

A Totally New Type of Being: Figuring the Human in Cyborg Ontology

by

Rebecca Bishop

An article published in the The Sydney Morning Herald three years ago hailed the emergence of a new kind of being. The article stated that developing technologies, “will soon fuse flesh and technology within the body” creating “hybrid people” that may make humans obsolete” (November 15-16, 2003, p25). Exploring the science of nanotechnology, which involves the transplantation of artificial molecular structures into the human body, the article points to the evolution of a *homo technicus*, a ‘totally new type of being...a fusion of biological and technological at an atomic level’ where ‘living and non-living materials will be indistinguishable’ (*SMH*, p25).

Tales of humanity in a state of posthuman emergence are not only increasingly the stuff of mass media conversation and popular culture, but are also surfacing across a number of academic disciplines. Questions concerning the nature and parameters of the human, the breaking down of boundaries between human and machine, and the fusion of organic and inorganic life forms have inspired new directions in both feminist epistemology and Deleuzian philosophy. Recently, the figure of the posthuman has existed alongside an emergent theoretical dialogue on the breaking down of humanist binaries and the development of a teleological connectivity between the human and its other(s). Notions

of hybridity and alliance between organic and inorganic life have led to new conceptions of knowledge practices and identity formation, labelling them as ‘nomadic’ (Lykke 1996), grounded in a cyborg ontology (Haraway 1991), as a state of hybridity and becoming (see for example Shildrick 2002).

In film and media studies, the figure of the cyborg, the hybrid of human/animal/machine, is also being explored as representative of a new shift in identity politics. The cyborg, it is often suggested, challenges the humanist binaries that have formed the foundation of knowledge practices, raising critical questions over the boundary between soul and machine, mind and flesh. Indeed, it could be argued that the cyborg body be seen as an iconographic image of the cultural anxieties of the fin de millennium – embodying concerns over a ‘human’ interference in the natural order-of-things, and the potential dissolution of the rigid border between human being and being-other.

If the figure of the cyborg has provoked or reflected cultural anxieties over border-crossing, so too has it served as a site of posthuman possibility. Recent decades have seen the emergence of groups such as the ‘transhumanists’ and ‘extropians’ hailing the potential for a posthuman perfectability. Whether a technologically modified human body freed from illness and disease, or a techno-human soul downloaded into cyberspace, the notion of a corporeally enhanced posthumanity is beginning to make its way into both scientific discourse and the EuroWestern cultural imaginary.

Yet what remains problematic in both popular discourse and theoretical re-figurations of hybridity and connection is that the category of the ‘human’ itself remains universalised

and largely unproblematized. There is a tendency to conflate and to separate the human with the rational, transcendent figure of 'man', to represent the human as an organic and metaphysical whole that can be recognized transculturally across time and beyond geographical boundaries. Throughout these discourses, we find that the figure of the posthuman paradoxically relies on a confirmation of humanness as a stable subject position that can be historically identified, transcended and melded into a state of in/organic connectivity. Here, the notion of arriving at posthumanity, of merging into hybridity, relies on a logic of separation, that dialectic of 'translation and purification' that Latour (1994) recognizes as a quintessential feature of modernity. Where or what is the human that prefigures a cyborg future? What is the nature of the human that posthumanity claims to evolve beyond? Travelling through both the theorizations of hybrid identity and representations of the posthuman in popular culture, we find the spectre of the human, that enigma that riddled both Enlightenment philosophers and modern ethicists, resurfacing even as it is left behind.

Knowledge practices and an epistemology of connection

Donna Haraway's notion of cyborg ontology, of permanently partial identities and joint kinships between human and nonhuman, has certainly been embraced and refigured in many facets of contemporary feminist scholarship. Her vision of identity as a network, of epistemology as embodied knowledge, of alliances and porous boundaries, has provided a conceptual fuel for rethinking the legacy of humanist political philosophy. Lykke (1996) for example, has pointed to cyborg ontology as a means to 'redefine the relationship between human and non-human as one of conversation and non-suppressive dialogue between different subjects, instead of hierarchical and exploitative relation between dichotomously separate opposites' (Lykke 1996:24). Also taking inspiration

from Haraway's arguments, Shildrick has maintained that once it is 'admitted that both social and biological bodies are not given, but exist only in constant processes of historical transformation, then there are only hybrid bodies, vulnerable bodies, becoming-bodies, cyborg bodies; bodies, in other words, that always resist definition...' (Shildrick 2002:121). Evoking a history of monstrosity, Shildrick argues that the hybrid figure is 'not just an inventive trope of postmodernism, but a transhistorical site of challenge to the rational, autonomous, masculine subject, and to the category of the human itself...' (ibid 121).

