



## THE GOLDFISH SYNDROME. HUMAN NATURE AND THE POSTHUMAN MYTH

### EL SÍNDROME DEL PEZ ROJO. NATURALEZA HUMANA Y EL MITO POSTUMANO

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#### ABSTRACT:

##### Keywords:

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extensionism.

Posthumanism is a myth. This does not mean to say that it constitutes a narrative devoid of any foundation, inspired by mere fantasy, far from it. The myth, as shown by Ries, Eliade and Lévi-Strauss on several occasions, is based on something real and true, and appeals to conceptual structures that keep it away from a mere scientific report: having had to do with the essence of things, it does not even have a purpose of classification in a given place or time. In this sense, the posthuman myth lives outside of time and out of the common space of existence, or perhaps, it lives in its own time and in its own space. Just like the myth, posthumanism lives in consciousness: to prove this assumption, we will discuss in greater depth the spatial and temporal coordinates of posthumanism, as well as its cosmological and anthropological point of view. Once demonstrated its mythical essence, it will therefore be easier to remember how the posthuman myth – despite intending to present itself as a radically innovative and progressive thought – makes no more than re-emerge some coordinates that have always been present in the history of philosophy.

#### RESUMEN:

##### Palabras clave:

Posthumanismo,  
mito, espacio y  
tiempo, identidad,  
extensionismo.

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El posthumanismo es un mito. Con esto no se quiere decir que ello constituya una narración carente de fundamento, inspirada en la mera imaginación, para nada. El mito, como muestran Ries, Eliade y Lévi-Strauss en varias ocasiones, se basa en algo real, y reclama a estructuras conceptuales, que lo distancian de los meros informes científicos: puesto que tiene que ver con la esencia misma de las cosas, no tiene ambiciones de marco histórico o espacial. En este sentido el mito posthumano vive fuera del tiempo y del espacio común de la existencia, o tal vez sería mejor decir que vive en su propio tiempo y en su propio espacio. Al igual que el mito, el posthumano vive en la conciencia: para demostrar esta hipótesis vamos a discutir más a fondo las coordenadas espaciales y temporales del posthumano y su visión antropológica y cosmológica. Una vez comprobado su esencia mítica será fácil de recordar cómo el mito posthumano, no obstante quiera proponerse a sí mismo como una idea radicalmente innovadora y progresista, sólo hace emerger de nuevo algunas coordenadas presentes desde siempre en la historia del pensamiento.

## 1. The genesis of a myth

The starting hypothesis of our paper is that the post-human narratives are mythical narratives. Before getting to the heart of the argument of this case, however, we must specify what we mean by the term “myth”<sup>1</sup> and in what manner posthuman philosophy traces these narratives: to do so we will refer to the speculations of Julien Ries and those of other philosophers and anthropologists who have tried to outline the essential characteristics of a phenomenon that is as complex as necessary in the history of mankind.

In fact, the Belgian anthropologist and historian of religions, referring to the studies of Mircea Eliade, writes that: «the myth relates the events that date back to the origins, to the primordial and legendary time of beginnings. In doing so, it refers to realities that exist in the world, explaining the origins: cosmos, man, plants, animals, life»<sup>2</sup>. The posthuman narratives appear to be notably close to Ries’ “eschatological myths”, namely those myths that relate the events of cosmic catastrophes (floods, earthquakes, collapsing mountains, destruction of the world and apocalypses), and which often end with the image of a new creation<sup>3</sup>. These myths seem to express the idea of a gradual degradation of the cosmos, which requires its destruction and its subsequent recreation. It is as if the contemporary man (i.e. the man of every historical epoch), the real man (*hic homo*), could no longer live on this Earth, in this space, and needs a catharsis to return to a time previous to corruption. The real man inevitably makes room for the “archaic man”, i.e. one who, nostalgic for the primordality, «tries to reach the “essential primordial state”, i.e. the human condition of his origins, and by

means of this essential primordial state, i.e. the primordial state that precedes existence. [...] The consciousness of this primordial state brings the archaic man to adjust his behavior to find more and more this absolute reality, opposed to the profane world: a powerful reality, rich and meaningful»<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.1. Truth of myth: means, method and object of narration

When we connote a reality as “mythical” we do not mean disqualify or declass it to a mere fairy tale, a mere figment of the imagination; myth, in fact, in its deeper reality, says something true, something that has an element of truth: «Myth is neither irresponsible fantasy, nor the object of weighty psychology, or any such thing. It is “wholly other”, and requires to be looked at with open eyes»<sup>5</sup>. It does not describe an object as a scientific report would, but it tends to reveal the truth behind what – whether it is the whole or a part of the reality – it is hiding. Therefore it does not have a claim of realistic and historical reconstruction of the facts; it does not relate the history of the genesis and development of a reality: it says something profoundly real, that mere scientific explanation of the facts could not explain. So the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, far from bringing back the history of technology as it has been unfolding over time, tells us of the aspects of the technical essence, of the relationship that man has with it, of the value in human life.

This complex reality cannot be explained in scientific, historical or sociological terms, as it has nothing to do with a chronological sequence of events, with the logic alternation of causes and effects<sup>6</sup>, as shown by Cassirer:

4 Ibid, 22.

5 De Santillana, G. Von Dechend, H. *Hamlet's Mill, An essay investigating the origins of human knowledge and its transmission through myth*, David R. Godine, Jaffrey, 1998, 328.

6 The difficulty of accepting the truth about myth has probably something to do with what Trapanese here describes: «De-mythizing can be conceived as a general phenomenon that occurs in inversed types of manifestations (Protagora, Platone, Nietzsche and others) that “progressively dominates the whole history of mythology”. In particular, in modern times “the same principle of science obligates us to speak about the myth in an argumentative language (logic) and therefore not measurable with the narrative style of the myth itself”» - Trapanese, E.V. «Due “derivate culturali” del mito», *Enkelados. Rivista mediterranea di psicologia analitica* 0, (2013), 175-176.

