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Dedication

This issue of *Entanglements: Journal of Posthumanities* (Volume 2, Issue 1, January 2026) is lovingly dedicated to

Dr. Dipankar Sen & Dr. Dipanwita Sen

in gratitude for lives devoted to healing, care, and ethical responsibility.

In gratitude and deep respect,

Sukhendu Das, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief, *Entanglements: Journal of Posthumanities*

Editor's Note

Sukhendu Das 

Posthumanities: Getting Weary of Yet Another 'Post-' Fad?

A few years ago, when we established the Centre for Research in Posthumanities at Bankura University in 2022, we faced serious criticism from many of our colleagues across academia regarding the *raison d'être* for establishing such a centre. The same criticism was hurled against me in a post conference *adda* recently. I should mention that both moments had collegial ambience. Since 2022, I have been diving deeper into the books, articles, and talks of many renowned scholars working in this area. Whatever I say and write, I try to substantiate my views with logic and reason. I have learnt this lesson of ethical scholarship and accountability from my teachers, colleagues and fellow researchers. I feel it imperative to respond to such criticism in this editor's note.

The first question that I need to respond here is: "What, if anything, is new about posthumanism?" A simple bottom line answer would be that posthumanism is a new way of thinking about certain strands of humanism. "[T]he posthuman" as Hayles says "does not really mean the end of humanity" (286). Western Enlightenment modernity's projections of the human, its inherent dualistic mode of thinking, its rationalization of human exceptionalism, and an unwritten 'modern constitution'ⁱ (Latour 1993) face serious disruptions in the wake of contemporary climate catastrophe, ecological degradation, mass species extinction, socio-political and geo-political transformations,

unprecedented expansion of technology, Artificial Intelligence, and prosthesis. Moreover, humans are no longer biological agents of this planet. They have become geological agents in the Anthropocene. Since a “geological force has no sense of purpose or sovereignty” (Chakrabarty 33), how, then, are we supposed to re/configure ‘the human’ who is attributed with autonomy and freedom-seeking agency? Critical posthumanists, who argue for an inclusive way of thinking, might be tempted to rearticulate the normative conception of the human in the first place: who or what is ‘Anthropos’? With the loss of planetary stewardship, exceptionalism and agentic transmutation (from biological agent to geological agent), humans came to understand their complex entanglements with the non-human others. Humans are part of a much larger and complex web of beings, things and systems. In other words, posthumanities come about with growing interface between human and technology, digital surveillance, bio-terrorism, AI takeover, synthetic biologies, neuroscience, among my such countless things and novel ways of life.

Humanism’s shifting focus from human exceptionalism to locating human in a complex web of life and things did not certainly happen overnight. This gradual and decisive shift is deeply entrenched in history. The historical roots of posthumanist thought could be traced back to anti-humanist thought (of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault), STS (of Latour and Haraway), cybernetics and systems theory, and contemporary ecological and environmental philosophical thought. Posthumanist thought is to be found within such plural intellectual traditions. Posthumanism, in this sense, is neither a continuation of humanist thought nor a decisive break from it. Posthumanism radicalizes and recalibrates humanist ideals of reason, autonomy, progress, and science.

Another question that I recently confronted is: “Is posthumanism another academic imperialism?” Whether posthumanism is becoming another academic imperialism is a subject of debate within academia. Posthumanism could end up being a new form of academic imperialism if it attempts to universalize Eurocentric epistemologies at the cost of neglecting and marginalizing non-

Western and indigenous epistemologies. If my mapping of the landscape of contemporary debates is right, I find that possibility very weak. Scholars belonging to the non-European world are contributing intersectional approaches to this rapidly expanding domain. A cross-pollination between posthumanist thought and Indigenous/decolonial thought has the potential of recalibrating and reorienting ethico-onto-epistemic frameworks that acknowledge and respect diverse ways of being and knowing. At the same time scholarsⁱⁱ are also worried about the risk that posthumanities end up being an alibi for further dehumanizing certain groups of marginalized people or ignoring colonial histories of dehumanization. As Michalinos Zembylas articulates this apprehension in “The Entanglement of Decolonial and Posthuman Perspectives: Tensions and Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy in Higher Education”:

[...] it is not clear whether decolonial and posthuman approaches have always the same priorities; when certain people have never been treated as humans—as a result of ongoing colonial practices—*post-human approaches advocating a move away from humanism might be seen as an alibi for further denial of humanity to these same people*. Consequently, there may be tensions between decolonial and posthuman approaches that need to be carefully explored, especially in relation to how they function as and through technologies of power – e.g. in the context of higher education. (italics mine, 255)

