POSTHUMANISM: BEYOND HUMANISM?

POSTHUMANISMO: ¿ MÁS ALLÁ DEL HUMANISMO ?

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ABSTRACT:

Keywords:

Posthuman, ecology, human nature, technology, boundaries.

The focal point of posthumanism consists not as such in an a-critical acceptance of the technological promises – like there is for transhumanism – but in a total contamination and hybridization of human beings with other living beings and machines (these are the two main forms of contamination). The change of perspective untaken by posthumanism would be, thus, a paradigmatic shift in anthropology. As with ecologism, posthumanism, in order to obtain total contamination and man's openness to otherness, proposes the elimination and the fluidification of boundaries, thus even denying man's identity, and, with it, the very possibility of openness. However, by denying the identity, one denies the condition of possibility of thought, just as it has been manifested in history until now: hence we understand how, primarily, posthumanism is not configured as an adequate philosophical reflection, but as a narrative that takes origin from certain requirements, which are eminently human, and that discloses its deeply anthropogenic roots.

RESUMEN:

Palabras clave:

Posthumanismo, ecología, naturaleza humana, tecnología, límites.

El punto focal del posthumanismo consiste no tanto en la aceptación acrítica de las posibilidades ofrecidas por la tecnología, tales como el transhumanismo, sino en una contaminación y hibridación total de los seres humanos con otros seres vivos y con las máquinas (éstas son las dos principales formas de contaminación): el cambio ofrecido por esta corriente de pensamiento querría configurarse primero como un cambio de paradigma en el pensar el ser humano. Igual que el ecologismo, el posthumanismo propone, con el fin de obtener la contaminación total, una eliminación y fluidificación de los límites que impiden la apertura del hombre a la alteridad, negando así también su identidad y, con ella, paradójicamente, la posibilidad misma de la apertura. Al negar la identidad, sin embargo, se niega también la posibilidad del pensamiento, por como se ha manifestado hasta ahora en la historia: aquí se entiende cómo el posthumanismo no se configure primero como adecuada reflexión filosófica, sino como una narración que se origina en algunas exigencias que son eminentemente humanas y que revelan así sus raíces profundamente antropogénicas.

1. Transhumans or posthumans?

In the contemporary age we often hear about the possibility to overtake a reality that appears as antiquated[1], as if the "post" (that has been disclaimed the various *post*-modern, *post*-romantic, *post*-structuralist, etc.) should necessarily indicate a situation of positive development, a possible release from an oppressive and limiting condition. Post-modernism, in fact, is free from

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1 See: Anders, G. *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Band I: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*. C. H. Beck, München, 1956; *Band II: Über die Zerstörung des Lebens im Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution*. C. H. Beck, München, 1980.

the backwardness of the modern age, presenting itself as a very innovative thought, as something that can upset the current state of things: it is something like a Copernican revolution. So much so that the post-modernism is no longer understood through the modern paradigm, since it makes use of radically different conceptual categories. If in the modern age there was the paradigm of certainty and great metaphysical point of view, in post-modernism we are witnessing the end of the certainties and great stories, a prelude to a more liquid concept of the human being and society.

If then we move within the anthropological context, we witness the same paradigm shift: the different philosophies that preach an overtaking of man – at different levels: historical, ontological, chronological, etc. – have the upper hand on those that are anchored to an "antiquated" model of human nature, trying, at the same time, to unseat a "traditionalist" ontological conception. Rosy Braidotti, indeed, writes: «This philosophical post-humanism does not, therefore, result in antifoundationalism. It rather stresses the need for process ontology»[2]. It is a new conception of totality, of man and of all that is offered as a panacea to the ills of the modern age and of the traditional thought of western metaphysics: the posthumanist philosophy imposes a radical change of mentality and *Weltanschauung*, such that would be incomprehensible in the light of the precedent paradigms.