1 In this paper we will try to comprehend myth in light of some philosophical and anthropological studies. For a more complete view, one would need to understand the psychoanalytical perspective. For now, we would prefer to leave it aside for reasons of competence and priority of writing, and refer to: Cambray, J. «The Mythic Mind and Emergence of Consciousness from the Archetypal World», *Enkelados. Rivista mediterranea di psicologia analitica* 0, (2013), 31-40; and also: Kelly, T. «Mythology and Individuation», *Enkelados. Rivista mediterranea di psicologia analitica* 0, (2013), 53-59.

2 Ries, J. *Mito e rito. Le costanti del sacro*, Jaca Book, Milano, 2008, 6.

3 See Ibid, 7.

«Whereas scientific thought takes an attitude of inquiry and doubt toward the “object” with its claim to objectivity and necessity, myth knows no such opposition. It “has” the object only insofar as it is overpowered by it; it does not possess the object by progressively building it but is simply possessed by it. It has no will to understand the object by encompassing it logically and articulating it with a complex of causes and effects; it is simply overpowered by the object»<sup>7</sup>.

If mythical narrative has no reconstructive pretensions towards its object, in the same way it does not even have a desire for classification in a given place or time: having to do with the essence of things, it does not bother to contextualize, since the essence does not have historical and spatial boundaries. In this sense, myth lives outside of time and out of the common space of existence, or perhaps it should be said that it lives *in its own time and in its own space*, in a reality not marked by seconds, and not measured in centimetres.

It is, therefore, the object of mythical narrative - the essence of things, their origin and their end - to dictate even its method of inquiry: «Its aim is to reach by the shortest possible means a general understanding of the universe—and not only a general but a total understanding. That is, it is a way of thinking which must imply that if you don’t understand everything, you don’t explain anything. This is entirely in contradiction to what scientific thinking does, which is to proceed step by step, trying to give explanations for very limited phenomena, and then going on to other kinds of phenomena, and so on»<sup>8</sup>. The myth does not bother, however, to demonstrate step by step the correctness of the previously validated thesis, nor to corroborate hypothesis so that they are universally understood: the symbol itself, by its nature, is in fact something mysteri-

ous and certainly not immediate. It is also true that the essence is not understood by the addition of accidents. If the ideal of scientific knowledge, then, is Baconian - that is to say, knowledge itself is power - the aim of the myth, as Levi- Straus rightly points out, is quite different: «We are able, through scientific thinking, to achieve mastery over nature [...] while, of course, myth is unsuccessful in giving man more material power over the environment»<sup>9</sup>.

In this way and from now on, we deal with understanding this central point for our argument: the myth expresses something that is *true*, that is *real*. It does not concern a reality as we would imagine and how we usually think about - a reality that is quantifiable and measurable with unique (and inter-subjectively accepted) scientific instruments. Rather, it expresses a reality as to how it is given to the consciousness in a deeper way, expressing something that actually is, though intangible and materially not controllable. In this regard, the myth is an irrefutable indicator of a metaphysical opening. At the same time, to the dimension of the sacred: «Events that took place in mythical times and therefore make up a sacred history because the actors in the drama are not men but Supernatural Beings»<sup>10</sup>. The myth, by its very nature, speaks about something that is not natural - or being unexplainable in natural terms - since it lays the foundation of the natural world.

In this sense, the myth is configured as a symbolic expression of how reality immediately manifests itself to consciousness: it says something more than a mere figure, it explains the origin and the end<sup>11</sup> of reality, and reveals its essence. Ries writes: «The myth is a symbolic expression through which the human being interprets the relationship between the current time and the origins»<sup>12</sup>.

7 Cassirer, E. *The Philosophy Of Symbolic Forms. Volume Two: Mythical Thought*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1955, 74.

8 Lévi-Strauss, C. *Myth and Meaning*, Routledge, London, 2001, 5-6. We would like to specify further: we agree with Lévi-Strauss in that the myth conserves its own methodology of investigation, different from the scientific one; on the other hand, we must be precise regarding what the French philosopher affirms, in that we maintain that every myth has a universal pretension or explanation of totality: the mythical narrative is always referred to a particular aspect of our experience.

9 Ibid, 6.

10 Eliade, M. *Myth and Reality*, Waveland Press, Long Grove, 1998, 13.

11 We must specify that this affirmation, in light of what is previously said: the myth does not explain the *historical* origins and the end of a reality, as the characteristics of myth is to be a cyclical reality which repeats itself continuously; in this regard, the origin and the end are not meant to be taken *chronologically*.

12 Ries, *op cit.* 6.

If the aim of the mythical narrative is what we proposed here, then we can also understand the reasons for which it ought to firstly concern to how a reality came to be and where it goes: the myth always deals with the beginning and the end of a reality, as it is in these two moments that the essence of a thing becomes more obvious; Eliade writes: «Myth, then is always an account of a “creation”; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*. [...] The myth is regarded as a sacred history, and hence a “true” history, because it always deals with *realities*. The cosmogonic myth is “true” because the existence of the World is there to prove it; the myth of the origin of death is equally true because man’s mortality proves it, and so on»<sup>13</sup>.

If we applied the discussion that we have embarked on here to the myth to the posthuman - characterizing it as “post-human myth” - we would be immediately aware of how the posthuman narrative should not be treated as a false story or as a childish fruit of pure fantasy. Just the opposite: it is home to a variety of truths - truths that are qualified in a completely different manner from the results obtained from scientific or historical researches. First of all, the nostalgia of the original world in which man existed in harmony with the other living beings - human and non-human - and his subsequent fall that led to the genesis of chaos. Around these two events, as claimed by Ries and Eliade, most of the pages of mythical narrative are focused: «Through the mythical tales, human beings perceive the primordial time as a golden age during which chaos has become cosmos»<sup>14</sup>; and again: «The current human condition - a state of degradation in comparison with the golden age of mankind - is explained as a result of a fall, a tragic event that erupted into human history. Around it are grouped those myths and symbols that seek to explain the origins of disease and death, and the tragic nature of the human condition after the fall»<sup>15</sup>.