Posthumanism’s inadequacy to address the questions of race calls for urgent interventions. To overcome its Eurocentric bias, posthumanists should address the questions of race in their conceptual apparatuses. Critiques of speciesism remain incomplete if the questions of race and colonialism are not properly addressed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Claire Colebrook’s chapter on “Posthuman Humanities”^{iv} is a rich and compelling piece of criticism of posthumanism. Colebrook argues that prevailing

strands of posthumanist thought have failed to overcome humanism, and the human ultimately returns in disguised forms. This risk is prevalent in many anti-foundational theories. Posthumanism which seeks to displace the human from its privileged ontological status often runs the risk of re-centering the human. But it is very difficult to agree with all the points she makes, particularly her definition of posthumanism:

Posthumanism, as I will define it here, is not an overcoming of the human but takes a similar form to the structure of nihilism. Here is Nietzsche's diagnostic account of nihilism: a 'higher' world of truth is posited behind appearances, so that this actual world is given lesser value [...]. If the human is assumed to be nothing more than an interface, already at one with a world that is one living system, then *posthumanism is nothing more than the negation of a humanism that never was*. It is an ultrahumanism precisely because once man is abandoned as a distinct system or inflection he returns to characterize nature or life in general, just as the death of God left an implicit and widespread theologism that no longer had a distinct or explicit logic. *Posthumanism is an ultrahumanism and partakes of the same metaleptic logic of reactive nihilism.* (italics mine, 159-163)

Colebrook's definition of posthumanism as a kind of ultrahumanism is certainly provocative. Despite having a strong rhetorical force in her argument, I find it less persuasive. Posthumanism is not an overcoming of the human but of certain strands of humanism.

The articles in this volume cover a wide range of domains – neo-materialist ethics, animal studies, biopolitics, transhumanist cyborg cinemas, AI-animal relations, post-anthropocentric Indian *kathās* tradition, posthuman ecobildungsroman, environmental (post)humanities, and the rise of xeno-subject:

- Carolina Santini's article, "Embodied Affirmation: Rosi Braidotti's Neo-Materialist Ethics Between Biology and Phenomenology," situates Rosi Braidotti's neo-materialist ethics of "embodied affirmation" within the contemporary context of biocapitalism, technoscience, and planetary ecologies, arguing that subjectivity must be rethought as an embodied and relational process within a relational continuum of the living. At the core of this project is Braidotti's *zoe*-centered ethics, where *zoe* is defined as an "impersonal and immanent vital force" traversing human, animal, and technological life, so that ethics appears as a material practice across bodies, environments, and technologies rather than as an abstract human-centred normativity.
- "The Anti-Posthuman Order: Colonial Anthropocentrism and the Making of Animal Degradation in India," by Dr. Nivedita Ghosh argues that Indian urban multispecies life is shaped by a persistent tension between emerging posthuman imaginaries and inherited colonial regulatory structures. Focusing on street dogs in Delhi–NCR, she shows how the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules and related legal frameworks, while apparently posthuman in recognising dogs as community beings entitled to exist beyond ownership, still treat them as biopolitical populations to be managed through sterilisation, vaccination, and surveillance rather than as full urban co-inhabitants.
- Swapnajeet Das, using a posthumanist lens in his article, "Entangled Existence: A Posthumanist Perspective on Biopolitics and Human-Animal Subjectivity," deconstructs traditional humanist discourses that are speciesist, ableist and racist, and that create not only the categories human and animal but also human and subhuman. Focusing on the biopolitical condition of animals, the paper argues that thinking biopolitics beyond its conventional anthropocentric frame exposes an entanglement of animal issues with human issues, advancing a post-

anthropocentric and posthumanist continuum of entanglement where humans and nonhuman animals share common traits of vulnerability.

- The article by Ardra Ann Thomas and Dr. Sujarani Mathew, “Programmable Bodies and Prosthetic Memory: A Critical Posthumanist Intervention in Transhumanist Cyborg Cinema,” examines contemporary cyborg films, such as *Bloodshot* (2020), *RoboCop* (1987), *Upgrade* (2018), and *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019) to argue that these texts imagine the posthuman body as infrastructural, and memory as a “programmable interface” under regimes of surveillance, capital, and control rather than as emancipatory enhancement. While these films indulge in transhumanist fantasies of technological enhancement, optimisation, and power, the authors show that they simultaneously expose the ethical, ontological, and political contradictions of those fantasies, revealing enhanced bodies as dependent, vulnerable, and embedded in corporate–military apparatuses.
- Dipanwita Ganguly compares two speculative visions of technology’s future in her article, “Between Eulogy and Warning: Techno-Utopian Futures Reimagined in Aaron Bastani’s *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* and Appupen’s *The Snake and the Lotus*”. Aaron Bastani’s manifesto promotes a Marxist-inspired utopia of post-scarcity abundance via AI and automation, while Appupen’s graphic novel warns of a posthuman dystopia where machines enslave humanity.
- Sameen Husain’s article, “Cyborg Companions: Reimagining Animal-AI Relations within Posthuman Ecologies in *Wild Robot* and Beyond,” analyses the 2024 DreamWorks film *Wild Robot* as a speculative vision of AI-animal coexistence. It bridges the animated narrative—where robot Roz evolves into a cyborg mother raising gosling Brightbill on an animal-only island—with real-world AI advancements like bio-robots and elephant call decoding. Husain juxtaposes Roz’s transformation via emotional bonds, language learning, and storm rescues with posthuman

theories: Haraway's "becoming-with" and companion species (Roz as cyborg kin), Despret's animal agency ("right questions" yielding co-constituted realities), and Barad's intra-action (mutual evolution sans binaries). Empirical ties include Bonnet et al.'s bio-hybrid robots linking bee/fish behaviours and CSU's AI-decoded elephant names, positioning fiction as blueprint for ethical, non-anthropocentric ecologies.