However, we should point out: this posthumanism that we try to characterize with greater precision in the following paragraphs is really different from the a-critical glorification of technological potentials, which instead, was put into act in the famous Transhumanist Movement Manifesto: «Contemporary transhumanists argue that human nature is an unsatisfactory "work in progress" that should be modified through technological means where the instrumental benefits for individuals outweigh the technological risks. This ethic of improvement is premised on prospective developments in four areas: Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Informa-

tion Technology and Cognitive Science – the so-called "NBIC" suite»[3]. Nick Bostrom, one of the pioneers of the transhumanist movement, incisively describes the theoretical gain of the transhumanist philosophy: «Why do I need to know arithmetic when I can buy time on Arithmetic-Modules Inc. whenever I need to perform arithmetic tasks? Why do I need to be good with language when I can hire a professional language module to articulate my thoughts? Why do I need to bother with making decisions about my personal life when there are certified executive-modules that can scan my goal structure and then manage my assets so as to best fulfill those goals?»[4]. An extreme exaltation of technology and its potentially redeeming and cathartic role is not part of posthumanist ideology[5]: in fact, it is an idea of transhumanist matrix to overcome man once and for all, through a process of technological improvement; Birnbacher writes: «"Transhumanism" can be defined as a movement that wants us to get on the way to "posthumanity" by going *beyond* humanity in its present form. Transhumanists want us to enter upon a process that will ultimately lead to "posthumanity" by attempting, now and in the near future, to transcend certain limits inherent in the human condition as we know it»[6]. If, therefore, transhumanism is not possible without technology[7], then a posthuman-

2   Braidotti, R. «Posthuman, all too human: towards a new process ontology», *Theory, Culture & Society* 23/7-8, (2006), 199.

3   Roden, D. [On line publication] «A defence of precritical posthumanism, Transcript of a Peper given at Nottingham University's Psychoanalysis and the Posthuman Conference». 07/09/2010. <http://enemyindustry.net/blog/> [Consulted: 05/10/2013].

4   Bostrom, N. [On line publication] «The Future of Human Evolution». 12/05/2001. <http://www.nickbostrom.com> [Consulted: 29/08/2013].

5   It could be true, however, that the boundaries are not as clear-cut as those that we would like to draw. In posthumanist thought, also exist some schools that believe that fundamental technological input is necessary for a total contamination of the human being with other living beings: «Technological posthumanists rush to embrace technology as that which saves us from humanism and frees understandings of what it means to be human from humanism's essentializing and normativizing grip. They imagine a future where the human body has been left behind and humans are free to configure and augment themselves however they see fit» - Benko, S. «Ethics, Technology, and Posthuman Communities», *Essays in Philosophy*, 6/1, (2005), 2.

6   Birnbacher, D. *Posthumanity, Transhumanism and Human Nature*, in Gordijn, B. Chadwick, R. (eds.) *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, Springer, New York, 2008, 95.

7   Hables Gray, indeed, writes: «Technology is not alien to or destructive of our individual and common humanity, it is the very definition of it. We are, simply, animals that use tools. Thus technology is a definition of our humanity, not something foreign to

ism, which does not have at its centre the potentiality of today's techno-science, is even now plausible.

If the transhuman being is a being of passage, which still in some ways conserves the characteristics of the human being – although enhanced and amplified via technologies – the posthuman one is characterized as something radically new, which clearly exceeds the human frontier, so much so as to no longer have the appearance of the *Homo sapiens* species: «A post-singularity world would be constituted in ways that cannot be humanly conceived»[8].

2. Posthumanism and ecology: the contamination of the living being

The inability to think of the posthuman being is certainly given, not so much by the difficulty of grasping a process still *in fieri*[9], as it (at least) currently does not exist: «Posthumanism has yet to settle, yet to succeed, yet to make its mark»[10].

The additional difficulty of interpretation that is hidden behind the posthumanist philosophy is to eliminate the identity, and thus render impossible any definition: only that which has clear edges is defined, only that which has unambiguous boundaries can be defined. If there weren't distinct and distinguishable entities, any affirmation or attempt to define is equivalent to a characterization of a quality of the Whole. But the ground that is gained by posthumanist philosophy is precisely that of the total contamination of the human

being with other forms of life, i.e., the elimination of differences: post-mankind lives in harmony with other living (and non-living) beings, establishing a sort of open system. In this regard, Pepperell writes: «There is nothing external to a human, because the extent of a human cannot be fixed. If we accept that the mind and body cannot be absolutely separated, and that the body and the environment cannot be absolutely separated, then we are left with the apparently absurd yet logically consistent conclusion that consciousness and the environment cannot be absolutely separated»[11].