It is precisely within these two dynamics - together with the third one of cosmic destruction, typical of eschatological myths, as pointed out above - that we will

test the posthuman narrative as a possibility, at the same time, to explain the essence of reality in general (and human life, in particular) and to indicate a pedagogical direction toward the possible salvation of mankind (or rather: post-mankind). Even in the latter respect, the posthuman narrative reveals itself to be closely akin to the mythical one, since it is concerned with the possibility and the need for man to reach the time of the golden age, to adjust his lives permanently, to give it meaning, significance and effectiveness.

In order to more clearly analyze the peculiar characters of the posthuman narrative, to decree whether or not its proximity to myth, we will focus on three elements, which are particularly significant in this sense: space, time and anthropological conception (and consequently the cosmological conception) of posthumanism. In any case, in our discussion we will move on whilst taking most seriously the beautiful expression of Donna Haraway, who, consciously or not, expresses the closest connection between myth and posthumanism: «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 all cyborgs»<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. Elements of posthumanism

The posthuman narrative moves in spaces and times that are not those classical, core Newtonian ones of western tradition. Indeed, they are precisely their negation: given that the ultimate goal is the rejection - if not the destruction - of a certain way of western thinking<sup>17</sup>, which is characterized by an oscillating dichotomy between paradigms (nature/culture, human/environment, male/female, mind/brain, etc.), the posthuman narrative moves in a time and a space that are not “westernly real”. The reconstruction of the posthuman thought in the light of the categories of space and time is therefore particularly difficult: they do not exist in the posthuman language.

<sup>16</sup> Haraway, D. *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Social Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, in C. Hanks (ed.), *Technology and Values. Essential Readings*, Blackwell, Malden, 2010, 226.

<sup>17</sup> We are particularly referring here to the way of thought inaugurated by the scientific revolution.

<sup>13</sup> Eliade, *op cit.* 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Ries, *op cit.* 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

In the following pages, we will try to explain the following line of reasoning: 1) the posthuman elimination of space and time - or rather their bracketing - proceeds in the direction of a removal of the identity, since this is the daughter of existence (the existence is always cut and pieced in space and time); indeed, Feuerbach writes: «You exist only in space and time; you begin in them, but you also end in them; they are the boundaries of your being. As an individual, you cannot exist outside of time and space; therefore, you exist only in this spatiotemporal life»<sup>18</sup>; 2) the elimination of the identity - the central point of the posthuman speculation and the prelude to the total contamination of the living beings - is therefore postulated by elimination of the categories of space and time, and, with them, the possibility that a substance remains or becomes; and 3) the post-human bracketing of space and time coincides with the abandonment of the idea of substance, rather than the processes of becoming and permanence.

The Whole infinitely remains, the Whole constantly changes, but, ultimately, it does not exist. To sum up the posthuman thought through the famous words of the eighth point of Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*<sup>19</sup>: «We stand upon the furthest promontory of the ages!... Why should we be looking back over our shoulders, if what we desire is to smash down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and space died yesterday. We are already living in the realms of the Absolute, for we have already created infinite, omnipresent speed»<sup>20</sup>.

So here then, is how to summarize the posthuman ideology: an ontology of processes-that-remain. In this regard, it is configured as deeply conservative, and even in this aspect expresses a distinctive feature of the myth.

Such thinking, as it is understood, totally denies the foundations of western logic, that is, the Aristotelian

principles of identity and non-contradiction. In this sense, it also denies our possibility of a "logical" thinking: in this aspect, it reveals its mythical essence.

If we just wanted to produce a first synthesis of posthuman thought as shown so far, and in any case we will motivate in the following pages, we could say we are dealing with an alogical, conservative, and anti-identitarian, anti-definitional, anti-scientific paradigm.

## 2.1. Time. The future never arrives... the past neither

If we want to be consistent with the posthumanist thought, then we should say that its ontology - if anything can be said so in this way - is a-spatial and a-temporal<sup>21</sup>: it takes place in a time and space radically different from our space and time. In this sense, in the *Posthuman Manifesto*, Pepperell affirms: «The future never arrives»<sup>22</sup>; the future never arrives because *there is no longer* a past or a present: there is no longer a dimension of time, ultimately. There is no longer space or time, as matter itself no longer exists - this is one of the posthuman fundamentals, the understanding of which determines the comprehension of its integral "meta-physical" structure: «Everything that exists anywhere is energy»<sup>23</sup>. The energy, in contrast to the matter, in fact, has the merit of being characterized as a flow, as something that becomes, or rather is itself a becoming and is characterized as a flow that does not require the matter: «The appearance of matter is an illusion generated by interaction among energetic systems at the human level of resolution»<sup>24</sup>. The difficulty in this sense - but that runs through the entire posthumanist narrative, from anthropology to cosmology - is that the process of becoming needs the Being, just as the relationship needs the subject, and the flow, the substrate. This is a point which we will return to later on.

18 Feuerbach, L. *Thoughts on Death and Immortality from the Papers of a Thinker, along with an Appendix of Theological-Satirical Epigrams, Edited by one of his friends*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980, 45. We take from Feuerbach's writing to add to our paper, even though we do not fully share the conclusions that the author brings forward in regard to the spiritual reality.

19 We only mention here the posthumanism/futurism connection. In brief, we cannot delve into the theme that would merit a more precise and rigorous treatment in another paper.

20 Marinetti, T.F. *The Futurist Manifesto*, in Marinetti, T.F., *Critical Writings*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2006.

21 It is curious to note how an a-temporal narrative, such as the posthumanist one, takes life thanks to a temporally situated situation. The "post" always tells us something about a succession (chronological, causal, axiological, and so on).