- "‘Chance Encounters Are What Keep Us Going’: Affective Assemblages in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*," by Rituparna Majumder analyses protagonist Nakata's intellectual disability through Deleuze-Guattarian assemblages, Critical Posthumanism, and Disability Studies. Orphaned by family after a childhood coma, Nakata thrives via rhizomatic kinships with humans, cats, trucks, and stones, fostering co-becoming and agency in flux. Majumder frames dis/ability as environmentally co-constituted, not fixed: Nakata's cat-whispering detects lost pets in Nakano Ward assemblages (neighbours-cats-subsidy), evolving via reterritorializations like killing Johnnie Walker (losing cat speech) and nomadizing with trucker Hoshino. Care networks enable mutual enhancement—Hoshino gains music/philosophy, Nakata literacy desire—evading State codification (e.g., "handicapped subsidy recipient") for nomadic "schizo" flows.
- Soumya Sur uncovers posthumanist themes in ancient Indian storytelling traditions like *Pañcatantra*, *Jātaka Tales*, and *Kathāsaritsāgara* in his article, "Moving Beyond the Human with Indian Kathās: A Post-Anthropocentric Understanding of the World". These kathās challenge human exceptionalism by centring nonhuman agency, hybrid beings, and multispecies ethics, predating Western posthumanism. Sur employs Indian narratology (e.g., Nalini Sadhale's kathālakṣaṇa, K. Ayyappa Paniker's apauruṣeya authorship and cyclical time) to reveal anti-anthropocentric structures: animals debate statecraft (*Pañcatantra*

jackals), Bodhisattva incarnates as beasts (*Jātakas* like golden mallard or bull showing superior compassion), and tales originate in nonhuman tongues (*Kathāsaritsāgara*'s Paiśācī, overheard by demigods). Humans appear foolish or peripheral, subverting ego-driven dominance.

- Numana Ibrahim Bhat's article, "Connecting the Human and Arboreal: A Reading of Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* as a Posthuman Ecobildungsroman," redefines the bildungsroman through an ecological lens. It positions Pariat's novel as an "ecobildungsroman," where protagonists like Shai and Evelyn evolve via entanglement with nonhuman agents—trees, fungi, soil—challenging human/nature binaries. Bhat contrasts traditional bildungsroman (human acculturation into society) with ecobildungsromane, which subvert separation by embedding growth in ecological awareness: Shai shifts from urban apathy (Delhi's AQI 477, ignoring Amazon fires) to tending gardens in Mawmalang, aligning with lunar cycles and protesting mining. Evelyn embraces Goethean methodology ("think like a plant") over Linnaean classification, joining the fictional Nongiaid tribe to perceive arboreal "consciousness" via the Wood Wide Web.
- In their article on "The Rise of the Xeno-Subject: Decentering the Human and the Problem of Alterity in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*," Salomia Mary P and Dr. Tamilmani K T introduce the "Xeno-subject" as a hybrid identity marked by ethical tension, vulnerability, and relational accountability in networked human-nonhuman-technological systems. Unlike abstract posthuman multiplicity, it emphasizes instability and moral negotiation, analysed through Egan's fragmented narrative, temporal discontinuities, and metafictional strategies in the 2010 novel. The authors apply posthumanist (Braidotti's nomadic subject, Haraway's cyborg) and post-structuralist lenses to characters like Sasha (compulsive theft, dissociation) and Bennie (obsessive pattern-tracing), whose trauma

manifests as repetitive gestures amid digital mediation and nonlinear time (“Time’s a goon”). Narrative ruptures (PowerPoint chapter by Alison) mirror unprocessed memory (per Caruth), distributing cognition across social media, archives, and music industries, forming selves via external patterns rather than interiority.