While offering important new directions for the conceptualisation of identity, the argument that the hybrid offers a means to 'redefine the relationship between human and nonhuman', to challenge 'the category of the human itself' highlights the emerging problem of universalization in discourses of hybridity and posthuman being. While the scholars above certainly ground their work in a fundamental critical of humanist epistemology, the ambiguous reference to 'man' and 'human' points to a critical problem in current scholarship on the liberatory potentials of hybrid ontologies. The figure of 'man', and indeed the concept of the human have played fundamental roles in the construction of the myriad subaltern others against which Eurowestern 'humanity' has been framed. However, the tendency to meld both man and hu-man in academic and popular discourses perhaps reinforces the historical solidity of the boundaries between the EuroWestern 'self' and its female, racialized, sexualised others. Here, the 'human' continues to be evoked as a kind of Platonic pure form against which 'otherness' has been defined, and from which one can launch into cyborg possibility.

Recent commentaries on the rise of the figure of the cyborg in science fiction similarly rely on a reference to the human as a stable subject position. Writing on human/machine bodies in contemporary film, Pyle (2000), for example, suggests that “each of these films asks in its own way what happens when the status and fate of the human becomes intertwined with the technologically reproduced image of the cyborg” (Pyle 2000:129). Citing the film *Bladerunner* as an example, he suggests that the cyborg threatens “the stability of the notion of the human that underwrites our actions, beliefs and meanings” (Pyle 2000: 130). The concept of the human”, he writes, “proves to be less stable than before” (Pyle 2000:135). Also writing on contemporary sci-fi films, Bukatman (1993) suggests that these films portray an “uneasy but consistent sense of human obsolescence, and at stake is the very definition of the human...our ontology is adrift” (Bukatman 1993:20). Tomas (1995) suggests that the cyborg “represents a radical vision of what it means to be human in the Western world in the late twentieth century” (Tomas 1995:21). Graham (2002) too argues that digital, cybernetic and biomedical discourses and representations of the posthuman challenge “our very understanding of what it means to be human” (Graham 2002: 1), rightly arguing that:

The erosion of clear boundaries between humans, machines and nonhuman nature can either be interpreted as a threat to the ‘ontological hygiene’ of humanity or a rendering transparent of the very constructed character of the parameters of human nature.

(Graham 2002: 20)

What is at stake here is not that these authors argue for a stable category of humanness, rather, they intimate that ‘our’ visions of humanity are reconstituted in representational practices in a way that the ‘human’ is clearly recognized. In this context it is necessary to consider that if representations of the cyborg challenge a notion of the ‘human’ as a corporeally and teleologically bounded entity, so too they simultaneously affirm the human as that which-is-not-other; that hybrid fusions of the human and machine, human and animal in representations of the cyborg reinforce a notion of the categorically ‘pure’ human with an uncorrupted corporeality, an embodied wholeness. Here the figure of the cyborg resurrects long-standing historical epistemological/ontological concerns over corporeal purity that have long separated the human, that ‘entity that underwrites our actions, beliefs and meanings’, from hybrid forms of difference.

Posthuman embodiment

Indeed, it is possible to argue that EuroWestern conceptions of humanness itself have been produced in a language of corporeality, that humanness has long been constituted as an embodied state of being. Throughout a history of representations of hybrid and cyborg bodies, humanness has been challenged precisely at the moment the boundary of the body has been breached¹. Humanness gives way to a state of fusion, a melding into forms of ‘another kind’ when the corporeal limits of the body have been transgressed and blended with body parts of the ‘other’; a metaphysics of human being, a notion of intangible subjecthood and identity, has long been inexorably woven into a somatic politics of identity.

