV series¹⁴.

Such narrations have the capacity of taking the prefix “post” in a serious and literal way, as characterizing the position of the subject and/or the narration in terms of “human”. This notion of “human” is at the center of the descriptive scheme. The narrations propose posthuman as a vision, something as a look at the human from the outside or from the “after”, which needs to be further investigated.

Because of this, posthuman as a narrative genre tries to take into account both the “empowered” man modified in his “natural”¹⁵ corporeity, which finds his highest expression in the cyborg¹⁶ – the man who has transcended his own organic limits through the addition of mechanical artificial limbs – and to contrast it with a man whose features go beyond the limit of reality.

Such representations of the beyond-reality features usually take place via two narrative situations: the first consists of creating a confrontation (mostly antagonistic) between a human and a non-human being (usually an alien, a monster or a robot). This reveal, in comparison, what the human constitutive features are and when these are lacking, in order to later introduce – often in a rhetorical and anthropocentric manner – the question of the fluidity of the characteristics that we tend to recognize as intrinsically human.

¹² In general on the theme of the Anthropocene see Crutzen/Stoermer (2000), Smith/Zeder (2013), Crutzen/Steffen (2003), Braje (2015), Steffen/Crutzen/McNeill (2007), Wilkinson (2005).

¹³ In general on the Neolithic Revolution see Aurenche/Cauvin (1989), Cauvin (1993), Cauvin (2000). For a critical position see Watkins (2013)

¹⁴ Here, I list an example for each category: *The Possibility of an Island* by Michael Houellebecq (novel, see Houellebecq, 2005), *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott (film), *The Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman (available on different media: comic, TV series, novels, videogames), *The Last of Us* by Neil Duckmann and Bruce Stailey (videogame)

¹⁵ It is important to mention that in the second half of the 1900's, the German philosophical anthropology, Arnold Gehlen in particular, had already deconstructed the idea of a “natural man”, who lived in a status before the “discovery” of the technique. See Gehlen (1986), Gehlen (1989).

¹⁶ See Haraway (1985)

This position could be simplified by taking as an example of this genre, Frankenstein¹⁷ by Mary Shelley. When the creature¹⁸ is showed able to feel emotions (emotions that are therefore presented as the distinctive character of the human being), what is put into question through recourse to an external and foreign perspective is the status of humanity.



Boris Karloff, acting as the monster that will make him famous in the movie *Frankenstein* (1931) by James Whale

The second narrative situation (which is more and more present in the media) coincides with the representation of a post-apocalyptic world, where the “post” indicates a spatial-temporal situation that follows the destruction of the human world – with all its social, political and cultural structures – as we know it today. In this postapocalyptic world (which in most of the cases does not play a big role in the narration, but rather focuses on the dynamics of the “post”, often dedicating time only to the trigger event – usually an epidemic *outbreak*¹⁹ – and to the following dynamics), what characterized the human collectives, namely, forms of life, ethical principles, moral ideas and – more generally – everyday life, is torn apart together with the world that allowed and justified those behaviors. The postapocalyptic world is a posthuman world, thus, since all the features that characterize the behavior and the ethical-social rules of what we normally define “human”, have completely collapsed, usually giving space to an anomic world,

¹⁷ See Shelley (2007).

¹⁸ From a critical perspective toward the anthroponcentrism, it is important to remember that “Frankenstein” is the name of the protagonist of the novel, whereas “the monster” does not have a name. The public have transferred the name from the creator to the creature, creating an interesting retroactive structure

¹⁹ See Zani/Meux (2011), Ronchi (2015)

the 2.0 version of Hobbesian state of nature²⁰. Here, the individuals are divided into people who still carry “human” values (often counter-adaptive) and those that have lost any trace of humanity in their behavior. The latter are people who, while still belonging to the *sapiens* species, may no longer be called “humans”, since they have lost all the ethical, political and social characteristics of humanity.

In the following paragraph, I will analyze a recent film, *Alien Covenant* (2017) by Ridley Scott. By discussing some key scenes in the movie, I will try to highlight how all the topics I have been referring to can be found in this movie: the crisis of the idea of “human” via the two comparisons with an external perspective (even dual in this case: an android and an alien-monster), and with the world that has lost all its human features (though in this case not because of an apocalypse, but through the narration that takes place outside of the terrestrial context, resetting all the basic social conditions of humanity under normal circumstances).