- Yashika Bipinkumar Parmar and Dr. Milind Solanki’s article, “Vernacular Futures: Reconfiguring the Posthuman in Contemporary Assamese Speculative Fiction through *Homo Minuscula*,” examines posthuman themes in Santanoo Tamuly’s 2023 Assamese SF anthology, positioning it within postcolonial Indian speculative traditions. Drawing on theorists like Nayar, Haraway, Hayles, and Braidotti, it analyses 21 stories blending mythology, ecology, biotech, and AI to challenge humanism’s human-centric ontology. The anthology depicts humans evolving via subtraction (e.g., “*Homo Minuscula*”: pituitary tweaks shrink people to 3 inches for planetary survival) or risky augmentation (“Rasayan”: glandular transfers revert an elder to primate form; “Livability”: brain implants erase personal memory for “livable” utility). Cloning (“Inseparable Hearts”) and interspecies swaps (“Porcine”: pig brain in human) blur species lines, questioning organ-donor ethics and identity.
- Dr. Gurpreet Kaur critiques human supremacy in the Anthropocene through literature that fosters multispecies ethics and ecological reciprocity in her article, “Beyond the Anthropocene: A Study of Posthumanism and Ecocriticism in Children’s and Speculative Fiction”. It blends ecocriticism with posthumanism to analyse how texts dismantle anthropocentrism, urging a post-Anthropocene shift where technology aids restoration, not domination. Speculative novels like Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (monarch butterflies as climate hyperobjects signalling systemic collapse) and Okorafor’s *Lagoon* (Afrofuturist aliens and nonhuman narrators like swordfish condemning pollution) portray entangled agencies, where humans awaken via nonhuman wisdom amid

environmental trauma. Children's books—Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (tree's sacrificial care), Seuss's *The Lorax* (industrial critique), Donaldson's *The Snail and the Whale* (interspecies alliance), and Hawthorth-Booth's *The Last Tree* (collective renewal)—instil empathy, challenging exploitation through vivid, relational storytelling.

- Tabir Amjad and Dr. Qurratulaen Liaqat frame human clones as sacrificial victims in a dystopian 1990s England, where biotech prioritizes organ harvesting over nuclear arms in their article on “Clones as Scapegoats: Slow Violence in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005)”. Applying René Girard's Mimetic Theory and Rob Nixon's slow violence, it argues that humans' envious, imitative desires (mimesis) fuel scapegoating mechanisms, reducing clones to dehumanized vessels via gradual, attritional exploitation. In Ishiguro's alternate history, clones raised in Hailsham “camp” (Agamben's biopolitical exception) endure sterilization, identity distortion through censored education, denied deferrals (love-based donation postponement), and “completion”(sequential vital organ removal). Society (Originals/Possibles/Guardians) denies clones' humanity to justify rituals, blinding itself to violence as clones passively accept fates like Sisyphus.

I am deeply grateful to the authors, editors, reviewers, members of the advisory committee for their reassuring faith in our project. I am thankful to my wife (Suparna), Dr. Kaushik Ghosh and Sk Amimon Islam for their generous support, kindness and love. I express my gratitude to our Executive Editor, Baloram Balo, for his unflinching commitment to the preparation of this volume despite an irreparable personal tragedy in his life.

I hope that the articles in this volume will spark debates, provocations and further dialogues.

In solidarity and flux,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Sukhendu Das". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Sukhendu Das, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief, *Entanglements: Journal of Posthumanities*

January 2026

Notes:

ⁱ In his book *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) Bruno Latour proactively challenges modernity's dualistic mode of thinking and the unwritten 'modern constitution', which impinge on modernity's constitutive elements, such as ethics, freedom, reflexivity etc. We are made to usher in a post-dualistic existence and an ontologically interdependent or entangled existence of the human and the non-human. Latour's ideas have produced a profound incredibility towards western modernity, sweeping across academia in the last few decades.

ⁱⁱ Shu-mei Shih in her article, "Is the Post- in Postsocialism the Post- in Posthumanism?" clearly expresses her concern and entrenched critique: "[...] (w)hen certain people have not been considered and treated as humans, posthumanism serves as an alibi for further denial of humanity to these same people. Cybernetics might be a step beyond old- fashioned Enlightenment humanism, technologically speaking, but the newly emerging subjects of history — colonized peoples, women, minorities of all kinds — need to be respected and dignified as humans first. Here the question is not about temporality — the subhumans are asking for old- fashioned humanism and hence are hopelessly anachronistic — but about priority within the same historical moment shared and lived by all." (30).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's "Review: Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism", <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719431>

^{iv} See Colebrook's book chapter on "Posthuman Humanities" in *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction*, Vol. 1. (Open Humanities Press, 2014.), <https://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/titles/death-of-the-posthuman/>

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Embodied Affirmation: Rosi Braidotti's Neo-Materialist Ethics Between Biology and Phenomenology

Carolina Santini  

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64959/enjp.vol.2.issue1.1.w.001>