22 Pepperell, R. «The Posthuman Manifesto», *Kritikos*, 2, (2005), I, 5.

23 Ibid, III, 12.

24 Ibid, III, 13.

This cosmological vision - the totality of things is a flow of energy - cannot be considered entirely innovative: the Stoic interpretation of the universe (although was even without the conception of matter as energy and could not break free from the idea of the presence as an *incarnation* of the body) spoke of an eternal recurrence of things, and therefore a cyclical dimension of time. Marcus Aurelius indeed wrote: «The recurrent cycles of the universe are the same, up and down, from eternity to eternity. And either the mind of the Whole has a specific impulse for each individual case. [...] The universal cause is a torrent, sweeping everything in its stream»<sup>25</sup>. In the indistinct flow of things and in the energy that carries everything, from eternity to eternity, speaking about the instant - the instant in which the human being is embodied - becomes superfluous and redundant. The story no longer has a linear development - from the beginning to the end of time - but has a circular permanence: everything eternally returns, into a river that continuously flows through the routes of Being.

So, the future never arrives. Everything has always been that way, everything will always be like this: «So always remember [...]: all things have been of the same kind from everlasting, coming round and round again, and it makes no difference whether one will see the same things for a hundred years, or two hundred years, or for an infinity of time»<sup>26</sup>. Everything returns in the routes of Being, not in the routes of Existence: existence is a predicate that is attributable only to the Whole, and not its individual parts. It is the flow of energy that exists eternally, not the individual entities that are affected and are enlivened by that flow. The parts - where the human being represents a part like others - incessantly change, while the flow eternally remains: «The parts of the Whole, all that form the natural complement of the universe, must necessarily perish - and "perish" should be taken in the sense of "change"»<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations*, Penguin Books, London, 2006, 88-89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 95-96.

There is no longer change or perishing<sup>28</sup>, motto of the trans-humanist movement: there is only the change; things, in fact, do not come in and out of the world of existence, but it is the energy that changes its appearance and its form without a solution of continuity. It redesigns a radical immanence, typical of some classical philosophies. First of all, that of Stoa: here the matter is indeed «also divisible and totally variable, for its parts are always changing, but they do not perish in the sense of passing from existence to nothingness»<sup>29</sup>. In the posthumanist thinking, Stoic Marcus Aurelius' vision of death is reincarnated: «On death. Either dispersal, if we are atoms: or, if we are a unity, extinction or a change of home»<sup>30</sup>.

The circularity of the world and events - an idea that is opposed with great force to the linearity of history and, on the other hand, is the only possibility for which entities should have an identity - is made possible only from a determined shift in metaphysics: the liberation of the world from the final causes. In the posthuman ontology - as in much of the pre-Socratic ontologies<sup>31</sup>, however - there are only material and efficient causes (in a relative size): the reality is the result of energy exchanges, nothing more. So, there should be no more a sense (meaning and direction) to which things should proceed... as everything comes back, and it comes back without ever having started or finished, it has no motive to ask for reasons for the eternal recurrence: «The posthuman abandons the search for the ultimate nature of the universe and its origin. [...] The posthuman realises that the ultimate questions about the existence and being do not require answers. The answer to the question "Why are we here?" is that there is no answer»<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> See Campa, R. *Mutare o perire. Le sfide del transumanesimo*, Sestante Edizioni, Bergamo, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Van Winden, J.C.M. *Calcidius on Matter. His doctrine and Sources. A Chapter in the History of Platonism*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1965, 97.

<sup>30</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *op cit.* 63.

<sup>31</sup> The testimony of this fact can be found in: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press (W.D. Ross ed.), Oxford, 1942, I, 5, 987a, 1-28.

<sup>32</sup> Pepperell, *op cit.* III, 2-3.

Here then, it is one of the crucial points of union between the mythical narrative and posthumanist one: both are located outside of time. Or rather, both are living in a time that is no more marked by the seconds and not determined by the passing days, by the alternance of the seasons and the run of years. Just like the mythical narrative, the posthumanist narrative always comes back; it is repeated in every space and in every time, as *it has no space and no time*.

This is all the more true because the posthumanist narrative remains in a dimension that has nothing to do with the logical, remedial or humanly, tangible phenomena: it takes place within our *psyche*. And as a psychological reality, it follows the time of the *psyche*, which does not necessarily coincide - as Saint Augustine demonstrated - with physical time. We must be careful: we are not saying here that the posthumanist narrative follows the time of the *Erlebnis* (experience) in the consciousness of man... quite the opposite: as a psychological projection of human desire, it can live and, indeed, *must* live, even outside of this time. You could provisionally say of the posthumanist narrative what Feuerbach describes and writes of the thought of Christian immortality: «To bring an immortal spirit out of man and send it to heaven, you must turn off the senses and listen only to the imagination. The spirit, a being without body, without senses, without limits of space and time is undoubtedly in itself immortal, but this spirit, this being, is not a real being but an imagined being. It is nothing more than the being of human imagination. You can most certainly fly in an instant through all the ages and the places with human imagination, but, please note, these are only *imagined* times and places. So how do you deduct from this imagined absence of space and time a real existence devoid of time and space?»<sup>33</sup>.

Posthumanism is, thus, ultimately, a psychological dimension; and it is precisely that dimension that unites humans, and of which is constituted as an inescapable dimension: the desire for immortality, the de-

sire that nothing comes to an end, and that everything can come back and reappear again on the threshold of choice and human thought, as Marcus Aurelius still reminds us: «All that you see will in a moment be changed by the nature which governs the Whole: it will create other things out of this material, and then again others out of that, so that the world is always young»<sup>34</sup>. In this sense, just like myth, posthumanism cannot have a time in which it is accomplished in its entirety: it always comes back and takes place again in the *psyche* of every man. Here we return to the great teaching of Saint Augustine: in consciousness (and even in myth, that is a particular form of consciousness) there are not three times, past, present and future; on the contrary, «the present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation. If we are allowed to use such language, I see three times»<sup>35</sup>. In myth, therefore, all three times are given and envisaged here: the myth is always updated according to the forms of the present. And so it is like this in posthumanism: it reveals itself in an eternal present, since it is a creation of *psyche*, and then dwells in the conditions of consciousness.