1.1. Xenomorph Darwinism

In the most recent chapter of the movie saga *Alien, Alien Covenant* (2017) – the second prequel of the movie tetralogy – the opening scene is an insubstantial image: a wide room with a glass window open to a natural wild cold northern landscape. In the room, which aseptically reflects the outside landscape, there are only a few items: Piero della Francesca’s painting representing the nativity of Christ, Carlo Bugatti’s armchair-throne, Michelangelo’s *David*, a Stanway grand piano and a tea table with two mugs and a teapot. Together with these items two characters are shown: Peter Wayland, the founder of the Wayland Corporation, which will play a fundamental role in the (chronologically) following movies and an android dressed in white interpreted by Michael Fassbender. The dialogue between the characters, one human and the other posthuman, explains in a dialogic way what the furniture symbolically already suggests: a scene of creation, a peculiar form of nativity. The android, which will soon call himself “David” looking at Michelangelo’s statue, asks his creator (his non-biological father) about his own origin. The conversation immediately moves to the topic of the relationships between the human and the android. David asks Peter why he, an immortal android, is destined to serve a mortal: “Allow me then a moment to consider. You seek your creator. I am looking at mine. I will serve you, yet you’re human. You will die, I will not”. Peter is annoyed by David’s comment and he shows it by commanding the android to serve the tea. The preliminary scene stops here, and the main narration starts. The posthumanism of Scott’s narration originates from all those issues already introduced in the first scene: the problem of paternity/maternity, the matter of mortality and caducity of the human species, and the creation of life.

²⁰ See Lucci (2014)



The *Urszene* in which the prologue of *Alien Covenant* by Ridley Scott (2017) takes place

The spaceship, of which the protagonists are the crew – which ferries human lives, though not only humans, and which is headed to a planet where the conditions of life are suitable for human life – decides to take a fatal detour after intercepting a signal from a planet on the route. It's here that the spaceship finds David, who survived the events of the previous chapter of the saga, *Prometheus* (2012). What is important to notice here, beyond the events taking place in the movie, is the collapse of the hierarchal line established by the classical anthropocentric model. David is a machine created by humans to serve them. From the beginning, though, he always faces the question of the special position humans play within the creation. Therefore, he tries and succeeds to get emancipated. This emancipation is accompanied by the desire of creation, which is represented by David's bio-engineering activities eventually resulting in the creation of infective spores. Such spores will eventually bring about the Neomorphs²¹, which will decimate the whole spaceship crew. In addition to these horrific creatures, there are the so-called "Facehuggers"²², embryonal versions of the more famous Xenomorphs²³, the aliens that have made *Alien* famous. Similar to spiders, Facehuggers come out of their eggs jumping onto the face of the person that made the egg open by getting close to it, and fecundate him/her with an embryo that will feed off of the guest's body to later leave it, causing the person's death. In this renewed chain of evolution, humans are no longer on the top of the pyramid of creation: compared to Xenomorphs they only represent an intermediate ring, what animals have mostly always been for humanity, i.e., preys to hunt and available sources of nutrient.

²¹ The video representations of the alien species making-of are very interesting and are available on *Alien Covenant* official website (<https://www.alienuniverse.com>). For the neomorph <https://www.alienuniverse.com/post/neomorph> (17.09.2017)

²² https://www.alienuniverse.com/post/ovomorph-and_facehugger (17.09.2017)

²³ <https://www.alienuniverse.com/post/xenomorph> (17.09.2017)

Here, the posthuman perspective presents itself in a dual decentralization of perspective. On the one hand, human beings are dethroned from their creational position by their own creature, the machine; on the other, they also lose their place in the food chain, becoming an evolutionally disadvantaged species.

David's words are the perfect recap of the posthuman vision of Alien Covenant: "They are a dying species that do not deserve start again and I am not going to let them."