Abstract

Rosi Braidotti's neo-materialist ethics is grounded in a principle of embodied affirmation that challenges the modern opposition between the human and the non-human, redefining subjectivity as a relational and dynamic process within a vital continuum. Central to this framework is the concept of *zoe*, understood not as a property of the subject but as an impersonal and immanent force traversing human, animal, and technological forms of life. Ethics thus emerges as a material practice unfolding across bodies, environments, and technologies. Through a genealogical engagement with Foucault, Agamben, Haraway, Varela, and Guattari, this article places Braidotti's thought in dialogue with Lynn Margulis's theory of symbiogenesis and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment. It argues that neo-materialist ethics can be situated within a robust empirical-ontological framework, countering interpretations that reduce it to poetic vitalism. The critique advanced by Francesco Paolo Adorno – who warns against the risk of collapsing subjectivity into mere biological life – serves as a critical test of the coherence of posthuman ethics is ontologically supported by both the biology of symbiosis and the phenomenology of flesh; and second, that responsibility and difference must be articulated through practices of care and situated knowledge that recognize the active materiality of the living world. The posthuman thus appears not as a negation of the human, but as an epistemic reconfiguration at the intersection of life sciences, phenomenology, and relational ethics.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Neo-materialism, *Zoe*, Embodiment, Symbiogenesis, Phenomenology, Ethics, Relational Ontology.



Introduction

In recent decades, the combined transformations of the life sciences, technologies, and planetary ecologies have radically destabilized the modern idea of life as the exclusive attribute of the human (Braidotti, *Il postumano* 1: 5). Subjectivity no longer appears as an autonomous and self-sufficient center, but as an embodied and relational process, inscribed in material networks that include non-human organisms, environments, and technical devices. In this scenario, the ethical question can no longer be formulated in terms of an abstract normative foundation; it must instead confront the material and ontological conditions through which life itself is articulated, governed, and valorized.

It is within this horizon that Rosi Braidotti's neo-materialist ethics is situated. Through the notion of *zoe*, understood as an impersonal and immanent vital force that traverses human and non-human forms of life, Braidotti proposes a radical reconfiguration of subjectivity beyond the anthropocentric paradigm. Ethics no longer emerges from the separation between human and non-human, nor from the superiority of consciousness over matter, but from the capacity to inhabit in an affirmative and responsible way the relational continuum of the living.

The guiding question of this article is whether, and to what extent, Braidotti's *zoe*-centered ethics can be considered ontologically grounded and capable of articulating responsibility and difference without falling back either into residual humanism or into a naturalization of subjectivity. In this sense, the engagement with Francesco Paolo Adorno's critique – which identifies in posthumanism the risk of dissolving ethics into mere biological life – plays a central role in testing the consistency of Braidotti's neo-materialism.

Methodologically, the article is structured in two distinct but complementary movements. The first part adopts a genealogical approach aimed at reconstructing the critical and epistemic field within which Braidotti's neo-materialism takes shape. In this section, the analysis of biocapitalism and contemporary transformations of biopolitics is not merely contextual or descriptive; it serves instead to indicate the historical-material point of departure from which *zoe*-centered ethics arises as a

theoretical response. Biogenetic capitalism, the technologization of life, and its growing economic valorization constitute the critical negative against which Braidotti's neo-materialism takes position, without limiting itself to a reactive critique.

The second part of the article tackles the core theoretical issue, testing the ontological validity of the neo-materialist approach through a double confrontation. On the one hand, Adorno's critique makes it possible to interrogate the risk of a biological reduction of subjectivity and to clarify the differences between a dialectical conception of the relation between *bios* and *zoe* and an immanentist, relational perspective. On the other hand, the dialogue with Lynn Margulis's biological theory of symbiogenesis and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment shows how *zoe*-centered ethics can be rooted both biologically and perceptually, thereby eluding the charges of abstract or poetic vitalism.

Through this double genealogical and critical movement, the article argues that Braidotti's neo-materialist ethics does not represent a negation of the human, but rather an epistemic and ethical reconfiguration of the human within the continuum of the living. The posthuman thus emerges not as a dissolution of difference, but as a situated relational practice in which responsibility, embodiment, and multispecies coexistence become the fundamental criteria for thinking ethics in the present.

Post-Anthropocentrism and Biocapitalism

The theoretical core of Braidotti's work is rooted in a neo-materialist ethics tightly interwoven with Spinoza's vitalist materialism and its monist premises (Spinoza, *Etica* I.14-15; III.6-7), which inform her entire worldview and her way of conceiving the relation between body, life, and power (Braidotti, *Il postumano* 3: 260). The deadlock to be overcome concerns a politics of life conceived as an exclusive prerogative and inalienable right of the human – an ontologically guaranteed and unquestioned principle – in favor of a relational and open-ended process devoid of any final telos:

My point of departure is the death of the anti-humanist Man/Woman, which highlights the decline of certain fundamental presuppositions of the Enlightenment—specifically, the idea of humanity’s progress through the self-regulatory and teleologically oriented use of reason and secular scientific rationality, both of which were assumed to be directed toward the perfectibility of Man. The posthuman perspective is grounded in the historical acknowledgment of the decline of humanism, yet it goes further by exploring new alternatives, without falling back into the anti-humanist rhetoric of the crisis of Man. Instead, it commits itself to developing alternative ways of conceptualizing posthuman subjectivity. (*Il postumano* 1: 43)