The real goal of posthumanism, is not so much an hyper-technological appliance of the human being, but, rather, a progressive elimination and fluidization of the differences, as expressed effectively by Rosi Braidotti: «What Braidotti refers to as the posthuman predicament, or living in the times of the posthuman, requires humans to think beyond their traditional humanist limitations and embrace the risks that becoming-other-than-human beings»[12]. A complete posthumanism, thus, coincides with the annihilation of all the boundaries that make "human" a human being: «In the posthumanist thought, the human is no longer [...] the adoption or the expression of man but rather the result of a hybridization of man with non-human otherness»[13]. Posthumanism, therefore represents the vertex of a parabola that began well before the modern age, to which man is nothing other than merely one of living creatures that inhabit the Earth. In this way, the culmination of the posthumanist philosophy is not reached in the denial of anthropocentrism – which is peculiar of the Renaissance era and of modern philosophy – but in a return to a pre-Socratic or stoic period, to that time in which the research on man and nature was but one. The abandonment of the anthropocentrical paradigm on an ethical level, in fact, appears only as a consequence of a certain metaphysical point of view, previously embraced: it is decided that man should not

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it» - Hables Gray, C. *Introduction*, in Hables Gray, C. (ed.) *Technohistory: Using the History of Technology in Interdisciplinary Research*, Krieger Publishing Co., Melbourne, 1996, 2.

8   Roden, *op cit*.

9   In this sense, Roden's statement appears really inappropriate: «If the genuine posthuman would be, like the human, a historically emergent multiplicity, there can not be *a priori* "posthumanology". We can understand the posthuman only in the process of its emergence or line or flight from the human. Thus understanding the posthuman is not rendered impossible by imaginary limitations on human understanding, but nor will it be achieved by armchair speculation on the essential nature of the human and the posthuman. It can be achieved only through participating – to a greater or less degree – in the excision of the posthuman from the human» - Roden, D. «Deconstruction and excision in philosophical posthumanism», *The Journal of Evolution & Technology* 21/1, (2010), 34.

10   Badmington, N. «Pod almighty!; or, humanism, posthumanism, and the strange case of Invasion of the Body Snatchers», *Textual Practice* 15/1, (2001), 5.

11   Pepperell, R. «The Posthuman Manifesto», *Kritikos*, 2, (2005), II, 10-11.

12   Herbrechter, S. «R. Braidotti The Posthuman. Cambridge: Polity Press. Review». *Culture Machine*, (2013), 2.

13   Marchesini, R. *Ruolo delle alterità nella definizione dei predicati umani*, in: Barcellona, P. Ciaramelli, F. Fai, R. (eds.) *Apocalisse e post-umano. Il crepuscolo della modernità*, Dedalo, Bari, 2007, 54.

deserve privileges because he is not different from other living beings. The anti-anthropocentric point of view is configured on an ethical level, therefore, as a result of the anti-identitarian conception at a cosmological level (it would be better to say *ontological* level): «The up-shot is that individual humans in the sense of isolated, separate objects do not really exist, other than in our imaginations. What exists instead are non-contained beings who, in numerous ways, are distributed far beyond their local space and time, caught in an infinite chain of events without beginning or end. Each act I make, whether trivial or expansive, has further consequences that will ripple through infinity, just as each act is the extension of an indeterminate number of prior events. […] The result is that our conception of human beings must include our wider cultural environment as well as our physical structure, and in particular our technological environment, not just as an external adjunct to the human condition but as an inherent part of what constitutes us in the first place. To put it succinctly: Humanists might regard humans as distinct beings, in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings. Posthumanists, on the other hand, regard humans as embodied in an extended technological world»[14].

Just as with *Deep Ecology*, therefore, «posthumanism [...] is defined by the elimination of the degrees of being, because there is no hierarchy in the ecosystem»[15]. And just as with ecological concepts, the conceptual fulcrums become essentially two: the system and the network. The posthuman entity exists as it is part of the Super-Organism or Ecosystem and lives and feeds on the relationships/networks (*webs*) that constitute it in an essential way, so much so that without these, there would be nothing. The culmination of a complete posthumanism (like that of a fulfilled ecology), is, indeed, the adaptation of common consciousness to the Superorganism/Gaia, the pouring out of oneself and the cancellation of one's own *ego*. One of the most successful representations of a successful adaptation to the Whole can be