Contemporary discourses on posthuman embodiment resurrect these historic associations between human being and corporeal boundaries in multiple ways. While

Goldstein posits an emerging age of the *homo technicus* in his discussion of nanotechnology, where a “totally new type of being....a fusion of biological and technological at an atomic level” will emerge, Mauron (2003) argues that we are seeing the emergence of a new genomic metaphysics, where the genome is constituted as the “ontological core of the organism, determining both its individuality and its species identity” (Mauron 2003: 245). This metaphysics, he suggests, may lead to the dawn of the *homo faber sui ipsius*, the ‘self-generated man’ (Mauron 2003:244). Superseding the cyborg vision of a human corporeality with exterior components grafted onto the body (Clynes and Kline 1960), both point to a new machinic/organic network which operates inside the body, invisible to the eye. While Goldstein posits a new vision of interconnection and machinic assemblage in the body’s interior, Mauron suggests that a genomic purity, a pure human species-being untainted by animal or machine, will herald a posthuman ontology.

This ambiguity is further manifested in differing discourses which locate the ‘posthuman’ in both the obsolescence of the body and the reconstruction of the body. While claiming that the body is ‘obsolete’, the often cited performance artist Stelarc, for example, focuses his performance art directly on machinic alterations of the flesh, where “TECHNOLOGY NOW BECOMES A COMPONENT OF THE BODY” (Stelarc 1998:118, original caps). “What it means to be human is no longer being immersed in genetic memory”, he suggests, rather, the ‘human’ is “reconfigured in the electromagnetic circuit” (Stelarc 1998: 23). What is significant, he argues, is “no longer the freedom of ideas but rather the freedom of form – freedom to modify and mutate the body” (Stelarc 1998:117), where “CYBER-SYSTEMS SPAWN ALTERNATE, HYBRID, AND SURROGATE BODIES” (Stelarc 1998:116).

So too the collective that refers to themselves as the “transhumanists” equate ‘human’ evolution with radical technological prosthesis and enhancement. “We foresee the feasibility of redesigning the human condition”, states The Transhumanist Declaration, we “can use technological means that will eventually enable us to move beyond what some would think of as “human”ⁱⁱ. This vision of the ‘posthuman person’ equates techno-evolution with the removal of human corporeal and cognitive weaknesses:

...they yearn to reach intellectual heights as far above any human genius as humans are above other primates; to be resistant to disease and impervious to aging; to have unlimited youth and vigor; to exercise control over their own desires, moods, and mental states; to be able to avoid feeling tired, hateful or irritated about petty things.ⁱⁱⁱ

In a similar vein, the “Extropians” suggest that technological enhancements may see an end to the fragility and frailty of the ‘human’ condition:

Human beings achieved "civilization" thousands of years ago. Yet we have not shaken off the ancient tyrannies that haunt the human condition. We suffer physical and emotional sicknesses ending in decrepitude and death. The primitive parts of our brain spur us to envy, to hate, to despair, and to kill.^{iv}.

In this post-Darwinian rhetoric, they aim to “gradually but firmly change the rules of the game called being human”, a change, they argue, that will occur by embracing new technological enhancements which will evolve the human into a super-human beyond oppression or control, beyond containment.

The transhuman and extropian position relies at once on historical narratives of evolution toward perfectibility; both the original ‘human’ and its antecedent, the nonhuman primate, are cast as inferior versions of humanity’s drive towards progress and perfection, where illnesses, decrepitude, disease, leaky bodies and aging are merely reminders of a human condition that exists prior to technological invention. Arguably, these discourses do not so much celebrate a new cyborg ontology of assembled humans, animals and machines, but recast historical European visions of perfectibility, a vision captured, for example, in Nietzsche’s outline of the *Übermensch*, or overman, who may supersede evolution in a bid for ultimate human perfection^v. “Man is something to be overcome”, spoke Zarathustra (Nietzsche 1969:41); adding: “[w]hat is the ape to man? A laughing-stock, a thing of shame...Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman – a rope over the abyss” (Nietzsche 1969:42-3).

These visions of a technologically enhanced uber-humanity rely at once on a separation from animality and the erasure of the monstrous; deformity, disfigurement and illness have no place in this framing of the posthuman. Indeed, for some, the body itself, that wet and corruptible aspect of humanity’s animal origins, will no longer be required. As the World Transhumanist Association declares, “some posthumans may find it advantageous to jettison their bodies altogether and live as information patterns on vast super-fast computer networks”, where they might “employ different cognitive architectures or include new sensory modalities that enable greater participation in their

virtual reality settings”^{vi}. Hans Moravec, a leading figure in arguments for posthuman transcendence, makes a similar point:

Today's virtual adventurers do not fully escape the physical world: if they bump into real objects, they feel real pain. That link may weaken when direct connections to the nervous system become possible, leading perhaps to the old science-fiction idea of a living brain in a vat. The brain would be physically sustained by life-support machinery, and mentally by connections of all the peripheral nerves to an elaborate simulation of not only a surrounding world but also a body for the brain to inhabit.^{vii}

“Some individuals”, he suggests, “could survive total physical destruction to find themselves alive as pure computer simulations in virtual worlds”.^{viii}

Certainly this vision reinscribes the Cartesian conceptualization of the body, where “I am not this assemblage of members which is called a human body; I am not a rarefied and penetrating air spread throughout all these members...” (Descartes 1960b [1641]: 84). Yet so too it recalls Descartes’ own muted anxieties over where the line between mind and body, soul and corporeality began and ended; as he writes:

I cannot keep myself from believing that corporeal things, images of which are formed by thought and which the senses themselves examine, are much more distinctly known than that indescribable part of myself which cannot be pictured by the imagination.

(Descartes 1960 [1641:86])

While ‘we’ are certainly far from the realization of Moravec’s ‘mind-children’, the grafting of subjectivities into the matrix of cyberspace in the form of web-pages, chat rooms, and MUDs offer potentialities for a new connection between the visual and the ontological^{ix}. That “indescribable part of myself” can be re-imaged in virtual space as a string of words, an image, or a constructed hyper-real character in a virtual world where one can ‘play’ with multiple persona. What is ambiguous, and indeed ethically problematic, is that both Moravec’s vision and the *ubermensch* of the self-identified “transhumans” and “extropians” construct the ‘human’ as a coherent, if materially weak entity, and offer a vision of the new-human as an entity who has transcended heterogeneity, frailty, ‘wet’ bodiliness and corporeal mutation. The premises of extropianism and transhumanism in particular intimate that the evolution of perfectibility is in essence an evolution toward material/bodily normalization. Post-‘man’ here is the ultimate homogenization of ‘humanity’ cast against multiple historic framings of otherness.

At the same time, this ethically problematic casting of both the human and the posthuman often relies on a naïve assertion of cultural singularity, an assertion which has its roots in the antecedent to the post-human, the ‘modern primitive’. An eclectic collection of body modifiers and body artists, the Modern Primitives argued that through engaging in carnal body-play through piercings, brandings, scarification and S and M sex, the ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ self can be discovered, a ‘primitive’ self that lies buried beneath the disciplines and containments of civilized morality and behavioural standards. As Vale and Juno (1989) state in their collection of writings on the topic,

through body modification it is possible to “uncover the mass of repressed desires lying within the unconscious...to free us from “normal” social restraints, to awaken our dead bodies to life” (Vale and Juno 1989:5). In the same collection, modern primitive Levi-Strauss suggests that the “increasing exploration (in one’s own mind and body) of these “primitive” practices and techniques looks beyond the Ideology of Progress to a possible, synthetic future” (in Vale and Juno 1989:158, original parenthesis). Unlike the transhuman and extropian vision, the modern primitives celebrate the carnal, the animal and the ‘savage’ that civilization has set out to tame; in doing so, they recast historical discourses on both noble savagery and of a wild, untamed embodiment associated with subaltern ‘primivity’ beyond the confines of civilization. The well-known body modifier Fakir Mustafar for example, makes the dubious and ethnographically incorrect observation that:

The idea of possession, the idea of slavery, the idea of using in bonding one person by another [sic] is a strictly civilized idea. It does not exist in the primitive world. I’ve researched this deeply.

(in Vale and Juno 1989:21).

These kinds of blind cultural assertions re-appear in posthuman discourse, where the question of differential socioeconomic access to resources and technologies is generally overlooked, and where, as Moravec states, it is ‘inevitable’ that the transition of some into a state of ‘posthuman-ness’ may be slow, or indeed, may never happen at all; “[u]nhappy lives, horrible deaths, and failed projects have been part of the history of life

on Earth since there was life”, he argued in an interview with Mark Dery (1996); a fact which, he suggests, is supported by the history of human cultural evolution:

You see, many cultures are gone; the Maori of New Zealand are gone, as are most of our ancestors or near relatives.

(Dery 1996:307)

If some socioeconomic groups ‘miss out’ on their posthumanity, he argues, this is a consequence of a survival of the fittest, portions of humanity, like the ‘obsolete Maori’, are doomed to extinction.