To this end, Braidotti introduces two conceptual categories for analyzing the vitalism of matter, aimed at deconstructing traditional binary oppositions. On one side stands the domain of bios – qualified, organic, discursive life, historically reserved to the anthropos – and on the other the broader dimension of animal and non-human life, *zoe*. The perspective of a nature-culture continuum allows the dimension of *zoe* to expand and to manifest itself within the colonized idea of the “human,” identified with the male, white, heterosexual citizen belonging to privileged classes. Post-anthropocentrism, in its posthuman articulation, dissolves the barriers separating vitality and rationality, opening up the space for a new scene of relations among humans, non-humans, and the environment, one that is entirely *zoe*-centered. This implies that the irrational intensity of life that acts and moves independently of the rational control that the plane of bios seeks to exercise (*Trasposizioni* 51).

In developing her argument on the affirmative power of *zoe*, Braidotti explicitly challenges Giorgio Agamben’s theory, which offers a radically different interpretation of the bios/*zoe* problematic. Heir to Heidegger, Agamben assimilates the dimension of *zoe* to that of “bare life”. The latter refers to the ways in which embodied subjectivities can appear as non-human due to the subjugating work of power: “bare life” is the corporeal residue resulting from the removal of the humanized “bio-logical” dimension. “Zoe is consequently assimilated to death as corpse, as the liminal corporeal existence of a life that does not qualify as human” (51). According to

Agamben, *zoe* is the constitutively elusive horizon of an alterity that must be simultaneously included and excluded so that the edifice of the subject may stand. Finitude thus reflects itself in a structural element of subjectivity, which nourishes an affective economy marked by loss and melancholy at the heart of subjective experience.

In opposition to Heidegger's ontology of Being and the proximate perspective of Agamben, Braidotti aligns herself with the philosophical approach of Deleuze and Guattari: starting from nomadic theory, the subject is simultaneously dissolved and refounded within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, characterized by a marked interest in pre-human and even non-human dimensions. These elements give rise to a network of forces, energies, and encounters that together configure an ecological entity and a conception of life as a non-teleological, generative vitality, conceived as continual becoming. The idea of life as "becoming corpse" must be surpassed; besides omitting the positivity of *zoe*, it reinforces the dialectical model of the Same and difference that Braidotti's entire philosophy seeks to overcome. It is instead more fruitful to begin thinking of a life that eludes individuality as its center and fulcrum, in order to distance thought from conceptualizations of rigid demarcations between bios and *zoe*, that is, from the supposed superiority of consciousness.

From this perspective, Braidotti lucidly observes that the expansion of scientific, technological, and social practices intervening in life reveals how contemporary 21st-century capitalism no longer merely organizes production or labor, but directly incorporates vital processes, transforming them into resources, data, and opportunities for valorization.

Nikolas Rose's "biocitizen" provides a clear example. He interprets the implications of biopolitics as a specific declension of the broader logic of governmentality, that is, as a dispositif of self-management whereby the bioethical subject takes on the responsibility of exercising integral control over their own genetic existence. This perspective virtually incorporates not only the possibility of illness, but also the assumption of responsibility by the embodied subject for their

own body, understood as a potential corpse and thus as an object of continual ethical-political governance.

In *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*, Rose argues that, with the progressive expansion of political intervention into the vital dimensions of existence and with the elevation of biological life into a focus of economic and subjective interest, collective *vitalitas* begins to be configured as a strategic resource of value (237). Starting in the nineteenth century, the protection and enhancement of vital value became central tasks of the state apparatus, which claimed responsibility for preserving, safeguarding, and optimizing the biological capital of the population. In parallel, private initiative plays a decisive role in the production of goods and services – nutritional, therapeutic, pharmacological – capable of combining economic profit and public utility.

In this context, biogenetic capitalism, through its ability to render the body visible, intelligible, quantifiable, and manipulable down to its molecular dimension, has inaugurated unprecedented articulations between life and the market. The criteria for evaluating the nature and value of different forms of life and the various modes of being human are now inscribed in the practices and knowledges produced by the life sciences and contemporary biomedical research. In this framework, the process of generating “biovalue” does not merely describe life, but directly incorporates and transforms its conditions, reshaping the very experience of living subjectivity.

The effects of practices of manipulation and surveillance enacted by the dynamics of advanced capitalism inevitably spill over onto those categories considered inferior or marginal with respect to the centrality of the human (Shiva 44). The generative powers of women, animals, plants, and cells are subjected to mechanisms that Vandana Shiva, in *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, radicalizes under the term “biopiracy” (xii). Biogenetic capitalism generates a reciprocal interconnection among all living organisms, humans included, which manifests itself primarily in reactive terms. This form of unity asserts a negative connection, expressed through a shared vulnerability: a global sense of

interdependence between humans and the non-human environment in the face of common threats.

