

Nataša Jovanović

Facultu of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

From Posthuman to Posthumous and Back

Abstract: In this paper, I will endeavor to deal with the issues of the modality and status of human beings and forms of 'existence' that may depart from our understanding of what is meant by the term 'living'. In this process, I shall refer to the contemporary 'post-human discourse', and its various aspects and interpretations, which are employed as a means of redefining the human condition. By means of examples, I shall try to explore the fear of death and the human quest to extend life by various means. Posthumanism is the dominant idea of today, and the problem of posthumanism in this text is dealt with in a narrow ideological sense that advocates the abolition of human biological limitations, and in the broader sense, a policy of globalization that works less directly, but significantly more forcefully, through the change of forms of human behavior to achieve the same goal. Hence, new ways of avoiding 'crossing over to the other side', as well as old ways, are still being sought. Holograms, these digitally-generated 3-dimensional images have been used as a means of providing entertainment by generating a simulacrum of an artist to perform for an audience, regardless of whether the actual artist is still alive. Thus, biological mortality is conquered and the line between life and death is blurred.

Keywords: human; posthuman; posthumous; hybrid; hologram; shift

Introduction

For the purposes of clarification, I am not seeking to use this essay to revise or re-interpret the *death of Man* suggested by Michel Foucault or to refer to that what Brian Massumi named *Ex-Man*. Nor am I attempting to craft any new theories. Instead, I am concerned more about switching or transferring from one hybrid to another.

Posthumanism and *posthuman* are terms that have emerged since the '70s but were often a part of confusion. To be post-human is to come after the human, whether literally as in post-apocalyptic narratives and science fiction, or after humans have somehow *transcended* their humanity through technology, evolution, or both. When we talk about posthumanism, we are not talking about a stable category, but more about an assemblage. Post-human-*ism* suggests not what comes after the human being, but what comes after the ethical and philosophical suppositions of *humanism*. In other words, how do we re-conceptualize what it means to be human in light of new

technologies and scientific knowledge but also in light of the fluidity of boundaries between human, other living beings, artificial intelligence and machine.

I reject the view that the posthumous state is a necessary part of the apocalyptic reality that is imposed upon us but, rather, as a suggestion that there exists the possibility of creating a new place for man. Whether this place has any temporal or spatial reality or whether it exists only in the imagination remains to be seen. As Rosi Braidotti explains ‘We’ are a missing posthuman people, who need to become constituted and actualized and the *posthuman* is just the question, the answer is what ‘we’ are capable of becoming.¹ This is more in keeping with Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive approach which is to say that everything rests on the beginning and the end of the idea itself; in its ability, reality and necessity, though not necessarily in that order. The desire to become other, to become posthuman, is not new and is not singular. Instead of asking, “what are we?” we faced with a question, “what is it that we want to become”? While our own experience of the world is limited by our human consciousness, we can nevertheless recognize, if only through speculation, that the experience of the inhuman is both valid and worthy of our consideration. “Both imagination and science are agents of change, crucibles of values, modes not only of representation, but also transformation, their interplay may now be the vital performing principle in culture and consciousness – a key to posthumanism.”²

The hologram as a live re-creation of the dead and politicians who have ‘left the Left’

The use of technology to enhance humans was viewed as a separate process to the ‘natural’, genetic process of evolution. This opposition between human enhancement as mechanical or artificial compared to the more ‘natural’ process of evolution is particularly intriguing in light that most people believes that the mind over the body is the essence of being human. Blurring of the line between *real life* and science fiction is typical of posthumanism. For Badmington, posthumanism marks the meeting point of high theory and mass culture where, “[...] the boundaries between theory and fiction have been breached beyond repair”³. The line between reality and fiction is blurred in the present.

The *hologram* has been used for many years now as a means of entertainment. Consequently, the hologram as a visual and audio medium has accumulated a tradition of its own in terms of both history and theory. In its early days, it was a source of awe and wonder, stunning audiences with its apparent ability to recreate physical reality in three- dimensions. It is used for stunning sensory effect. As it is frequently

¹ Rosi Braidotti, “Posthuman Critical Theory,” in *Critical Posthumanism and Planetary Futures*, ed. Debashish Banerji and Makarand R. Paranjape (New Delhi : Springer India, 2016), 13–32.