2. Posthumanism as Critical Humanism

A second declination of the idea of posthuman finds its maximum expression in the theoretical field. Authors like Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Kathryn Hayles²⁴ in particular can be included in this repartition of posthuman genre. By leading it to its extreme consequences, these authors have radicalized a discussion which was already organically formulated in some of the authors belonging to the so-called *French Theory*, namely Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault especially. Radicalizing some outcomes of the first structuralism Foucault has described the human being as a result, denying its substantiality and even questioning the existence of a "human nature" in itself²⁵.

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea²⁶.

If we take into consideration Foucault's entire production, and look especially at his gradual interest for the construction of the subjectivity between 1980 – 1983²⁷, we can say that the human being would be, according to Foucault, just a point of intersection between the power dynamics in the world of politics, economics, medicine etc. (in general, those worlds we can refer to as "institutions", which are subjected to historical changes) and a series of exercises, techniques, resistances, practices and individual strategies, which aim to render the subject who he is²⁸. Therefore, Foucault states, "man" would not exist, but it would be a series of human production chains, in which socio-political-economical thrusts meet with the single practices of recognition, creating what we usually call "sub-

²⁴ See Hayles (1999)

²⁵ See the famous debate with Foucault and Noam Chomsky on the theme of the "human nature": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfNI2L0Gf8> (17.09.2017)

²⁶ Foucault (2002), 422.

²⁷ See Foucault (1978), Foucault (1985), Foucault (1986).

²⁸ See Foucault, (1988).

ject”. The other authors I previously mentioned attempt to radicalize – if possible at all – Foucault’s thesis, even questioning matters like “gender”, “sex” and “life” (as well as “body” and “subject”). This way, posthumanism has been successfully connected with the feminist theories and with a certain radically deconstructive declination of the so-called “theory”²⁹.

In order to pragmatically exemplify this theoretical declination of posthuman, in the following paragraph I will analyze the thesis put forward by philosopher Rosi Braidotti and described in her *The Posthuman*³⁰. I think that Braidotti’s ideas could be presented as a summary of the deconstructionist and feminist topic of the posthuman.

2.1. Rosi Braidotti’s Posthumanism: An Other Idea of Subjectivity

It is very interesting to notice that the idea of “subject” is always at the center of the reconstruction of the big “cartographic”³¹ summary which is the subject matter of Rosi Braidotti’s book. Although this “subject” is “process-oriented”³², it still remains a necessary subject, an important actor of the theoretical discussion:

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In my view, a focus on subjectivity is necessary because this notion enables us to string together issues that are currently scattered across a number of domains. For instance, issues such as norms and values, forms of community bonding and social belonging as well as questions of political governance both assume and require a notion of the subject. Critical posthuman thought wants to re-assemble a discursive community out of the different, fragmented contemporary strands of posthumanism³³.

I believe that it is possible to read Braidotti’s text as a dual attempt revolving around the idea of subject: on the one hand it aims to build a posthuman theory (i.e. a non ethno-phallogocentric, relational and metastable theory), on the other it wants to create a theory about the main characteristics of the posthuman subject. In other words, it refers to a relational and situated subjectivity, which has an ethical and dialogical relationship with the nature, the animals, the ecosystem and the other human groups). According to Braidotti, the posthuman subject is a subject which has freed itself from the chain of Eurocentric Anthropocentrism

²⁹ For a cultural history (and political) of the concept of “theory”, see Felsch (2015)

³⁰ See Braidotti (2013)

³¹ Braidotti (2013), 4

³² *Ibid.*, 190

³³ *Ibid.*, 42

and it is open to different dimensions of the responsible cooperation and political activity. This is very clear in the second chapter of the book, *Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species*³⁴, where the “postanthropocentric” and “posthuman” concepts are used as synonyms:

An altogether different and powerful source of inspiration for contemporary re-configurations of critical posthumanism is ecology and environmentalism. They rest on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others. This practice of relating to others requires and is enhanced by the rejection of self-centred individualism. It produces a new way of combining selfinterests with the well-being of an enlarged community, based on environmental inter-connections. [...] My position is in favour of complexity and promotes radical posthuman subjectivity, resting on the ethics of becoming, as we shall see in the next chapter. The focus is shifted accordingly from unitary to nomadic subjectivity, thus running against the grain of high humanism and its contemporary variations. This view rejects individualism, but also asserts an equally strong distance from relativism or nihilistic defeatism. It promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical Humanism. A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others, [...].³⁵