For the biogenetic political economy of capitalism to generate profit, it requires, if not the complete dissolution, then at least the progressive attenuation of the distinction between the human species and other forms of life: seeds, plants, animals, and microorganisms are pulled into a logic of consumerist exploitation. Consequently, the global economy becomes post-anthropocentric, subjecting all species to the imperative of the market and, through its excesses, jeopardizing the sustainability of the entire planet. The result is a form of negative cosmopolitan interconnection, grounded in the shared bond of vulnerability.

Braidotti responds to this negative configuration of the present by proposing an eco-philosophical approach based on the articulation of new ecologies of belonging. Against the neoliberal reduction of technological resources to mere instruments of profit, posthuman theory seeks to assert itself as a horizon capable of valorizing their emancipatory and relational potential. What is needed is the adoption of an affirmative perspective capable of recognizing in technological innovation a site of conceptual reconfiguration and of rejecting any form of technophobia. For Braidotti, the contemporary era opens up a field of possibilities – posthuman becomings – directed toward the posthuman recomposition of relations beyond a reactive conception of vulnerability. The core of this intensive exploration lies in affirming a relational bond in which the subject inscribes itself within the continuous flow of interconnections with multiple others, promoting a form of productive cooperation that exceeds mere exposure to shared risk.

Genealogical Perspectives: Autopoiesis and Relational Ontology

In order to redefine an ethics of co-determination between self and others, Braidotti explicitly acknowledges the inspiration of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (*Il postumano* 1: 98). Autopoiesis, ascribed to organic systems capable of self-organization, can be understood as processual creativity, which – according to Braidotti – finds its most complete place within a broad ontology of gratuitousness, or of “no-profit” in an

ontological-existential sense: an act of affirmative self-creation that does not root itself in any transcendence. It is not a matter of the death or dissolution of an atomized self, of an isolated and self-sufficient individual, but of the affirmation of a subject traversed by multiple speeds and intensities of becoming.

There is a constitutive tension between resistance and sustainability, in which subjectivity is expressed not as the private property of the “I,” but as an impersonal mode of singularity (Braidotti, *Trasposizioni* 118). The imperative tone dissolves the sentimentalism of dominant visions of the subject still anchored to nostalgic, identity-based representations, opening instead onto an ethics of transformation and perseverance in becoming. Oriented toward self-accomplishment – understood as the realization of singularity – the subject emerges as an affective and receptive entity, capable both of exercising influence and of allowing itself to be transformed by the multiplicity of relations that traverse it.

Autopoiesis, however, is not limited to the human, animal, or natural world; it extends beyond the biological domain to include machines and technological artifacts. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a machinic ontology in which living organisms and technical dispositifs are conceived as qualitatively continuous. This contribution is crucial for Braidotti, as it involves a radical reconceptualization of machines as intelligent and generative systems capable of producing new connections and new subjectivities. Deleuze and Guattari thematize this dynamic through the notion of transversal assemblages, in which nature and culture, organism and environment, subject and collectivity are combined and recombined in contingent configurations, always open to becoming. Transversality opens up a conceptual space for a *zoe*-centered egalitarianism able to welcome and valorize alternative forms of posthuman subjectivity (*Il postumano* 1: 100).

In Braidotti's perspective, transversality is broadened and enriched through empathic dispositions that enable different affective intensities to enter into relation within the vast and intricate world of *zoe* (*Nuovi soggetti nomadi* 17). For Braidotti, empathy is the point at which the subject enters into relation with alterity through a direct affective involvement that operates beyond symbolic authorizations, identity

categories, or structured identifications: it is an ethical movement through which subjectivity comes to be constituted by including itself in the very event, actively participating in its contingency.

This process is clearly figured by Donna Haraway through the metaphor of the “tentacle”: a relational movement inherent in living matter, a renewed kinship that binds together species, environments, and both biological and social spheres. “With Haraway the bond becomes tentacular. It searches, senses, experiences, touches, finds, connects, is one among many and enables movement” (Tedeschi, *Innamorarsi del mondo* 3).

Haraway’s celebrated motto “make kin, not babies” (102) today offers one of the most incisive syntheses of relational and posthumanist thought. She radicalizes this perspective further by introducing the notion of “oddkin”: unusual, eccentric forms of kinship capable of exceeding the boundaries of identity and species. These “strange” bonds are an invitation to experiment with modes of coexistence and affiliation grounded not in similarity but in the contingency of vital relations and in a shared responsibility for the common world. In this direction, Haraway proposes conceiving subjectivities as humanimals, a hybrid figure that dissolves the presumed ontological fracture between humans and non-humans, highlighting the processes of co-construction and co-emergence through which both dimensions are reciprocally constituted in history.

