

## Plenary 2

Thursday 11 September h. 14:30-15:30, Auditorium

### When we 'were' posthuman. Scanning our lost future?

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This lecture stems from my personal need, as a scholar, to navigate a highly stimulating yet potentially disorienting field of study due to the vast amount of material produced over the past two decades—namely, the contemporary articulation of the crisis of Humanism, understood both as a basic notion of the Human and as a historical category within the disciplinary field of the Humanities. Positioned between the two movements of Transhumanism and Posthumanism, this exploration will unfold paradigmatically between theoretical reflection and narrative thematization.

After briefly addressing the construction of the humanistic myth of the autopoietic subject and its early crisis, some contemporary novelists will be examined in relation to some of their works, which can be classified as speculative fictions. These works depict a transhumanist future realized through unsettling modalities. To frame Transhumanism, reference will be made to the Western intellectual tradition of rationalism and its dualistic foundations, linking classical philosophical thought to Cartesian modernity and, subsequently, to contemporary critics and transhumanist theorists (Huberman, 2021). Regarding the threat posed by Transhumanism, the critique advanced by liberal theorists such as Francis Fukuyama (2002) and Yuval Noah Harari (2015) will also be considered, as they were among the first to express concerns about the neo-classist dimension of access to the benefits of transhumanist enhancement. Indeed, all the novels analyzed substantiate the critique of the risks associated with the imbalance of the human towards forms of improvement that remain the privilege of limited elites, while the vast majority of people are excluded from the schemes of human 'intensification'. These novels take the narrative form of dystopian universes, yet they are deeply rooted in the observation of technological potentials and authoritarian political tendencies that are already fully visible today.

Other Anglophone authors will be examined instead through the lens of a form of "idealist" realism, to substantiate an idea of Posthumanism conceived as a post-anthropocentric and post-dualistic model of thought. Tracing the emergence of the term "Posthuman" from the 1970s with Ihab Hassan (1977) to the present day with ground-breaking thinkers—particularly female scholars—such as Val Plumwood (1993), Rosi Braidotti (2013), Donna Haraway (2016), Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman (2014), and many others, this talk will seek to outline a coherent proposal that connects key moments of poststructuralist elaboration and the celebration of difference with the more recent ecofeminist and neo-materialist turns.

My talk will begin with two questions: "Is Transhumanism already with us?" and, more importantly, "Is Posthumanism already with us?" In attempting to answer these questions, the aim will be to assess, on the one hand, the extent to which certain natalist scenarios of eugenic and transhumanist orientation are already a reality. On the other hand, it will explore whether the posthuman perspective—an ethical praxis based on a *relational ontology* that assumes human responsibility towards other creatures and all vulnerable subjects—remains a viable project within our vision of the near future. In a provocative vein, which explains the title of this speech, the discussion will conclude with the question of whether it is still possible to pursue the posthumanist demystification of human exceptionalism and universalism, or whether we are increasingly facing a reality in which it becomes ever more difficult to challenge the resurgence of patriarchal, heteronormative, and climate change-denialist perspectives that are gaining ground across many spheres of our contemporary society.

### References

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