

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Subhadeep Paul¹ ✉

(Issue Editor)



More than what posthumanism is (which is a trite bit of a commonplace by now), what is perhaps more pertinent to consider now is what it quintessentially means to be posthuman today. We are no more a milieu where mere technological add-ons (viz. in the area of prosthetics) would sufficiently encompass whatever it has come to imply to be posthuman. Indeed, posthumanism has come to imply a metaphysics of renewed understanding of ethical abstractions (with reference to Francesca Ferrando's *Philosophical Posthumanism*), but also entailing the materiality of infinitely stretching human capacities, with recourse to latest advancements in bioscience, bio technology and medical technology. David Cohen, in an article for *New Scientist* suggestively titled 'What does it mean to be posthuman?', opines that the intrinsic fast-paced nature of techno-upgrades is an unstoppable and irreversible process, and so, the moral quotient of the same is an eternal problematic, since we have a Hobson's Choice when it comes to this revolution in the present continuous. Posthumanism is both a being and a becoming at this moment, and the sooner we realize this, the better prepared we become in updating ourselves like apps, faced with this technophilic zeal. Cohen points out that Kevin Fong's *Extremes* deals with "extreme bodies", while Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* deals with "bodies in extremis" – both incidentally having a strong bearing on the discussion on posthumanism; a discussion he feels is "too important to be left to academics" (Cohen 2013). But posthumanism has emerged as so serious

¹ [Author] ✉ Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Literature, Language & Cultural Studies, Bankura University, West Bengal, India

E-mail: paul.sdp@gmail.com

© 2021 Consortium Journal; The author



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

a preoccupation in both theory and praxis that its significance as recognizing rhetorical invention as a capacity emerging from interactions between human and nonhuman agents and its attempts to redefine social structures without inherently humanly or even biological origins, but rather in terms of social and psychological systems where consciousness and communication could potentially exist as unique disembodied entities. Carol A. Taylor, commenting on the ontological turn in the 'bildung,' opines that the human must be decentred and in its place in the material spaces of higher education, what needs to be installed and foregrounded is "an ecology of ethical relations at the centre of educational practice in higher education" (Taylor 119). This reconceptualization in favour of a posthumanist bildung is vital to our educative and general understanding. Taylor quite succinctly notes: "This is because we are already living in posthuman times, where gene therapy, three person embryos, drones, technological innovations, GM foods, global warming, mass refugee migrations, continual warfare and the extinction of many species have thrown the nature of the 'human', the boundaries of the 'human' and the progressivist mission of Humanism into doubt" (Taylor 433). Taylor's idea echoes the sentiments of noted posthumanist Karen Barad who mentions that "bodies do not simply take their place in the world ... rather 'environments' and 'bodies' are intra- actively constituted" (Barad 170). We have to be acutely sensitive about the nature and progression of our 'posthumanization,' such that we can incorporate the critical, cultural and philosophical epistemologies to work in favour of our planetary futures. One should bear in mind that the Greek term 'techne' harmonizes the ideas of "science of craft" on one hand, and "art, skill, cunning of hand," on the other – according to Liddell and Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon*. We should neither be over-swayed to be technophilic, nor falter as technophobes. Without being ultra-techno-pessimists in the vein of neo-Luddism or Anarcho-Primitivism, it is also an ethical obligation that we deliberate before indulging our optimistic selves in a socio-political projection towards techno-utopianism. We can rightly do so when we begin to sensitize and attune ourselves to what Stephen Herbrechter describes as aspects of "non-technological posthumanization" (Herbrechter 3) that take into account the spiritual genealogies of our posthuman advancement (Francesca Ferrando), as well as alternate forms of knowing, as contradistinguished from Western Manicheanism or the Enlightenment Rational Project (Debashish Banerji). A holistic, multispecies-oriented, biocentric, and ethically-monitored networked technological interventional approach is the need of the hour.