found in the famous novel by Asimov, *Foundation and Earth*: «"Yes", said Trevize. "Exactly! I chose Gaia, a superorganism; a whole planet with a mind and personality in common, so that one has to say 'I/we/Gaia' as an invented pronoun to express the inexpressible". [...] "I/we/Gaia do not know how it is that you come to the right decision. Is it important to know that as long as we have the decision?" "You speak for the whole planet, do you? For the common consciousness of every dewdrop, of every pebble, of even the liquid central core of the planet?" "I do, and so can any portion of the planet in which the intensity of the common consciousness is great enough"»[16].

It is realized in this way, even in the posthumanist philosophy, the "metaphysical revolution" that characterizes much of the contemporary ontologies: the role reversal of the relation (accident) with the subject (substance). From this conceptual framework, one can understand *disembodied consciousness*, *mind uploading* (or *downloading*), unconditional openness to otherness as a source of "constitution of identity", and its emphasis on forms of "energy without matter" and becoming: the posthumanism features, at an essential level, as a radicalization of relationships. The importance committed to the substantial accident of the relationship allows posthumanism, on the one hand, to establish a "complex" cosmological view, and, on the other, to avoid the root of the problems about the existence of such a thing as human nature: «Posthumanism, emerging as it does from poststructuralism, denies that there is such a thing as human nature»[17].

The basic problem is the fact that becoming needs Being as its foundation: the condition of possibility man's change is precisely the fact that we can give a structure to which the mutations adhere, namely man himself. Yet, posthumanism denies the permanence of a thing such as human nature, perhaps fearing to lose the metamorphosis of phenomena. The point is perhaps to accept that the human being is not defined once and for all, but neither is he "nothing": only ad-

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14 Pepperell, R. «Posthumans and Extended Experience», *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, (2005), 34.

15 Viola, F. *Umano e post-umano: la questione dell'identità*, in: Russo, F. (ed.) *Natura cultura libertà*, Armando, Roma, 2010, 90.

16 Asimov, I. *Foundation and Earth*, Bantam Books, New York, 2004, 4.

17 Benko, *op cit.*, 2.

mitting that he is becoming, just like all other living beings, we can explain both his identity and his changes[18].

3. Eliminate the limits to eliminate man

In the absence of a human nature – in its deepest meaning, of course – there are no restrictions or limitations on how humans can configure themselves: the only limitation humans have to overcome is the organic body. But, even in this case, avoiding the impasse of the body should become quite simple: once its boundaries are removed, or the body is reduced to a mere function, this latter becomes a useless pretence, completely replaceable. In fact, Pepperell writes: «There is nothing external to a human, because the extent of a human cannot be fixed»[19]; and again: «The mind and the body act together to produce consciousness. If one is absent consciousness ceases. […] In order to function the brain must be connected to a body, even if the body is artificial»[20]. The most significant difficulty in this context seems to be the following: is it possible to totally cancel the limit – of an entity, of the whole, etc. – or do you tend to postpone and procrastinate it only? The issue of the alleged perfection (or perfectibility) seems, in fact, to be a more regulative idea than a real possibility: is it possible to achieve perfection? What kind of perfection: material (bodily), spiritual (psychic), or both? The difficulties are so obvious, especially if you think that, to establish the idea of perfection, it is always necessary to refer to a "model of perfection", an ideal to which you can inspire to for the design of an entity. Yet some contemporary philosophies (posthumanism and ecologism first of all, but also evolutionism, which is the theoretical background for these) deny, a priori, a norm of which to refer to, an ideal of perfection to aim for, a purpose and a directionality of the perfective activity. The "where to", in fact, speaks of an end, a goal to tend towards, which can inspire and give the sense (meaning and direction).

Firstly, "blind evolution" that is at the base of ecology, and then of posthumanism, excludes for itself the

category of perfection, since the case (or the non-adjustable biological processes) does not follow trajectories oriented and adjustable by an intelligence; it is quite the opposite: to delegate the interpretation of the whole and of its becoming to mere bio-chemical processes, driven by irrational principles, means to deny the possibility that reality actually responds to a higher rational order.