So, there is nothing new under the sun. Also because the idea of "new" presupposes that of "old" and, therefore, the idea of time, which inevitably continues to run.

## 2.2. *Space. Without boundaries, without identity*

The posthumanist narrative moves beyond that which is in an indefinite time and even in an indeterminate, fluid space: the central hub around which its speculation turns, is precisely the need to eliminate every boundary. Again, the possibility of the delimitation is given by the persistence of a specific reality: the flow without solution of continuity, on the other hand, deletes the limits and eliminates the boundaries, taking away the identity with it. Here, the body as a signpost

<sup>33</sup> Feuerbach, L. *Osservazioni aggiuntive*, in Feuerbach L., *L'immortalità*, Mimesis, Milano, 2000, 198-199.

<sup>34</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *op cit.* 62.

<sup>35</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, XI, xx, 235.

limit (and, therefore, as an identity) becomes the first element to be replaced in a posthuman ontology: «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»<sup>36</sup>.

The fluidity of the bodies, the central concept in the posthuman narrative drawn freely from postmodern thought<sup>37</sup>, declines into the need to redesign human beings (and other entities) as energy beams, as information flows that extend beyond the body size: the last goal of posthumanism is precisely to gain the «re-conception of human beings as essentially information that is only contingently embodied and therefore capable of being “uploaded” into “super-intelligent” communication and information systems that know no limitations of time or space»<sup>38</sup>. The contradiction of the posthumanist thought - a contradiction that makes it, therefore, more like a narrative than a systematic philosophy - is to not adequately consider the posthuman programming phase, focusing on the hybridized body as a final product (technological or otherwise). It is, in fact, in the design phase of the disembodied consciousness (*software*) of a particular body or machine, that the body (*hardware*) is still seen as the formal cause of this. The consideration of the mere result (consciousness or fluctuating *software*), thus, allows eliminating the im-

passe of the historical process leading to posthumanism. So that posthumanism, from a disincarnate thought, becomes itself, a disembodied narration. And then, once again, a myth.

The posthuman body without boundaries originates from a matter which does not have, itself, spatial or temporal limits: the pre-Socratic and Stoic thoughts about *physis* as an infinite nature reappears here: «Matter, the basis of everything, has not a single form or shape of its own nor by itself a single quality, yet it is always inseparable from one quality or another. And because it is without origin or end – for there is no question in it of arising out of nothing nor of passing away into nothing – from eternity it is not without a spirit and a power which is at times moving it as a whole, at times only as a part of it»<sup>39</sup>.

The body - every body, not just the human one - is so subjected to the pressures of technique and to the contamination of other bodies, which invade the space of its existence: therefore it ends up deconstructing itself, with giving up its integrity - and with it, its identity – handing it over to the becoming Whole. The body and space, that are completely destructured, appear and disappear at the appearance and disappearance of the energy flows. So, posthumanism, echoing the philosophy of deconstruction, and the theories of embodied cognition and endorsing the epistemological device of destructuralism, «complicates and nuances the metaphysics of autonomy and personhood characterizing traditional humanism. However, a distributed subject, “smeared” in both space (extended cognition) and time (*différance*, the virtual) can exercise normal capacities for deliberative rationality required by liberal theory just so long as its world is relatively stable and singular contexts rare or infrequent»<sup>40</sup>.

The changing of the conception of space determines a change in thinking on the idea of identity: the posthumanism lies, in fact, outside of the western metaphysical tradition since it disembodies the entities, depriving

36 Hayles, N.K. *How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999, 3.

37 Negrin writes: «Although the increasingly fluid nature of identity in postmodernity can be seen as a positive development insofar as it encourages an openness to new experience, it becomes problematic when all sense of coherence is lost» - Negrin, L. *Appearance and Identity. Fashioning the Body in Postmodernity*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008, 29. And more, Bauman, about the liquid body: «The body's new primacy is reflected in the tendency to shape the image of community (the community of certainty-cum-security dreams, the community as the greenhouse of safety) after the pattern of the ideally protected body: to visualize it as an entity homogeneous and harmonious on the inside, thoroughly cleansed of all foreign, ingestion-resistant substances, all points of entry closely watched, controlled and guarded, but heavily armed on the outside and encased in impenetrable armour. The boundaries of the postulated community, like the outer limits of the body, are to divide the realm of trust and loving care from the wilderness of risk, suspicion and perpetual vigilance. The body and the postulated community alike are velvety on the inside and prickly and thorny on the outside» - Bauman, Z. *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, 184.

38 Bendle, M.F. «Teleportation, Cyborgs and the Posthuman Ideology», *Social Semiotics* 12/1, (2002), 47.

39 Van Winden, J.C.M. *op cit.* 97.

40 Roden, D. «Deconstruction and excision in philosophical posthumanism». *The Journal of Evolution & Technology* 21/1, (2010), 33.



them of the predicate of existence. As already noted, the spatiality and temporality of a body are the first signs - after the entity *first apprehensio* - that allow the recognition of its phenomenological, attemptable presence: the living being is always spatially and temporally categorized. On the other hand, being in a non-place<sup>41</sup> is no a guarantee of the presence of such an entity; in fact: it is a sign of its non-tangible-existence. The lack of boundaries and limits, signposts of the identity of the entities, thus, determines also the lack of determined and well-coded spaces and places in which existence would be possible.

The difficulty of thinking these categories (non-places, non-spaces) is enhanced by the fact that in this narrative, as already mentioned, together with the principle of identity, is denied even the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction: A and non-A may be simultaneously given, in post-humanism, in the same entity. That way, the very idea of the human body, by its very finite and limited nature, is in jeopardy from the assumption that «human bodies have no boundaries»<sup>42</sup>; in the same way again, we read in the *Posthuman Manifesto*: «No finite division can be drawn between the environment, the body and the brain. The human is identifiable, but not definable»<sup>43</sup>.