² Ihab Hassan, “Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes,” *Georgia Review* 31 (1977): 843.

³ Neil Badmington, *Posthumanism* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 8.

used to recreate the image and work of musicians, it often implies the physical absence of the ‘star’. “An upsetting moment is the fact that regardless of the body’s mortality, the capital system (here presented in the form of the music industry) as a modern management technology always has the ‘live’ performance of the performers – whether they are alive or dead.”⁴

Marina Gržinić refers to this when she says that the creation of cyberspace interrupted the paradigm of time and space and that the perception of a live presence has changed to include a technologically-driven presence.⁵ There are numerous examples of this: Michael Jackson’s holograms (2014), Tupac Shakur (2012), and the duet performance of the living Celine Dion with the long-dead Elvis Presley (2009). However, hologram technology has not only been used to *resurrect* dead artists and make them sing again. “And while the most striking effect of the hologram is the resurrection of the dead stars on the scene, they are also used to multiply the number of live performances and appearances.”⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, politicians have employed the hologram as a campaigning tool. The message that, in past decades was broadcast by means of a video-link, can now be spread and amplified by hologram technology. During the last presidential election in France, the extreme left-wing candidate, Jean-Luc Melenchon⁷ employed a hologram to hold two rallies simultaneously, one in Lyon and the other 500 kilometres away Paris suburb of Saint-Denis. While this did not help Melenchon to win the election, it did, by dint of its deployment, send a message which said, or at least implied, that all citizens, and especially those coming from the poor suburbs, are equally important to him. Saint-Denis has, in recent years, become notorious for frequent and violent protests by socially vulnerable groups and also as a place where terrorist organizations recruit dissatisfied, unemployed and excluded young people. The message also implies is that the left is still the most progressive force in society, if for nothing else, then for using sophisticated technologies.

However, Melenchon was not pioneering the use of hologram technology as political campaign tool. The real *guru* is the current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, often referred to as *Magic Modi*. It was Modi who started using the hologram in 2012.⁸ In that year, he hired 40 technicians and 400 cameras in the province of Gujarat in a bid to reach as many voters as possible. He succeeded in his bid to become

⁴ Aneta Stojnić, “Live or Living Dead: (Un)setting the stage for the hologram performer,” in *The Crisis in the Humanities: Transdisciplinary Solutions*, ed. Žarko Cvejić, Andrija Filipović and Ana Petrov (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 178.

⁵ Marina Gržinić, *Spectralization of Space: The Virtual-image and The Real-time Interval* Grzinic_Biopolitics-Necropolitics_Simposio_2012.pdf., <http://international-festival.org/node/28702>, acc. July 22, 2018.

⁶ Stojnić, “Live or Living Dead,” 178.

⁷ Maya Nikolaeva and Catherine Lagrange, “France’s far-left Melenchon uses hologram to spread election message,” *Reuters*, February 5, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-idUSKBN15K0Q7>, acc. July 21, 2018.

⁸ Dean Nelson, “Magic Modi uses hologram to address dozens of rallies at once,” *The Telegraph*, May 2, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/10803961/Magic-Modi-uses-hologram-to-address-dozens-of-rallies-at-once.html>, acc. June 1, 2018.

the First Minister of the province of Gujarat which has over 60 million inhabitants. His success in the provincial elections likely played a significant role in his decision to run for the office of Prime Minister in 2014. During the campaign, he gave a total of 46 speeches which were replayed to 1,450 rallies across India by means of a hologram, thereby reaching up to 14 million more voters. Mr. Modi's campaign was a success and he was elected as the 14th Indian Prime Minister in May 2014. What *Magic Modi* has shown us is that the use of hologram technology is no longer the preserve of the so-called *First World*.