Although “enlarged”, this subject remains a human subject, that is supposed to modify its own ethical condition and attitude towards the non-humans. In my opinion, the staying-subject shows Braidotti’s Foucauldian/Deleuzian philosophical legacy and the big difference between the posthumanism as a “critical humanism” that I am presenting here and other two forms of posthumanism that constitute the object of our analysis: “Narrative Posthumanism” and the “Anti-anthropocentric Posthumanism”.

Whereas in narrative the problem of posthumanism is represented mostly through the formulation and the effect of the question of what the constitutive limits which render the “human” what it is are, as well as through the possibility/impossibility to transcend them – questions to which an answer is rarely provided and, whenever it is, it is usually just a repetition or translation of ethical, spiritual or empathic human categories on non-human subjects – in the case of posthumanism as a critical humanism the question is mostly ethical-political: how do we face the changes of contemporary society with all the related changes in proprioception with regard to the relationship with technology, the non-human actors and the environment?

Following the order of these reflections, it is clear that the phenomenological gesture of showing the human limits is not enough, and it is necessary to indicate an ethical direction, which seems possible only assuming a subject agent.

³⁴ *Ibíd.*, 55-10

³⁵ Braidotti (2013), 47-49

Here, Braidotti takes this theoretical direction. For instance, although she deconstructs the concept of Foucauldian bio-politics³⁶ through the addition of the idea, coined by Achille Mbembe³⁷, of “necropolitics” (the analysis of the first, she claims, would not adequately take into account the politics of death conducted in the contemporary world) she proposes a review of the constitutive elements of the ethical dispositions of the subject, but not its radical disempowerment or dismissal. The concept of subject stays – although only as common ground for historical and contingent influences – mainly because of its fundamental role in the theoretical discourse. This fundamental actor – or this timeless “conceptual persona”, to use a Deleuzian expression – remains present even where Braidotti tries (through the formulation of her own idea of *zoe*³⁸) to develop the Spinosian-Deleuzian idea of life, i.e. impersonal³⁹ life, beyond individuation. Even the idea of death, which according to Braidotti is the *pendant* of the vitalistic immanent-*zoe* force: it is an epistemological object that serves to develop a new awareness of one’s own limits and one’s renewed ethical challenges. This is why a thematization of death goes as the following:

It can be argued, therefore, that Life as *zoe* also encompasses what we call ‘death’. As a result, what we humans most deeply aspire to is not so much to disappear, but rather to do so in the space of our own life and in our own way. It is as if each of us wishes to die in our own fashion. Our innermost desire is for a self-fashioned, a self-styled death. We thus pursue what we are ultimately trying to avoid and become virtual existential suicides, not from nihilism, but because it is our nature to die and our deepest desire to self-fashion our own death⁴⁰.

...can only followed by an appeal to responsibility for the posthuman subject, who is encouraged to think beyond its “I”-centrism in continuity with the world of generations that will come after him⁴¹:

The inner coherence of this posthuman subject is held together by the immanence of his/her expressions, acts and interactions with others and by the powers of remembrance, or continuity in time. I refer to this process in terms of sustainability, so as to stress the idea of endurance which it entails. Sustainability does assume faith in a future, and also a sense of responsibility for ‘passing on’ to future generations a world that is liveable and worth living in. A present that endures is a sustainable model of the future⁴².

In the book conclusions, such appeal to subjectivity even acquires a “poetic” strength in the subjective assumption of the author:

³⁶ *Ibíd.*, 115

³⁷ *Ibíd.*, 122. For the concept of “necropolitics” see Mbembe (2003)

³⁸ Braidotti (2013), see in particular 110-130

³⁹ See Deleuze 2006 and Esposito (2012)

⁴⁰ Braidotti (2013), 134-5

⁴¹ On the intergenerational theme see Menga (2016). For the proposal of “inclusive humanism” see Macho (2013)

⁴² Braidotti (2013), 138

I live at the tail end of bio-power, that is to say amidst the relentless necro-political consumption of all that lives. I am committed to starting from this, not from a nostalgic re-invention of an all-inclusive transcendental model, a romanticized margin or some holistic ideal. I want to think from here and now, from Dolly my sister and oncomouse as my totemic divinity; from missing seeds and dying species⁴³.