While the modern primitives’ ethnographically incorrect idealizations of the ‘primitive’ as the primal self rely on a reclaiming humanity’s pre-civil past, Moravec’s vision of mind children, with its own imperialism and ethnographic error, instead locates ‘true’ human subjectivity as a mind that can be freed from unhappy lives and horrible deaths, the body a relic of humanity’s animal evolution. Both positions, however, link a new ‘human’ with the modification of the body; for the modern primitives a techno-material enhancement through piercing, branding and tattooing, for Moravec, a killing off of the body entirely. Like Stelarc, both link a mastery of the body with a new hyper-subjectivity, where, as Stelarc (1984) suggests:

The artist can become an evolutionary guide, extrapolating new trajectories; a genetic sculptor, restructuring and hypersensitizing the human body; an architect of internal

body space; a primal surgeon, implanting dreams, transplanting desires; an evolutionary alchemist, triggering mutations, transforming the human landscape.

(Stelarc 1984:76)

Yet it is a 'dream' that relies on overshadowing 'human' cultural, social and material heterogeneity. Like discourses on the monstrous and the cyborg, a 'post-humanization' relies on a referent to the 'human' as a particular kind of corporeal, metaphysical (and indeed socioeconomic) presence, a template from which 'becoming' can emerge, a corporeal wholeness against which states of hybridity can form, or into which one can evolve.

Ethics

The spectre of the technologically modified posthuman raises new and critical questions in regard to an ethics of becoming, questions which, to date, have remained largely unaddressed. On one hand, the real fact of differential socioeconomic access to technological resources suggests that becoming posthuman will be an option for a very limited field of cyborgs. Hayles (1999) has optimistically argued that the posthuman signals "the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice" (Hayles 1999:286). While she refers here to a posthuman ontology which hails the end of a masculinist will to power, she nevertheless, perhaps inadvertently, raises the silent whisper that courses through posthuman rhetoric; that the

freedom to modify the body, to effect change in the body's materiality in pursuit of a 'better body' remains the choice of a 'fraction of humanity'.

This ethico-politics of posthumanity is further complicated by its universalisation of the body/self relationship where it is argued that the modification of the body and its parts necessarily leads to a modification in human-ness. Certainly the last century of ethnographic research suggests that the EuroWestern framing of body and soul, both in Descartes' separation of the subject and the flesh, and in the posthuman conception of an embodied convergence between self/machine and animal, is the product of a particularly Western epistemology. While a number of feminist researchers have challenged the universalization of both the masculine rendering of the body/soul relationship, the question of the social/technological/economic site of the 'human' that much cyborg discourse addresses remains overlooked. Haraway's cyborg ontology, which offers a world in which "people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway 1991:154) is perhaps partly guilty of this oversight, its focus on material-semiotic actors within a particularly Western history fails to address the fact that a kinship between humans and animals, and a relationship between human and machine, is articulated in multi-layered ways in different cultural contexts. Cultures throughout the world construct a fundamental distinction between human and nonhuman worlds, between 'wild' or animal terrains and human, or "insider" space; yet the form and shape of these distinctions are heterogeneous and multi-layered within and without local cultural lifeworlds and worldviews. The danger of the current appeal to the 'posthuman' is that it relies on the universalization of human-ness that formed the ground of humanism's project. This universalization at once erases the multitude of local

differences in the articulation of the boundary between the ‘human’ and the other. Further this omission itself overlooks the way in which the ‘human’ has served as a construct which has consistently underscored practices of marginalization and the demarcation of subalternity within global political economy. If, as Sandoval (1999) suggests, cyborg politics has always been present in an “oppositional consciousness” in plural, multicultural settings, the danger remains that particular oppositional or situated voices will not be heard in the current call to reclaim a cyborg/monstrous identity.

Cyborg Ontology

Like Haraway’s vision of the cyborg, Halberstrom and Livingstone (1995) offer the ‘posthuman’ as a means to dissolve binaries between self and other and figure humanism is an outdated and obsolete mode of border patrol:

The human functions to domesticate and hierarchize difference within the human (whether according to race, class, gender) and to absolutize difference between the human and the nonhuman. The posthuman does not reduce difference-from-others to difference-from-self, but rather emerges in a pattern of resonance between the two.