Hologram performers are certainly a phenomenon of the geopolitical First World. As such, they are a symptom of a world that has the privilege to proclaim the human as redundant. However, at the same time they reflect the necrocapitalist tendency toward total exploitation, celebrating the post-human era in which the human has become obsolete.⁹

It was precisely the creation of cyberspace and cyber-technology that enabled less resilient, less developed countries to overcome space and time with greater ease and speed and, thereby, leap the stages of industrial development. These examples have shown that technology proves astonishing to some but leads to indifference in others when it comes to selecting political candidates. The precise value of the hologram for political purposes remains to be seen. The performer as an *unstable element*¹⁰ or the absence of the corporeal body as one of the main features of the hologram will possibly be used in future to maintain important political figures 'in life' even when they are politically or biologically dead. There may come a time when people will be *imagined* through technology, with technology, and eventually in technology itself.¹¹

Posthumous marriages and the transfer to 'living life'

Necrogamy, the marriage of living people to dead people, has been a feature of human societies ever since there has been an institution of marriage. Today, necrogamy can be found in some African, and Middle East countries, but also in one European country in particular: France. Necrogamy, or posthumous marriage as it is otherwise known, dates back to World War I when some French women were allowed to marry soldiers who had lost their lives in the conflict. The rationale for this was to provide a formal legal status for children born as a result of extra-marital relationships. However, it was a legal process that was utilised by a relatively small number of French women until 1959. and the tragedy of the Malpasset Disaster when a dam on the Rayran River close to the French Riviera broke resulting in 423 dead and some 200,000 people being

⁹ Stojnić, "Live or Living Dead," 181.

¹⁰ Ibid, 177.

¹¹ Ibid, 178.

evacuated.¹² One of the victims was engaged to be married and his future wife requested permission from the French President, Charles de Gaulle, to allow her to marry posthumously. After months of mass media support and campaigning, she was given permission to marry her dead partner. Since then, hundreds of women and men too, have formally filed for what is known as ‘postmortem matrimony’. Posthumous marriage was formalized and legalized in France by virtue Article 171 of the civil law.¹³ The article sets out a legal framework in which a couple can be considered married in accordance with a number of conditions. However, it is a complex process. Anyone who wishes to be granted the right to posthumous marriage must first send a request to the President of France, who forwards it to the Justice Minister who, in turn, forwards it to the Prosecutor for the applicant’s district. If the couple had originally planned on getting married and provided that the family of the deceased approves, the Prosecutor sends the application back to the President. 75% of all applications for posthumous marriage are successful. These posthumous marriages bring a dead story *back to life*. The marriage applies retroactively and takes effect from to the day before the deceased spouse died. Following a posthumous marriage, the living spouse automatically becomes a widow or widower. The law does not permit the living spouse to receive any of the deceased spouse’s property or money. The widow can, however, receive a pension and can be entitled to insurance benefits. The latest example of posthumous marriage, which was covered extensively by the media, was the public wedding ceremony of Etienne Cardiles to the police officer Xavier Jugele who was killed by an Islamic extremist on the Champs-Élysées. The wedding of the murdered policeman and his living partner was attended by the Mayor of Paris and former French President, Francois Hollande, who gave the decree and approved the wedding. The French President also awarded the slain officer the Chevalier of the Legion of Honour posthumously.

Friedrich Nietzsche begins his *Antichrist* with the words: “This book belongs to the most rare of men. Perhaps not one of them is yet alive... First the day after tomorrow must come for me. Some men are born posthumously.”¹⁴ Nietzsche is, of course, referring to himself but is nonetheless an interesting exercise, at least semantically, to explore the concept of *posthumous* and to effect a transfer to the human by posing questions that are seldom raised. The concept of *living life* has been used to humanize, rationalize and to raise questions of the human species in every way to manage and categorize people and bodies that are actually not people and bodies. Karen Barad coins the term *posthumanist performativity* to define the new human/nonhuman interaction. Life, at

¹² Camille Lestienne, “Il y a 55 ans, Fréjus était engloutie par les eaux du barrage de Malpasset,” *Le Figaro*, December 2, 2014, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/histoire/2014/12/02/26001-20141202ARTFIG00077-il-y-a-55-ans-frejus-englouti-par-les-eaux-du-barrage-de-malpasset.php>, acc. June 12, 2018.