In conclusion, I believe that it is possible to support the idea that the second posthumanism I have presented, rather defined as a “critical humanism”, exemplified by Rosa Braidotti’s text, indicates what the *proprium* of posthumanism is. Based on the western philosophical tradition (in its poststructuralist or deconstructivist critical version), it clings on the idea of a subject that, even with all the new revisions and critiques, is still present as a necessary part of the presented discussion.

3. Antianthropocentric Posthumanism

The last declination of posthuman that I intend to take into consideration is related to *animal studies*. What is particularly interesting about these philosophical theories is the possibility of relativizing the ethical categories that have always been applied only to the animal *homo sapiens*, showing on the one hand their arbitrariness, and on the other the impossibility of applying them only to human beings. These radical questions on the lawfulness of behaviors that harm people’s health and quality of life have to face an impasse, where “life” is defined as a bio-physiological concept, a consequence of the evolutionist theories. In fact, if a category of philosophical thought like ethics obliges us to respect life as such, it becomes very difficult to affirm from a scientific perspective – one which does not rely on religious dogma that consider central the position of human beings in the matter of creation – that a *differentia specifica* exists between human and animal life and, as a consequence, that there is a possible justification to the brutal subduing of animal life (as increased since the second industrial revolution) to satisfy the food needs, but also tastes and human trends⁴⁴.

According to these kind of observations, the *animal studies* theoretical movement is similar to the one we highlighted about “Narrative Posthumanism”: there is a radical question about the constitutive elements of humanity arising from a perspective that relativize human position. However, if in the first case the overturning of the point of view was made by comparing the human being with an imaginary and absolute foreignness (aliens, robots, monsters), in this case the concept of human is questioned starting from the comparison with the animal world.

⁴³ *Ibíd.*, 194-5

⁴⁴ See Patterson (2002)

Based on scientific proofs that see the human being in a radical continuity with the rest of the living creatures, the *animal studies* take a direction toward posthumanism by simply dethroning it, in the Darwinian sense, from the center of creation⁴⁵.

If the human being, as evolutionism has proven, is just one animal among the others, with a contingent evolutionary and relatively recent history and – in comparison with other animals – lacking any priority and ontological privilege of metaphysical origins, what then characterizes the superior position human beings have assumed on the planet? What justifies, on an ethical level, their actions? And what is supposed to guide humans' behavioral principles?

These matters are by far the most relevant declinations of posthumanism. In fact, they try to ask questions about the “human” from a non-anthropocentric perspective and therefore face the limits of the “human” itself. Such questions even reach the paradoxical limit of a theory created by humans, which tries to take a non-anthropocentric position.

3.1. The *Alba* of Posthumanism

At the beginning of the millennium, thanks to the active cooperation of two French scientists (Louis-Marie Houdebine and Patrick Prunet) and a zoo-systemician (Louis Bec), the transgenic Brazilian artist Eduardo Kac started an artistic project that consisted in the lab creation of a transgenic albino rabbit, which the artist – in agreement with the members of his family – would later call “Alba”⁴⁶. The peculiarity of this rabbit – whose genetic heritage was modified through the addition of a protein taken from the *Aequore Victoria* jellyfish – consisted in its getting a fluorescent green color when exposed to a specific shade of blue light, with a maximum excitation at 488nm.

This artistic project, named *GFP Bunny*, can be to my mind a good example to clarify the position of the *animal studies* within the posthuman perspective⁴⁷. Criticism against Kac⁴⁸ blames him to be wanting “to play God”, creating a living being just for an aesthetic pretention. Kac is accused of being extremely anthropocentric: his stance goes against the animal nature as an available source to be used at one's own discretion⁴⁹. In fact, if we look at the whole corpus of works related to Alba, we understand that the position of the Brazilian artist is much more complex than that. Kac did not consider Alba a work of art *per se*: art for

⁴⁵ See Sloterdijk (2017), 216-220

⁴⁶ The source of all the information about Alba and its characteristics is Eduardo Kac's personal website <http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html#gfpbunnyanchor> (15.09.2017)

⁴⁷ Wolfe (2010), 158-167

⁴⁸ For a thorough report on the debates caused by the creation of Alba see www.ekac.org/debates.html.