(Halberstrom and Livingstone 1995:10)

Yet this claim is evolving a little too quickly. Popular posthuman discourse often erases questions of race, class, and gender, but not in a way that implies their dissolution into a machinic assemblage, but in an erasure of difference, an erasure which evokes Bhabha’s (1983) reading of ‘otherness as the limit-text’ against which the West recognizes itself,

where “the desire for originality” is threatened by difference (Bhabha 1983:27) and where, following Fanon (1970) he argues that “the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit – a grotesque mimicry or ‘doubling’ that threatens to split the soul and the whole...”(Bhabha 1983:27). Where can those historically constructed as liminal, animal-like, or transgressive entities which mimic or double the ‘human’ be placed in these visions of the self-generating human? Where do the monstrous and the misfits that have been discursively produced alongside the ‘fully human’ fit in these posthuman castings of perfectibility?

Bodies without organs

If a teleology of emergence is gradually replacing older framings of containment and boundary, what possibilities does this offer for the reconceptualization of difference and belonging? A number of commentators have suggested that a focus on becoming rather than being, on hybridity rather than fixity, is set to challenge the binary oppositions of humanist thinking, and offers a new and critical means of framing ‘being’ and identity. While Shildrick (2002) for example, argues that the monstrous “destabilizes the grand narratives of biological and evolutionary science and signifies other ways of being in the world” (Shildrick 2002:10). Hayles welcomes the emerging posthuman subject as “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles 1999:3).

In a cognate, though politically disparate, field of inquiry, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conception of planes of consistency, of blocks of becoming, has provoked new directions in the philosophy and politics of being. While it is impossible to reduce

Deleuze and Guattari's work into a series of key tenets, their notions of assemblage and becoming have laid a broad groundwork for new approaches to rethinking the nature of connectivity between human and nonhuman worlds. Moving beyond the notion of identity as a point of stable fixity, they point to the nature of 'becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that becomes passes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 238); where there are 'various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations' (ibid 294). Attempts to frame the anomalous, to label categories of fixity and hybridity, they suggest, paradoxically provides the grounds for the possibility of the dissolution of boundaries (ibid: 244-246). Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, Ansell-Pearson has argued that human and non-human life exist in a state of "rhizomatic-styled becomings" (1997:136), in which beings exist in a state of interconnected assemblage. The concept of hybridization, he argues involves the 'connection of points', but not a 'passing *between* points' (1997:136). He favours a 'synthesis of heterogeneities', as 'hybridization is still tied to the idea of there being elements that are pure and uncontaminated prior to the mixing they undergo' (136). He suggests that life itself must be refigured in terms of machinic assemblage:

In rhizomatic-styled becomings becoming denotes the movement by which the line frees itself from the point and renders points indiscernible. *Machinic* 'evolution' refers to a synthesis of heterogeneities, where hybridization is still tied to the idea of there being elements that are pure and uncontaminated prior to the mixing they undergo in hybridism.

(Ansell-Pearson 1997:136)

This casting of being as flows, intensities, haeccities, and lines of flight, where fields of territorial signs feed into one another to deterritorialize and create further signifying is at once politically problematic and methodologically evocative. While the concept of the machinic assemblage does offer a means to transcend the dialectic of ‘purification’ and ‘translation’ which Latour recognizes in the framing of the ‘human’ and its ‘other’, it does so at the risk of a-historicizing and a-politicizing the very real practices of boundary production that have existed simultaneously with the assemblage of hybridities that I have discussed throughout this paper. Deleuze and Guattari’s *Abstract Machine* offers a means to reconfigure the relationship between the multitude of human and nonhuman forms that have circulated in the EuroWestern imaginary, breaking down barriers between selves and others in a recognition of the dynamic and transitory nature of meaning construction itself. However, if these ideas are to have any meaning beyond the boundaries of theorization, critical questions need to be asked about the synthesis, flows and haeccities between the abstract machine and the machine of posthuman politics.

If, as Latour (1994) suggests, the ‘purity’ of the EuroWestern category of the human has for a long time relied on the presence of the anomalous, the figure of the cyborg/hybrid conversely relies on the presence of a locatable human. Clearly, the visions of hybridity and posthumanism outlined above have very different political agendas and positionings, and my aim here is not to conflate these positions into a single collective. A new focus on emergence rather than mutation, on hybridity rather than humanism, does indeed offer new possibilities for both a theoretical and methodological

reinvigoration of the politics of identity, however, the celebration of interconnectedness both in academic theorization and popular discourse must be tempered with an attention to the 'real world' narratives and discourses which complex practices of marginalization and exclusion that continue to inform in EuroWestern framings of 'humanity'. It still remains necessary to apprehend the embodied and power-laden dynamics of the EuroWestern articulation of the 'human' before celebrating its cyborg demise, to identify the way in which the figure of the human continues to be evoked as a universal template from which becomings can emerge.