The denial of limit (and its idea) at this level, therefore, far from asserting consistently the realization of such perfection, contradicts its very possibility: perfection exists only if there is a limit to go beyond. To speak of perfection we still need to keep in mind something that is not perfect, and, on the other hand, something that will positively inspire our idea.

Perhaps the elimination of limit is not as possible as the posthumanism wants us to believe: at most, we can move to postpone it, but the very own ontological constitution of reality states a necessity and an in-eliminability of the limit. To think of "eradicating" the full limit from reality means losing its becoming: this means, ultimately, denying the very constitution of the world. But this is self-evidently unthinkable.

The posthumanist thought, therefore, moves the centre of the contemporary philosophical reflections from the question of technological possibilities and of its alleged ethical limits to the question of the limits of man, interwoven in his original essence: «The crucial issue is not that of the relationship between natural and artificial, but that of the distinction between man and his environment, between man and man's world. If this distinction is impossible, then we lose human identity. It is not a coincidence that the core of the problem of posthumanism doesn't turn so much around the possibility of natural hybridization between species, but above all around the issue of confusion between man and man's environment. Here, bioethics and ecology meet and blend. Posthumanism is not as such a replacement of the human species with a more perfect one, but rather it is a new way of considering mankind, one in which the question of identity has no longer any meaning. Post-humankind has no face, also be-

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18 See: Bontadini, G. «Sozein ta phainomena», *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* V, (1964), 439-469.

19 Pepperell, «The Posthuman Manifesto», *op. cit.* II, 10.

20 Ibid, II, 4.

cause we are no longer able to predict the effects of our actions and what we produce is without *telos*»[21].

4. The forms of contamination: the technology

The dissolution of boundaries – their liquefaction – is configured in posthumanism as the condition of possibility until a total contamination occurs, until the entities are totally opened to other entities and until they can allow themselves be plagued. A first theoretical difficulty encountered here is this: it seems to us that the condition of openness to others is precisely the demarcation of boundaries, and not their dissolution; the ontologically closed thing is opened to otherness since it is defined: we can, thus, recognize a "you" distinguished from an "I". The difference and the proportion (and thus the diversity marked by the identity) are configured as essential conditions for otherness. For, there to be an "other", there must always be contemporary given an "I".

The forms of the posthuman contamination – or hybridization – are essentially two, and are distinguished by the objects that make it possible, accepting the initial human structure: technology and other living beings[22].

For posthumanism it is not, in fact, the technique to represent an opportunity to dominate the world of man – just like for transhumanism – but it is technology that defines the hybrid identity of man, finally open to otherness. In the light of posthumanist speculation, it is not possible talking about technique as a mere means to direct human evolution, yet; on the contrary, the technique turns off all anthropocentric domination pretence over other species, living and non-living. In this regard, it becomes a vehicle for hybridizing transformation,

freeing up from its traditional role as a functional tool that can provide for the structural human deficiencies: man is not technical since he needs and *has* needs... it is the technique, rather, that imposes new ways of interpreting the living being, decentralizing the position of man in the cosmos.

In this sense, posthumanism is configured as an overcoming of transhumanism and as distancing from an a-critical glorification of the possibilities opened up by technology. It can also be portrayed as an abandonment of many humanist anthropocentric ideas: «The posthuman is thus the idea of a speculative transformation of the human that can be developed through a range of synthetic activities: say, by developing and testing enhancement technologies, the development of cybernetic art forms or the fielding of imaginative possibilities in philosophy or literature. In Derridean terms, these productive activities (occasion) singular judgments in which we re-invent our understanding of anthropocentric concepts»[23].

Therefore, posthumanism understands technology as one of the many means useful to reach a not purely technological end: hybridization –which does not occur exclusively with machines– can also be achieved through further means[24]. In this posthumanist point of view, technology is not configured as an extrinsic way through which the living being progressively eliminates its limitations, but rather, as an intrinsic possibility of the living being (in particular for the human being): «A critical theory of technology begins by embracing the symbiotic relationship between people and technology. As much as people create and determine technology, technology creates and determines people. Therefore, this critical theory of technology is thoroughly posthuman»[25].

In this regard, posthumanists critically distance themselves from transhumanists and, at the same time, from

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21 Viola, *op cit*. 95.