This Special Issue on Posthumanism by *Consortium: An International Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies* has sought to address those interdisciplinary subtleties

that make posthumanism such as overarching and all-encompassing field of critical inquiry. Joshua Niebuurt's paper studies the role of anthropocentrism in the way in which the Machine Gaze has encountered data as a primary factor in how digital-machines will view and act in the world of Being. Dibyendu Bhattacharyay's paper questions posthuman possibilities in this universe through a tripartite thematic schema – the absence of a body, the transformation of a soul and the incorporation of the non-human in the world we live in, via unconventional animation movies such as *Zootopia* (2016), *Soul* (2020) and *Luca* (2021). Asmita Boral's paper analyses horrorism as profoundly influenced by the posthuman turn and interrogates both terror and the war on terror in terms of a demonic ethos within seemingly sanitised societies. Arshiya Chahal and Simran Gindwani explore in their paper the nature of factuality of the digital replication of memory and transmission of consciousness. In two texts, namely *Psycho Pass* (2012) and *Ghost in a Shell* (1995), they explore the veritable possibility and consequences of subjecting the human consciousness to an aspirational immortality. Goutam Manna's paper contends that the digital turn subverts anthropocentrism in a radical way. Posthumanism upholds a post-dualist worldview that counters the erstwhile Manichean Subject/Other divide in postcolonial discourse. In a similar vein but different manner, Pratyasha Basu's paper shows the inexorable posthuman deconstruction of fixed identity markers and binary opposites. She culls Katherine N. Hayles's take in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* regarding posthumanist theorization of embodiment in informatics that encapsulates the plurality of the queer identity and draws focus on the body in queer theorizations. It critically examines discourses surrounding sex robots to understand contentious issues involving sexual identity and consensual behaviour. Again, Shalini Chakraborty's paper subverts that the premises of anthropomorphism by showing that the veritable idea of Truth is anthropocentrically limited, and thus, definitely not multispecies in orientation. Nabanita Karanjai's paper showcases works such as 'The Garden of Forking Paths', 'The Library of Babel' and 'The Aleph' (Borges's short stories) as representing the quintessential Borgesian labyrinth that prefigure the hypertextual form of the Internet, where meaning has no centre and both the author and the reader function as generators of meaning. Sujato Ghosh's paper contends, with reference to J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe*, that humanist history has never been objective and impartial, and posthumanist philosophy exposes the false glorification of the generic 'human' as possessing centrality of being. Through characters like Friday, who are projected as 'non-subjects', he foregrounds the authenticity debate of historical veracities as only plausible when such 'non-subjects' are brought to the

foreground of recognition, attention and examination. Debyojyoti Dan's searching scrutiny of T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' through various mathematical apparatus to show how Prufrock's time and space is a phenomenological topology where historical empiricism transcends the factual world of causalist presumption and attempts a bridge between humanism and posthumanism. Reeswaj Chatterjee's paper examines Subrata Sengupta's Bangla short story 'Compi-boro-bhalo-meye' and posits that the 'humanly consciousness' and the 'mechanical consciousness' radically alters when we finally find out that the biological human possesses the mechanical consciousness, while the biological non robot has a human one. Saikat Chakraborty's paper is a searching examination of two stories from the posthumanist paradigm, namely 'The Call of Cthulhu' by H.P Lovecraft and 'Sarpopuran' by Samiran Das, in a bid to discern whether such nuanced narratives can be considered as becoming part of a radical ontology that he proposes to label as 'posthuman ipseity.' Last but definitely not the least, Asijit Datta's review of Donna J. Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* is highly pertinent in the context of ongoing studies of posthumanism, since the notion of the Chthulucene (the tentacular ones), much like the focus on the Virocene in a debatable post-colonial context, exposes the failures and foibles of both the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. In doing so, it is once again reiterated that posthumanism has already internalized (and quite rightly so) the ethos of a green planet, where a horizontal multispecies coexistence has become obligatory for a myriad of reasons.

Works Cited

- Barad, K. (2007). Meeting the universe halfway — quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cohen, David. (2013). What does it mean to be posthuman? *New Scientist*. N. Pag.
- Herbrechter, Stefan (2013). *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Liddell, Henry George; Scott, Robert (1980). *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Abridged ed). United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, C.A. Is a posthumanist *Bildung* possible? Reclaiming the promise of *Bildung* for contemporary higher education. *High Educ* 74, 419–435 (2017).