The posthuman conception of space and time is, so, condensable in a vision, properly called “extensionism”, which tends to make liquid the boundaries of the entities, emphasizing the primacy of the flow on the substance: «In brief, rather than regarding identifiable objects in the world as coherent and discrete, extensionism holds that all objects and events extend indefinitely through time and space. However, we normally acknowledge only a fractional part of the real extent of any object because of constraints inherent in our perceptual apparatus and the coercive effects of time. Furthermore, extensionism recognises the co-

presence of opposites (such as a world that is both full of distinctions and devoid of distinctions, or an object that is more than one thing at the same time) without negating or resolving them, and in this sense does not admit the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction as set out in the *Metaphysics*»<sup>44</sup>.

This idea, in addition to being difficult to sustain at a metaphysical level (denying the validity of the principles of non-contradiction and identity tends to reduce the importance of our rational discourse), has a considerable difficulty in practice, in the first place, just to get out from the dimensions of pure capacity of thinking (not even too logical<sup>45</sup>).

In this sense, therefore, the value of posthumanist narrative appears to be more pedagogical/regulative (indicating educative ways to reach a *modus vivendi*, more or less adapted to our needs and that of the other entities that share with us the space of our existence) than scientific-descriptive, or even *foundational*: the posthumanist narrative exemplifies possibilities of life, outlines scenarios that could have been in another hypothetical reality, but that actually are not (and never will be). The posthumanist narrative is, so, always a mythical narrative: it remember needs and desires that are true and real, but which take place in a-temporal and in a-spatial world, and with characters with no personal identity. A mythical world, in fact.

### 2.3. Human nature and nature: fusion and confusion

“We have never been human”<sup>46</sup>, writes Donna Haraway, meaning to say that we have never been that autonomous reality or ontologically closed which we considered to be. The posthuman being, the post-mankind, has indeed lost the characteristics of the human being,

41 Here we borrow the beautiful expression coined by Augé (Augé, M. *Non-places. Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, Verso, London, 1995) to design a reality that does not enter into the meaning attributed by the French anthropologist: the posthuman non-places are not “anthropologically insignificant places” but, rather, they are “non-existent” places outside the imagination.

42 Pepperell, *op cit.* II, 7.

43 Ibid., II, 8.

44 Pepperell R., *The Posthuman Condition. Consciousness beyond the brain*, Intellect Books, Bristol, 2003, 188. We note how the posthumanist thought is presented as contradictory. To deny the idea of the “object”, defined in space and time, it still uses the term “object”. This demonstrates the difficulty (or the impossibility?) to get off the traditional metaphysical categories.

45 Pepperell writes in the *Posthuman Manifesto*: «Logic is an illusion of human imagination» - Pepperell, R. «The Posthuman Manifesto», *op cit.* II, 16.

46 Gane, N., «When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?; Interview with Donna Haraway», *Theory Culture Society* 23, (2006), 135.

traditionally understood, hybridized and contaminated by other living things. Posthumanism is characterized, so, for the accentuation given to the plasticity of the human body, in the sense that, due to the hybridization with technology, the post-human being can have his own bodily identity in a relatively arbitrary way, thereby embodying the generally postmodern concept of fluid identity. In this sense, the posthuman era is characterized as the era of the *end of the differences*, the time of the insignificance of language (anthropological and therefore cosmological), in which «all the oppositions are reconciled and resolved in an evolutionary type of scenario, in which the organic and the inorganic, death and life, are complementary sides of a single “natural” process, aimed at producing effective selection for survival in a meaningless universe»<sup>47</sup>. The posthuman being is the negation of man as he manifests himself (and how he is manifested) in history: once eliminated the boundaries that can define the human (first of all the limit of its body), he is irremediably lost in the fluidity of the Whole. At a closer look, however, something remains of the human being: his qualities, even if disembodied and enhanced.

These qualities, thus, are not exclusively peculiarity to man, yet: they can exist independently of him, without the need of a particular material substrate. Here we return to an essential point of “posthumanist ontology”, and, more generally, of most contemporary philosophies (first of all, the ecologies): quality, a substantial accident, now becomes the very substance (substantialization of the accident), like it almost has its very own subsistence<sup>48</sup>.

Again, the goal is more than clear: if, on the one hand, the embodiment of some qualities in humans highlights the limitations and limits of the flesh (intelligence, precisely because it is embodied, is limited and so too is the will, the senses, etc...), on the other, the hypostatisation of the very same qualities guarantees

the denial of dependency and finiteness of the human being, and, at the same time, the triumph of an autonomy that consists of nothing real<sup>49</sup>.

The central point that emerges against the philosophies of the contemporary world is that the limit - in the various forms that this can take: ontological, moral, spatial, physical, cognitive, biological, and so on - should be necessary considered as an eminently negative reality, and, therefore, to be overcome, to be eliminated. To deny the reality of the limit also means, inevitably, to deny the human reality, woven of deficiencies, of failings, of transience; the sign of these weaknesses is just his corporeality.

But it is precisely in this aspect that lays one of the major difficulties of the posthumanism: To interpret the limit only as a shortcoming. On the other hand, it cannot be interpreted as predominantly negative, as an obstacle of the existence, far from it: It-is-me since I-am-not-you, you-are-you since you-are-not-me. It is the limit itself, defined as boundary, which is used to detect different identities: there cannot be richness and diversity without the existence of boundaries. So, the first man who drew a line in the ground, fencing and delimiting his field (and delimiting a space!), did not establish an inequality between men, primarily due to the invention of private property, as Rousseau<sup>50</sup> would have stated, but marked the difference: this *is* my field, this *is not* my field. The boundary line, the limit, then, identifies the diversity and marks the richness (in fact, we speak of *this* field, *that* field, *that other* field, and so on): in the indistinct Whole, however, there cannot be richness because there is no diversity.