¹³ Article 171: “The President of the Republic may, for serious reasons, authorize the celebration of the marriage if one of the future spouses is dead providing a sufficient gathering of facts establishes unequivocally his consent. In this case, the effects of the marriage date back to the day preceding that of the death of the spouse. However, this marriage does not carry with it any right of intestate succession to the benefit of the surviving spouse and no matrimonial regime is considered to have existed between the spouses.” http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=450530, acc. August 6, 2018.

¹⁴ F. W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 38.

least theoretically, is almost everywhere at all times. These *weird lives* according to David Toomey¹⁵ can be everything: beta life, hypothetical life, non-standard life and Life 2.0. Life, simply by being life, expresses itself by actualizing flows of energies, through codes of vital information across complex somatic, cultural and technologically networked systems.¹⁶ The question that arises is: why, when we claim to be living in the *post-human era* is it still so difficult for us to leave *living life* or, at least ponder the prospect?

Conclusion

For decades we have avoided any discussion about the nature of life itself while occupying ourselves with analysis of life and a diagnosis of its attendant problems. What we refer to as the *critical studies* is actually the process of the sublimation of theoretical crafts and the development of new study programs which, among other things, include new feminist, queer, new materialist and post-humanist theories all of which revolve around the issue of modality and the status of the human 'living thing'; an attempt to analyze what things exists but not necessarily as living things:

Posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentralization of humanity through its binding in technical, medical, informatics and economic networks is increasingly ignored, a historical development that points to the necessity of new theoretical paradigms, a new way of thinking that comes after cultural repression and fantasy, philosophical protocols and avoidance, humanism as a historically specific phenomenon.¹⁷

Scientists are trying so hard to fulfill our desire to avoid the moment of physical death, by making machines to which our thoughts and emotions can be transferred and stored, so that after physical death we can stay forever, free from the bounds of entropy, in the awareness of own lives. Why do we refuse to die? We live in an era of material plenty but without a means of collecting or holding ourselves together in any commonality of experience.

We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date. We no longer believe in the dull gray outlines of a dreary, colorless dialectic of evolution, aimed at forming a harmonious whole out of heterogeneous bits by rounding off their rough edges. We believe only in totalities that are peripheral.¹⁸

¹⁵ David Toomey, *Weird Life: The Search for Life That Is Very, Very Different From Our Own* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2013).

¹⁶ Braidotti, "Posthuman Critical Theory," 13–32.

¹⁷ Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv–xvi.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 34.

There is a resolute refusal to stamp a post-script on the narrative of life being dominated by humanity. The story is extended and continued by means of holograms. As Nietzsche said, we reject the concept of being *posthumously born* and stepping forth into the post-human dimension.

References

- Badmington, Neil. *Posthumanism*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.
- Braidotti, Rosi. "Posthuman Critical Theory." In *Critical Posthumanism and Planetary Futures*, edited by Debashish Banerji and Makarand R. Paranjape, 13–32. New Delhi: Springer India, 2016.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Garreau, Joel. *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies – and What It Means to Be Human*. New York: Random House, 2005.
- Gržinić, Marina. *Spectralization of Space: The Virtual-image and The Real-time Interval*. Grzinic_Biopolitics-Necropolitics_Simposio_2012.pdf. <http://international-festival.org/node/28702>. Accessed July 22, 2018.
- Nelson, Dean. "Magic Modi uses hologram to address dozens of rallies at once." *The Telegraph*, May 2, 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/10803961/Magic-Modi-uses-hologram-to-address-dozens-of-rallies-at-once.html>. Accessed June 1, 2018.
- Nietzsche, F. W. *The Antichrist*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923.
- Nikolaeva, Maya and Catherine Lagrange. "France's far-left Melenchon uses hologram to spread election message." *Reuters*, February 5, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-idUSKBN15K0Q7>. Accessed July 21, 2018.
- Stojnić, Aneta. "Live or Living Dead: (Un)setting the stage for the hologram performer." In *The Crisis in the Humanities: Transdisciplinary Solutions*, edited by Žarko Cvejić, Andrija Filipović and Ana Petrov, 174–82. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.
- Toomey, David. *Weird Life: The Search for Life That Is Very, Very Different From Our Own*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2013.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Article received: April 30, 2018

Article accepted: May 10, 2018

Preliminary report – Short Communications