⁴⁹ See Heidegger (1977), 17 on the idea of “Bestand”

him was to be rather found in the relational and inter-subjective context created by Alba's birth and connected the artist, the animal, the scientific community, the world of arts, of philosophy, of the media and of the public opinion.



Alba, the fluorescent bunny. (Photo: Chrystelle Fontaine)

By analyzing the corpus of works connected to Alba it is possible to observe, just as a confirmation of the artist's original intent, that it wasn't the specificity of the animal what gave the users the chance of expressing themselves on Kac's work (this is reported in the *Alba Guestbook*⁵⁰). Most hostile opinions do not attack life manipulation as something wrong per se, but rather as something that goes against nature. These opinions show an extremely anthropocentric position and also an implicitly theological one, according to which nature has an autonomous way of functioning (which is good), which is not allowed to be modified⁵¹. The focal point in *GFB Bunny* aesthetic cycle – what contrasts this anthropocentric position in the first place – seems to reside within its ethical-relational dimension, which has always been highlighted by Kac. He has diligently taken care of the animal he designed, considering him an actual member of the family and allowing its existence to retroactively influence his way of living. It is no coincidence thus that in the theoretical text that accompanies the exposition of the historical-conceptual information of the project, Kac reflects upon these considerations from an evolutionary perspective. The domestication of animals, he claims, has always been bidirectional and the relationship between the human being and the

⁵⁰ http://www.ekac.org/bunnybook.2000_2004.html

⁵¹ See Habermas (2003)

animal has always influenced the human being himself⁵². What makes Kac's project very interesting in terms of the exemplification of a posthumanist perspective is that it puts together the criticisms generated around his work and the ethical proposal, which is implicit in his artistic operation. Indeed, on the one hand, *animal studies* try to criticize the dominant position of human beings on non-human animals. The epistemological aspect of this position, though, is represented by the method used for this decentralization. This change of perspective – going beyond the borders of a humanist position – tries to expand (even with respectable ethical goals) so as to include the way human beings relate or would like to be reciprocally related to animals, that is, by “humanizing” them without respecting their originality. Kac's “ethical” proposal is instead highly praised by an important scholar of the posthuman such as Cary Wolfe⁵³, as consisting of a dual perspective which Alba makes very clear. First, in the reactions of the public opinion, the fact that the animal had been created *in the laboratory* was not the actual focus of the critics⁵⁴. Secondly, and relatedly, the possibility of “creating” an animal life is by any means a shocking one, we just need to think about the thousand-year process we engaged in to domesticate animals that were, from a human perspective, gradually perfected in order to improve their performances or simply because of some aesthetic reasons (as exemplified by the history of the creation of dog and feline breeds through crossbreeding).

Although this, from a historical-cultural perspective, only represents the evolution of a practice that is absolutely not new, the possibility of creating life in laboratory should lead human beings to improve their empathic skills towards animals and develop ethical abilities such as inclusivity and the willingness to share life, environments and time.

By discussing the case of *GFB Bunny*, I have presented what I think are the most important theoretical guidelines on the posthuman. I will now conclude by addressing a perspective that tries to put together the analysis of the posthuman and an anthropological theory which – using Thomas Macho's expression – could be defined as “inclusive humanism”⁵⁵.

Conclusions: Ethical Posthumanism in the Anthropocene Era?

⁵² Quoting Kac: “domestication is always a bidirectional experience. As humans domesticate rabbits, so do rabbits domesticate their humans”.