REFERENCES:

Ansell-Pearson, K, 1997. *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition*, London: Routledge

Bhabha, H, 1983. "The Other Questions: Homi K Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse", *Screen* 24(6): 18-36

Bishop, R, 2004. 'Animalia: Liminal Beings, Monstrous Transgressions and the Embodiment of the Human', PhD thesis, Australian National University

Bukatman, S, 1993. *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, Durham NC: Duke University Press

Clynes, ME and NS Kline, 1960. "Cyborgs and Space", *Astronautics* September 26, 26-7, 74-6

Deleuze A and F Guattari, 1977 [1972]. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, [Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R Lane transl], New York: Viking Press

1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, [Brian Massumi transl], Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Dery, M 1996. *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century*, US: Hodder and Stoughton

Descartes, R 1960.[1641]. *Meditations*, [Lawrence A LaFleur], Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing

Graham, EL, 2002. *Representations of the post/human: monsters, aliens and others in popular culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press

Grosz, E, 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Halberstam J and I Livingston 1995. "Introduction: Posthuman Bodies" in J Halberstam and I Livingston (eds), *Posthuman Bodies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press

Haraway, D, 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge

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

Latour, B,1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

Lykke, N, 1996. "Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science" in N Lykke and R Braidotti (eds), *Between Monsters*,

Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace, London and New York: Zed Books

Mauron, A, 2001. "Is the Genome the Secular Equivalent of the Soul?", *Science* 2 February, 291:831-2

2003. "Renovating the House of Being: Genomes, Souls and Selves", *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1001:240-252

Moore, H L, 1988. *Feminism and Anthropology*, Cambridge UK: Polity Press

Moravec, H, 1988. *Mind children: the future of robot and human intelligence*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

More, M, 1990. " Transhumanism: Towards a Futurist Philosophy", *Extropy*, Summer:6

Nietzsche, F, 1969 [1891. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, [transl. R J Hollingdale], London: Penguin Books

Pyle, F, 2000. "Making Cyborgs" in D Bell and BM Kennedy (eds), *The Cybercultures Reader*, London: Routledge

Sandoval, C, 1999. "New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed" in J Wolmark (ed), *Cybersexualites*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press

Shildrick, M, 2002. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters With the Vulnerable Self*, London: Sage

Stelarc, 1998. "From Psycho-Body to Cybersystems: Images as Post-human Entities" in J Broadhurst Dixon and EJ Cassidy (eds), *Virtual Futures: Cyberotics, Technology and Post-human Pragmatism*, London and New York: Routledge

Turkle, S, 1984. *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*, New York: Simon and Schuster

1995. *Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York: Simon and Schuster

Vale, V and A Juno, 1989. *Re/Search #12 Modern Primitives: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment and Ritual*, San Francisco: V/Search Publications

Notes:

ⁱ I have made this argument at length elsewhere, see for example Bishop, R, 2004

ⁱⁱ ‘The Transhumanist Declaration’, <http://transhumanism.org>.

[accessed June 3, 2004]

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘The Transhumanist Declaration’, <http://transhumanism.org>.

[accessed June 17, 2006]

^{iv} ‘The Extropy Institute’, <http://www.extropy.org/>

[accessed June 17, 2006]

^v Indeed, some extropians make explicit reference to Nietzsche’s overman as a guiding principle in the quest for human perfection, see for eg, More 1990.

^{vi} World Transhumanist Association, <http://www.transhumanism.org/resources/faq.html>

{accessed January 20, 2007]

^{vii} Moravec, H, 1998. “Simulation, Consciousness, Existence”, online at:

<http://www.frc.ri.cmu.edu/~hpm/project.archive/general.articles/1998/SimConEx.98>

[accessed June 4, 2004].

^{viii} Online at:

<http://www.frc.ri.cmu.edu/~hpm/project.archive/general.articles/1998/SimConEx.98>,

[accessed October 6, 2004]

^{ix} See for example Turkle (1984, 1995) for a discussion of the development of MUDs, internet use and its impact on conceptions of identity.