So, the essential condition for diversity becomes identity, and therefore the limit, signpost of that identity. Only thanks to the presence of the limit we can achieve the third principle of the *Deep Ecology* Manifesto, which recognizes the importance of diversity and symbiosis: survival is necessarily linked to richness and diversity of

47 Barcellona, P. *L'epoca del postumano: lezione magistrale per il compleanno di Pietro Ingrao*, Città Aperta, Enna, 2007, 13.

48 Bringing to mind, for example, to Peter Singer's speculation and, in particular, his concept of person - see Singer, P. *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics*, St Martin's Griffin, New York, 1994, 172-184.

49 See Marcos, A. «Dependientes y racionales: la familia humana», *Cuadernos de bioética* XXIII/1, (2012), 83-95.

50 See Rousseau, J.J. *Discourse on the origin of inequality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.

cultures and life forms<sup>51</sup>. So it is, or, so it should be: but radical environmentalism (and with it the philosophy of posthumanism and many contemporary philosophies), denies the very existence of limit (and, thus, of identity) as an essential condition for richness and diversity.

In this frame, the aforementioned extensionism of Pepperell weel fits: «For the sake of convenience, I have borrowed the term “extensionism” to describe this tendency toward extendedness in contemporary thinking. In brief, extensionism looks at objects and events in terms of how they extend from one to the other rather than how they are to be distinguished from one another. In fact, elsewhere I have argued that there are no essential distinctions between any objects or events in the world at all, other than the distinctions generated by human cognition. As a consequence, the argument goes, objects and events do not really have boundaries or edges (except the ones we impose upon them) and therefore, being without edges, extend indefinitely»<sup>52</sup>.

It is precisely the betrayal of the identity, which dissolves in the changing flow of the unique substance, the “Whole” or the “Living Ecosystem”. That’s why Hayles can say that posthumanism must identify a new way of thinking about human condition, a way that makes the posthuman being conscious of «itself as a part of a larger whole – unbounded, empty, and serene»<sup>53</sup>. Or, as Rosi Braidotti writes: «What if consciousness were ultimately incapable of finding a remedy to its obscure disease, this life, this zoe, an impersonal force that moves us without asking for our permission to do so? Zoe is an inhuman force that stretches beyond life, to new, vitalist ways of approaching death as an impersonal event»<sup>54</sup>. The Stoic paradigm returns yet again to outline very clearly the contents of a thought that looms as radically new, but has ancient roots: «Think always of the universe as one

living creature, comprising one substance and one soul: how all is absorbed into this one consciousness; how a single impulse governs all its actions; how all things collaborate in all that happens; the very web and mesh of it all»<sup>55</sup>. The Living-Whole triumphs on individual living beings. First of all, human being, who is a non-necessary part of the Whole, and has to suffer the “initiatives” of the Macro-Subject.

The Triumph of Life, the victory of life without the human being, however, is not necessarily to be considered as a good, as naively assumed by some contemporary philosophies, first of all by the posthumanist philosophy: as Heraclitus rightly points out, life is *polemos*, it is the eternal war of the contraries, the infinite alternation of opposites without mercy. Also because, in hindsight, mercy does not exist except in the human being, i.e., in that one being that is able to build and preserve, and thus to serve Life (first declined in man as *human life*) through his intellect, and, therefore, through technology.

### 3. The Goldfish syndrome:

#### 3.1. *Posthuman, all too human*

It is said that goldfishes have a three second memory, more or less. It is also believed that this feature allows them to interpret events and objects they will encounter in their habitat (which is the fishbowl, their owner who gives them food, a river or a lake) as always fresh, like as though they have encountered for the first time. And it is for this reason that they can swim safely in circles, always drawing the same trails in the water. They simply do not realize it and, so, it does not become a burden for them. A big problem, you might say, to be like goldfish: maybe it is true ... but it also has its positive aspects. For example: the beauty of never falling into taken for granted relationships and everyday life, the merit of forgetting the mistakes and avoiding remorse, the peace of mind to evaluate without prejudices, and so on. On the other hand, you would have to give up stable relationships (it must

51 See Naess, A. «The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary», *Inquiry* 16/1, (1973), 96.

52 Pepperell, R. «Posthumans and Extended Experience», *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, (2005), 32.

53 Hayles, N.K. *How We Became...*, *op cit.* 156.

54 Braidotti, R. *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013, 194. To be understood according to what is found by a reviewer of Braidotti’s text: «The future of the humanities lies in ecology, sustainability, or in what Braidotti calls, in a Deleuzian vein, “becoming-Earth”» - Herbrechter, S. «R. Braidotti (2013) The Posthuman. Cambridge: Polity Press. Review», *Culture Machine*, (2013), 9.

55 Marcus Aurelius, *op cit.* 31.

not be very attractive to ask to your partner "who are you?" every few seconds...), historical depth and family memories.

Here, then, is the Goldfish syndrome: we do not mind if it is an invented, possible, or perhaps a real syndrome ... that it comes closest to the deficits by short-term memory or to Korsakoff's syndrome: here, we do not have a scientific claim. We wish only to emphasize that in the history of culture there exists a strange tendency to cyclically repeat ideas, discoveries and stories, always labelling them as new.

Posthumanism actually belongs to this order of reality. And in this sense it is characterized as a myth, i.e. as a reality that recurs at regular intervals in history, disguised in various forms. Posthumanists just seem to be suffering from the Goldfish syndrome: they forget centuries of the history of thought, in which the ideas we have briefly described as characteristic of the posthumanism have resurfaced several times. The posthumanist ideas, at a glance - those same ideas presented as "radically innovative", such as to suggest that «a post-singularity world would be constituted in ways that cannot be humanly conceived»<sup>56</sup> - without any delay can be attributed to philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza, Giordano Bruno, the Stoics and even the pre-Socratic philosophers, and fit perfectly into the furrow of a tradition of thought, which, however, the posthumanists would not want to join, at least at the level of intent. The break with the western metaphysical tradition - a tradition that runs from Aristotle to Aquinas, from Descartes to Hegel, for instance - on the other hand, is always within the same western thought, and posthumanism is a part of these events.