22 As reported in the most influential studies in this topic area, «the term posthuman stands for a series of quite different perspectives and positions. [...] These different uses of the term reflect often radically different and opposed approaches to the category of the "human". On the one hand, posthumanism names a contemporary context in which scientific developments trouble the foundational figure of the human subject as distinct from other animal forms of life. New technologies [...] disturb an idealized definition of the human subject as separate and liberated from nature and fully in command of the self and non-human others» - Castree, N. Nash, C. «Editorial. Posthuman geographies». *Social & Cultural Geographies* 7/4, (2006), 501.

23 Roden, D. «Deconstruction and excision...», *op cit*. 34.

24 In this sense, we cannot endorse the following thought: «Whatever this new post-human condition will be, it will involve at least the enhancement of mental and physical capabilities, but also possibly the extension of life itself towards immortality» - Russell, M. Sharpe, M. «Editors' Introduction: The Post/Human Condition And The Need For Philosophy», *Parrhesia* 8, (2009), 2.

25 Seltin, J. «Production of The Post-Human: Political Economies of Bodies and Technology», *Parrhesia* 8, (2009), 46.

hyper-humanists –the name for the staunchest contemporary defenders of the existence of a human nature already defined, such as Fukuyama or Habermas–, and at the same time, abandoning technophilia or technophobia. According to the posthumanists, we are not dealing with denigrating or overestimating technology in its influence on man: it is necessary, however, to analyze it with different parameters from those used as of now. To do this, however, we must overcome the Cartesian dichotomies, which led to the consideration of nature and culture (and with them the couple nature/artifice) as areas separated by an insurmountable ontological barrier[26]. The separation of the natural from the artificial and from the cultural inevitably led to, according to Roberto Marchesini, a radical distancing of man from the machine, and at the same time, from the animal[27].

This distancing also brings with it "strangeness": the machines and the technological constructions are now seen as something alien to human nature, so much so that «while the animal is realized exclusively within the natural context – i.e., within the so-called first nature – man feels the need to be completed – i.e., to contribute with culture, which is considered in all respects as a second nature»[28].

Instead, in posthumanism, between technique and human beings there cannot be "strangeness", because man may be the result of hybridization with technique[29]: the technique may modify the biological data, although it does not produce gaps between the two elements but a conjunction, so that technique is embodied materially to the *bios*. Thus technique, by human means to reach an extrinsic end to an object, becomes a co-operator of hybridization. Although posthumanism is going in the direction of a restoration of the natural/artificial fracture by mixing technology with the living world, thus aiming to overcome the Cartesian dichotomy nature/culture, it still seems to suffer from a deficiency that undermines the ground of the conceptual system: it ap-

pears, in fact, conceptually inaccurate, at least for the writer, to talk about technique and, then, man. If it is true that technique is a natural condition for man – as Ortega y Gasset wrote: «without technology, man would not exist»[30] – on the other hand, it must also be taken into account that without man, technique may not exist either. The hypostatization of technology – and, with it, the machines that are mostly considered fully autonomous systems – returns to the thought of a fracture that has not healed, and a difficulty of taking man into account as a *naturally technical being*. The technique configures, in fact, as a typical posture of man, and this is the real origin of technology. If technique is essentially in man's glance on the world, there cannot be a rift between it and the human being, and likewise, that glance cannot exist once the man is removed.

5. The forms of contamination: the hybridization with other forms of life

As with technique, we should think of the relationship between man and other living beings in the same way: the openness to others does not configure as the opposite attitude to the closure of everything that is extrinsic to man, but as a modality of an almost entirely accomplished expression of the self. Post-mankind is revealed as a reality that surpasses man in terms of completeness and accomplishment, since they are more connected and in tune with the energies that vivify the cosmos. Here, the conception of the world as a universal community emerges, «based on empathy, accountability and recognition»[31], and unified by «zoe, or the generative force of nonhuman life-rules through a trans-species and transgenic, interconnection, or rather a chain of connections which can best be described as an ecological philosophy of non-unitary, embodied subjects and of multiple belongings»[32].

As a result (and a consequence) of this hybridization and acceptance of others into itself, we have the dislocation of the «centrality of the human, in favor of the in/

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26 See: Marchesini, R. *Post-human, verso nuovi modelli di esistenza*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2002, 72 ss.
27 See: Ibid, 77.
28 Ibid, 79.
29 See: Ibid, 167.