<http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html#gfpbunnyanchor> (17.09.2017)

⁵³ Wolfe (2010), 158-167

⁵⁴ Ibid, 165

⁵⁵ See the “inclusive humanism” proposal by Thomas Macho at the end of his presentation *Tiere–Menschen–Maschinen. Für einen inklusiven Humanismus*, held on Septber 22nd 2012 for the “Philosophicum Lech” conference *Tiere. Der Mensch und seine Natur*. Cf. Macho (2013), 171

The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has entitled the first part of his *Zeilen und Tage*⁵⁶, a ponderous autobiographic diary – something in-between Cioran and Valéry – *Spuren in Posthumien*⁵⁷, “traces in the Posthumian”.

Since the very beginning of the book⁵⁸ Sloterdijk gives us directions to explain this word. The term has to be read in continuity with others like Musterian, Aurignacian, Magdalenian, referring to ancient ages where human beings were still at the very beginning of their history.

Compared with another similar term, Anthropocene, coined by Eugene Stoermer and then used by the 1995 Nobel Prize in chemistry, Paul Crutzen, to indicate the geological era in which the big climate changes are the result of human activities, the importance and the peculiarity of this concept can be found in its dual linguistic essence: the reference to “posthumous” and to the word “posthuman” radically changed by adding the disturbing “i”.

Sloterdijk does not fully develop the consequences of this neologism, but the term “Posthumian” invites us to reflect upon what the meaning of putting ourselves in a different era could be, one in which even the concept of humanity would be infected with the addition of a prosthesis, a discordant element (that annoying “i”), able to automatically project us into a different dimension than the one we have been living in so far.

I will try to formulate a hypothesis to identify what the epistemological object of the word and the concept of Posthumian could mean.

Until now, we have defined “human being” as that animal that lives and undergoes the categorical and perceptive influence of the macro-revolutions in the behaviour and in the organization of groups happening since the Neolithic Revolution. This refers to the prehistoric switch of humanity from a phase where groups were small and nomadic (and whose main source of food was collecting and hunting) to the phase of sedentarization, when human beings started building settlements and practicing agriculture and animals breeding.

The consequences of this revolution were enormous: increased birth rate and higher life expectancy, stabilized families that represented the founding nucleolus of human groups, the cohabitation human beings/animals, the origin of writing (most likely related to the need of counting the food supplies), the creation of Gods and Goddesses according to the natural cycles and stable religious rituals (including rituals for the dead, which started “living” closer physically and psychologically with living people). Many scholars such as Alvin Toffler, Lewis Mumford and Arnold Gehlen have tried to divide the history of humanity into phases, considering the Neolithic Revolution as the major break, the Industrial Revolution as

⁵⁶ Sloterdijk (2012)

⁵⁷ See Sloterdijk (2012), 11-354

⁵⁸ Ibid., 9, 19, 20

the second-most impacting one, and the so-called phase of “immaterial production” as the third one (in this last one, there is a switch from the production of physical goods to the production of information).

Perhaps, what is still not clear about this theory of the phases is that fact that human beings have not actually got out of their Neolithic phase.

Until recent eras, that is, until only a few decades away for the western side of the world (whereas the situation is still the same in other areas) human beings have always been born, lived and died in the same places as their parents have. They have always believed (and still believe) in complex religious systems dating a thousand years, and used the same writing system as their ancestors until the advent of personal computers. Human beings live (at least in the Western world) according to the family structure they have inherited from the Neolithic monogamist model, with the addition of the “allomothering figures” (as Sloterdijk defines them in *Spheres III*)⁵⁹.

In the last thirty years, it became clearer and clearer that we are going out of the Neolithic era⁶⁰. This recognition has become part of peoples’ everyday life and changed the habits and the forms of life in such a radical way that the exodus from that earlier system which has represented for thousands of years our *Lebenswelt* appears pragmatically as a *status quo*, although not accepted from a theoretical perspective.

Most of under-30 people have travelled to an unthinkable number of places, to longer distances and in a shorter time, compared to the generation of their grandparents. The migration flows have become individualized: for the most part, people emigrate on their own or in micro-groups, which means that there has been a big loss of the cultural and tradition determiners belonging to their original groups. There is also a clearer break in the line of continuity between place of birth, course of life and death. Media like pen and paper are mostly replaced with the keyboard and the electronic spreadsheet⁶¹. Throughout the last 20 years, the portability of technological tools has allowed the transportation of one’s ego-personal sphere without using too much energy. With a smartphone, all the human contacts, photos, documents and music are now condensed in an item that can be held in a hand and weighs a few grams: only until a few generations ago, all those items had to be packed up in many boxes during people’s rare relocations.