In this sense, posthumanism is a myth. And it is a myth in relation to three main aspects:

- 1) It is a myth because of its shape: the posthuman narrative takes on the characteristics of the myth; it accepts the essential coordinates of time, space and cosmology, among the others, as we have tried to show;

<sup>56</sup> Roden, D. *A defence of precritical posthumanism*, Transcript of a Paper given at Nottingham University's Psychoanalysis and the Posthuman Conference, 07/09/2010, <http://enemyindustry.net/blog/>.

- 2) It is a myth as to the intent and methodology: it prefers to show reality as it will be given in an indeterminate future, relying on mere intuition (and not predictions), typical of a visionary mysticism, instead of showing the scientific reasons that lie behind these futuristic forecasts<sup>57</sup>;
- 3) It is a myth according to its content: the posthumanist narratives are modeled for the situations envisaged (the metamorphosis of the living, the cosmic conditions, the relationship of the individual with the Whole, the visions of the future and the past), the mythical narratives.

If the first two points have already been put to theme within what is written, the last, essential to characterize posthumanism as a complete myth, must be argued with greater precision; we refer, again, to a systematic reading and summary of the myth, to Julien Ries' studies. Referring to Mircea Eliade, the Belgian anthropologist reports the existence of four types of myth:

- 1) Cosmogonic myths: «In general, the myths are tales of creation: they show the way in which something come into existence»<sup>58</sup>;
- 2) Original myths: «They narrate the emergence of institutions and society. However, here we are no longer totally primordial because we are placed back in time to cosmogony»<sup>59</sup>;
- 3) Renewal myths: «They look at the *renovatio mundi*»<sup>60</sup>;
- 4) Eschatological myths: «We find ourselves in front of myths that tell of cosmic cataclysms»<sup>61</sup>.

Posthumanism is characterized, at the same time, as an eschatological and a renewal myth, as already pointed out. It does not refer, at least primarily, to an ideal genesis

<sup>57</sup> The explanation of this affirmation is hid in Pepperell's *Posthuman Manifesto*: «The posthuman is entirely open to ideas of "paranormality", "immateriality", the "supernatural", and the "occult". The posthuman does not accept that faith in scientific methods is superior to faith in other belief systems» - Pepperell, R. *Posthuman Manifesto*, cit., III, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Ries, *op cit.* 16

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 18.

of the world and of the history, but focuses its attention on the possibility (and necessity) that the history of the world is renewed, in order to return to the original situation. So, at a cosmic level, posthumanist narrative reveals its nature of circularity of time in the need to return to a time even before the man's, even before the creation. Posthumanism – differing from transhumanism, which aims at the recovery of the preternatural gifts and insists on the need to return, through technology, to the mythical times of the golden age<sup>62</sup>, in which man lived in a state before the corruption and so he was immortal - intends to reveal the pre-primordial situation, in which only God existed and history was not possible. The posthuman God, coinciding with the Whole, is a God who does not create, who does not need to shape something out of him, and therefore there is nothing outside of him:

- God is everything and there is nothing outside of him;
- Everything that exists is God.

It is understood here that the image of God is nothing but a reflection of pantheistic immanence, and therefore it does not contemplate the possibility of creation. It is a God that does not create, a selfish God<sup>63</sup>, that does not

need anything else other than him, since he is totally complete and perfect in himself. Posthumanism would be characterized as the current image of *Deus Sive Natura*, out of time, space, and, thus, out of history<sup>64</sup>.

An idea that is not entirely new, in fact. A myth that runs and crosses through the entire history of mankind. A myth that attempts to deny the vanity of human life, disincarnating it (and thus freeing it from the constraints of space and time) and re-interpreting it as energetic beam that runs through everything.

The Goldfish syndrome forgets, however, that human life is not only fragile, but that «all is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun»<sup>65</sup>.

And there is nothing new under the sun. But this, the goldfish will never know.

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62 In this sense, transhumanism – or incomplete posthumanism – could represent a rite of initiation (and therefore an ulterior myth) or a transitory and cathartic phase that could bring the total purification of each living being (we can also apply here the posthuman extensionism). In Eliade, we can find a perfect description (even if it is involuntary) of this phase: «In other words, the ideal of humanity that the primitive wishes to attain he sets on a superhuman plane. This means: (1) one does not become a complete man until one has passed beyond, and in some sense abolished, "natural" humanity, for initiation is reducible to a paradoxical, supernatural experience of death and resurrection or of second birth; (2) initiation rites, entailing ordeals and symbolic death and resurrection, were instituted by gods, culture heroes, or mythical ancestors; hence these rites have a superhuman origin, and by performing them the novice imitates a superhuman, divine action. It is important to note this, for it shows once again that religious man wants to be other than he finds himself on the "natural" level and undertakes to make himself in accordance with the ideal image revealed to him by myths. Primitive man undertakes to attain a religious ideal of humanity, and his effort already contains the germs of all the ethics later elaborated in evolved societies» - Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, W. R. Task (eds.), Harcourt, New York, 1957, 187-188.

63 The idea of an egotistical God is probably obtained from that theory of rational egoism of Henry Sidgwick, before, and that of Ayn Rand, after. See: Brink, D.O. Sidgwick and the rationale for rational egoism, in Schultz, B (ed.). *Essays on Henry Sidgwick*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992, 199-239; and: Rand, A. & Branden, N. (eds.). *The Virtue of Selfishness. A New Concept of Egoism*, Signet, New York, 1964.

64 Just as Saint Augustine confirms, creation cannot exist without time or history. This reinforces the pantheistic and immanent worldview of posthumanism; see: Saint Augustine, *op cit.* XI, xii-xiii, 228-229.

65 *Ecclesiastes* 1, 2-9.

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