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30 Ortega y Gasset, J. *Meditazione sulla tecnica e altri saggi su scienza e filosofia*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, 2011, 37.
31 Herbrechter, *op cit.* 7.
32 Braidotti, *op cit.* 203.

non/post-human and of bio-centered egalitarianism»[33]. Thus, the change in perspective undertaken by the post-humanist philosophy consists in the abandonment of the anthropocentric conception to gain post-anthropo-centrism, once surpassed the negative form of anti-an-thropocentrism, describing it as a movement of Hegelian thesis/antithesis/synthesis: «Postanthropocentrism' – a key focus of posthumanist thinking – as rethinking the human "with" its nonhuman others (animals, machines, objects, systems, environments, etc.)»[34].

The difficulties encountered by the anthropocentric and bio-centric paradigms[35] seem to be permanently abandoned due to the post-anthropocentric proposal, which recalls the need for «a new global "ecology": the end of human exceptionalism returns the question of how to live together with nonhuman others with a vengeance. New ethical and political challenges and the extension of the demand for social justice to include all humans and nonhumans calls for new "ecologies" of how these increasingly complex environments may be shared "sustainably" in the face of disappearing natural resources and the increasing demand for them, and in the face of global migration flows, threats to the environment and biodiversity, and a globalized capitalist system that seems to be destined to pursue its path of destruction until everything is consumed»[36].

This form of posthumanism, thus, far from wishing to decline the "post" as an attempt to overcome the evolution process of the *Homo Sapiens* species, tries to reinterpret it in terms of inclusiveness of otherness rather than self-closure. In this perspective we would speak of posthumanism to indicate the fact that the possibility of human realization lies in the ability of man to go beyond himself, that is to recognize the irreplaceable value of co-existence and collaboration with biological or technological diversity. Rather than the "completed evolution" of transhumanism, or the

condition of life for the present and the future humanity through the application of sophisticated technology, posthumanism becomes a new perspective on the current human condition: «In one important sense, the "posthuman" means not the literal end of humanity, nor the dramatic mutations in the human body brought on by various technologies. Rather it signifies the end of certain misguided ways of conceiving human identity and the nature of human relations to the social and natural environments, other species, and technology»[37]. The possibilities offered by posthumanism are therefore, firstly, a new hermeneutical perspective: «When we talk about posthumanism, we are not just talking about a thematic of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates...rather, I will insist that we are also talking about how thinking confronts that thematic, what thought has to becomes in the face of those challenges»[38].

So the "post", in the light of these forms of contamination, cannot be longer interpreted as an "anti" or simply as the affirmation of a strong subject, tending to perfection, which is dialectically opposed to its corruptible materiality, and that tends to abuse technology as an instrument of power and domination over himself and the world. On the contrary, the "post" represents a "with" that proposes the affirmation of a subject in continuous metamorphosis, modulated by the relationship entertained with the otherness, be it a machine or another living being. If, in the first case, we are spectators of a fictitious overtaking of the critical referent of post-humanism, i.e. the "humanist" human being, characterized as the centre of the universe, in the second case, we come out with a real alternative conception, which sees in becoming, in relation to otherness, a necessity inscribed in the very being of man, which, in order to find himself, must paradoxically cross the boundaries of the self.

The total symbiosis of man with the other forms of life and the recognition of a single superior and

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33 Herbrechter, *op cit.* 7.

34 Herbrechter, S. «R. Braidotti The Posthuman. Cambridge: Polity Press. Review». *Culture Machine*, (2013), 3.

35 See: Valera, L. «Singer e la questione ecologica. Per il superamento della dicotomia tra antropocentrismo e biocentrismo», *Per la filosofia* 80/3, (2010), 67-78.

36 Herbrechter, *op cit.* 7.

37 Seltin, *op cit.* 46.

38 Wolfe, C. *What is Posthumanism?*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009, xvi.

transversal strength – *zoe*, or life – clash with a difficulty which appears as dialectically insurmountable, as evidenced from everyday experience: life – candidly elevated to a positive principle of everything – is *polemos*. Living beings – especially those which constitute the main partners of hybridization – are consumed by infighting, and the world outside of man does not seem to be as peaceful as it is described today in an exquisitely sweetened up manner. The nature, outside of man, is not the home of the happy coexistence of different species, rather the contrary: it is the home of the greatest injustices and abuses. In nature, the weaker continues to succumb to the stronger, and without giving rise to some motions of piety: compassion and mercy are strictly human feelings; on the other hand, also the opening up to difference seems to be an exclusively human prerogative.