⁵⁹ See Sloterdijk (2016), 715-720, in particular 716

⁶⁰ See Caronia (1996), 171-179

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger had already foreseen the negative consequences of these changes in the media, especially concerning the switch from the manual writing to the typewriter (see Heidegger 1992, 79-87). These studies will be later developed in the German environment (with an interpretation of the phenomenon in the American context) from the *Medienwissenschaften* especially with F. A. Kittler (see Kittler 1999: “Media determine our situation”, XXXIX.) For a discussion on this theme see Campbell 2013, 3-11

Long-distance relationships are spreading more and more through virtual tools such as Skype, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, which differentiate the possibilities and the channel, creating forms of contact and communication spheres that, for their impact on people's everyday life, cannot be considered less real than those ones carried out by more traditional media⁶².

The possibility of being seen or heard in any given moment and place becomes more important and often required in friendships, love and work relationships.

All these different ways of building relationships – which would deserve to become the main subject of a philosophical anthropology aiming to face contemporary times – represent a stark break with the world of our Neolithic ancestors, though this world continues to survive in its own structures and *Weltanschauungen*. By surviving, the Neolithic world, with its living heritage, still impacts the current inhabitants of the Posthuman, who struggle to find their own position in a world (already completely posthuman) that is based on routines, forms of behaviour, relationships still structured according to the Neolithic model.

Arnold Gehlen's theory, described in his *Man in the Age of Technology*⁶³, seems thus to be valid. The author criticizes Freud's theory of "discontent" of civilization not much in the sense of the interaction between the subject's erotic and thanatological drives and the censorship operated by society, but rather in that of the superimposition of different socio-cultural models (in our case, the Neolithic and Posthuman models), which would be at the base of the neurosis, depressions and the contemporary man's psychopathologies.

With human beings in charge of their own destiny and of that of other species through the manipulation of life, energy and biosphere, writing cohabitation rules and recognising the inclusive community we live in (namely the contemporary world, as the expanded community shared by human beings, animals, plants, rituals, objects, images, networks, environments, dead and the not-yet-born) seem to be the first of the many philosophical tasks to be accomplished in contemporary world.

The possibility of finding common rules for the cohabitation of all global actors, human and non-human, is based on one requirement only: killing anything is still 'Neolithic' in humankind and permanently become posthuman.

⁶² In this context we urge to get philosophical distance from the "nostalgic technophobia" which characterizes most intellectual milieu as well as the academic world. This position tends to consider older media and communication tools more "authentic" than modern ones. The first would indeed be closer to a (alleged and unjustified) idea of naturality. Such position can only be justified as a consequence of the longer use of the older media (habit) compared to the modern ones, not as an ontological difference between the two

⁶³ See Gehlen (1989), chapter 7

Only through deep awareness of our condition as humans – included in a context of non-human characters and put between the anvil and the hammer of the two great eras of civilization (the Neolithic and the Posthuman) – could we have the chance not to get stuck in between.

The only possible choice for the Anthropocene posthumous man is to be consciously (and fully) posthuman, i.e., to live the *couplage* with our techniques, our rituals and our emotions without prejudice, consciously accepting the forms of life proposed (and, in some ways, imposed) by the cohabitation with our media and with other non-human actors on the world's historical stage⁶⁴.

If this does not happen, what Heidegger defined as the “ontological difference” will look like an “ontological apartheid”: agents that are not recognized as human, and are forced to a logical, ontological, ethic and material enslavement, will end up leaving us alone. This uprooted omnipotence will tragically wear, impressed and immutable, the features of our human face, too human⁶⁵.

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⁶⁴ See Macho (2013)

⁶⁵ Here the expression “ontological apartheid” indicates the possibility – present in monist western ontologies and exemplified by Heidegger – of human beings considering themselves an entity having an ontological priority to the rest of the animals. In the history of western thought, this logic has allowed an ontological segregation of other entities in a “reduced” – impoverished – ontological world compared to the one including human entities.

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