The difficulty in practice by offering a realistic and non-idealized view of nature as *polemos* seems to undermine the harmony that should be given with the total hybridization of living beings. Always assuming that the other living beings "desire" this hybridization: otherwise, forced contamination would only reveal another form of the purely anthropocentric position.

6. Posthuman: still human?

The posthumanist idea, for which man can step outside his own boundaries, potentially embracing every form of life and every technological structure, is entirely different from many forms of thought that have occurred for many centuries. Post-mankind is not a bad copy of the Nietzschean *Ubermensch*, nor an aggravation of Baconian power and new science. In this sense, posthumanism is configured as an original thought, far from continental metaphysical traditions, and, at the same time, the analytical reflections and eastern mystiques. The difficulty in cataloguing posthumanism in a well-defined structure of thought is given by the elusiveness of such a philosophical system, so seemingly simple yet difficult to understand. And it is difficult to explain because it tends to undermine the very condition of thought, that is, the same human being: «The posthu-

man, according to Hayles, does not signify the "end of humanity" but the end of a conception of the human as self-present, autonomous agent that "may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous being exercising their will through individual agency and choice»[39].

The negation of man's identity is also, on the other hand, the denial that thought can be given in a probable future as it is always been given, i.e., starting from the same existential coordinates. Denying man, we also inevitably deny the persistence of thought. If it is true, beginning from the theory of *embodied intelligence* that supports the posthumanist thought, and for which one thinks with body and mind together[40], then the changing of the body also changes the thought. The conditions that make a thought possible in the contemporary age could change the attainment of a new body, be it is a technological one or a hybrid form with living beings. The difficulty of predicting the way by which one deploys the thought in an indeterminate future, makes any discussion present about this hypothetical forms of life so vain and foolish, and thus reduces it to a mere form of narrative. Here posthumanism reveals its deepest essence: it is precisely one of many narratives that man has always proposed in order to interpret a reality that is revealed as mysterious, and perhaps to fight off fear. Posthumanism is, after all, a narrative[41].

Far from denying the possibility of reflection that a narrative can provide, rather, we affirm that the true power of the posthumanist thought consists in rediscovering some purely human needs and desires: the pursuit of eternity and immortality, the desire of perfection, the need to open up to otherness and to live in harmony with other living beings, the need to know that we are part of a single cosmos. The posthumanist

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39 Roden, D. «Deconstruction... », *op cit*. 30.

40 In fact, Pepperell writes: «Consciousness is an effect that arises through the co-operation of a brain and body; we think with our whole body» - Pepperell, «Posthuman Manifesto», *op cit.* II, 4.

41 We tried to provide an adequate argumentation to that statement in another article within this special issue: Valera, L. Tambone, V. The Goldfish Syndrome. Human Nature and the Posthuman Myth.

narrative reaffirms, in short – albeit in philosophical disguise – a human feeling, all too human, namely the search for his own perfection: «"The supporters of this new current of thought compose the praise of man, not a mere subject, but a being sovereign of his own body, demiurge, and infinite re-creator of his own post-nature. In this perspective, the physical and psychological identity appears as a mutant entity, a becoming process, capable of continuously updating information assets". Posthumanists believe that through the intervention of the deep structures of the human being, we should arrive to a better, more advanced humanity. This idea is not new»[42].

Ultimately, the posthuman being is nothing if not the same human being. With the modified and hybridized body, with enhanced intellectual faculties and diluted consciousness in space and time, with increased sensitivity and no more diseases... but also with the same needs and desires of human beings.

Needs and desires that are post-human, perhaps all too human.

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42 Sommaggio, P. «Umano post umano. I rischi di un uso ideologico della genetica», *Diritto & Questioni Pubbliche* 8, (2008), 213-214. 213-247. Birnbacher writes: «"Posthumanism" is an unduly hyperbolic (and misleading) name for the next stage in a continued effort at self-perfection that has accompanied mankind from its very beginning» - Birnbacher, *op cit*. 106.

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