To think in terms of “humanimal” thus means to interrogate the material and affective networks that link forms of life: who has access to food, which systems of production fuel ecological crisis, how relations of exploitation and care unfold between species and within them. Such questions cannot be formulated from the standpoint of a mono-species conception of existence. The prospect of multispecies coexistence requires a multispecies reflection capable of thinking simultaneously the plurality of agents, needs, and vulnerabilities that cohabit the Earth. From this perspective, the cyborg, the monster, and the animal no longer appear as degraded or excluded forms of alterity, but rather as emancipated figures, released from the negativity historically imposed upon them. By rejecting the dialectics of alterity,

Haraway moves beyond a conceptual schema that opposes identity and difference, inhabiting instead a posthuman horizon in which technology becomes a medium for new forms of belonging and subjectivity (*Manifesto cyborg; Staying with the Trouble*).

It is precisely this departure from traditional models of the subject that Braidotti recognizes as one of the most innovative aspects of Haraway's thought. At the same time, however, Braidotti maintains that reflections on the cyborg must remain at the conceptual level and cannot be taken as an automatic resolution of the tensions that traverse subjectivity. While Haraway's framework does not exclude the body or the sexual dimension, her model of fluid and plural subjectivity tends, from Braidotti's perspective, to simplify the complexity of the psychic and symbolic structures that inform desire. What risks being overlooked is the persistence of a contradictory and unresolved dimension of subjectivity, traversed by drives, affects, and ambivalent tensions that cannot be fully dissolved or rationalized within a purely theoretical or technological perspective. Even as the cyborg exceeds traditional opposition – human/machine, natural/artificial, masculine/feminine – the posthuman subject remains, for Braidotti, structurally non-coherent and always in the process of becoming (*In metamorfosi* 289).

In pursuing this aim, Braidotti adopts the politics of positionality as a central tool across her entire philosophical corpus. Paying attention to embodied and situated positionality makes it possible to highlight the diverse modes and conditions of access to the point of entry into the posthuman convergence. This entails a serious collective negotiation aimed at understanding how many and what processes of disidentification and improvement embodied selves are able to bear: "The posthuman is only the question. The answer is what 'we' are able to become" (*Il postumano* 2: 85). This collective entity, exemplified by Braidotti under the sign of a "we," embraces the multiplicity and diversity of various points of view depending on the place of enunciation. Far from being a relativist position, practices of knowledge unfold within a qualitative and collaborative dimension. It is not a new "pan-human" system, but an autopoietic force that mirrors the variety of assemblages and interconnections among

heterogeneous subjects, each diversified in its situatedness: a praxis of posthuman trans-subjectivity.

Neo-Materialism Between Biology and Phenomenology

It should now be clear how the genealogical framework just outlined provides the fertile ground on which neo-materialism is grafted, revealing in any case that subjectivity – within the complex posthuman network – can no longer be defined in terms of a stable, separate unity, but only as a node in a vital, technological, and affective continuum.

Continuing along this argumentative line, I would like to suggest that Lynn Margulis's theories of symbiogenesis and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of embodied experience in the world – in addition to situating Braidotti within a shared epistemic matrix – represent two complementary theoretical axes that make it possible to root Braidotti's immanent ethics both biologically and phenomenologically. This does not mean providing empirical proof or a historical antecedent, but rather furnishing a methodologically distinct lexicon that renders Braidotti's politically and affectively formulated neo-materialism more operational.

In *What is Life?* Margulis develops a theory of life based on a symbiotic conception of biological processes. According to her, bacteria have the capacity to merge and cooperate, generating new emergent properties and giving rise to more complex cells. In other words, evolution does not derive solely from competition or random mutation, as traditional Darwinian models claimed, but rather from processes of collaboration and fusion among organisms belonging to different species or biological kingdoms. It is interaction itself – the cooperative effort among heterogeneous entities – that constitutes the driving principle of life, making life a relational and interdependent system in which new forms emerge from the encounter and co-evolution of multiple biological subjectivities.

Organisms are thus constituted as embodied and situated entities that participate in continuous exchange processes and forms of vital cooperation. In this perspective, life is thus described as rhizomatic and planetary, insofar as it resists hierarchical organization and individualistic models of biological explanation. Rather

than being centered on autonomous organisms, it takes the form of an eco-centric horizon of relations, where living beings emerge through ongoing processes of interdependence and material co-evolution. From this perspective, individuality and biological agency are radically redefined, no longer understood as fixed or self-possessed capacities, but as emergent effects of relational dynamics within the living world.

Living matter thus turns out to be endowed with capacities for choice, able to orient its own trajectories of existence on the basis of sensory information and to transform itself through the differential transmission of such data. Life is not therefore reduced to a mere biological function; it manifests itself as a cognitive and relational process of matter itself: the world becomes the immanent site of thought, where reflection and transformation coincide with the becoming of matter. With Margulis, the Earth becomes a self-regulating physiological system, articulated in a multiplicity of bacterial communities and symbiotic networks whose cooperation sustains the ensemble of vital processes. This valorizes the autopoietic and self-organizing activity of the planet, in opposition to the instrumental rationality and anthropocentric narcissism that have characterized human action and its modes of technical and conceptual domination.

Within this ontological frame, matter manifests its intrinsic vitality and its ability to produce ever new forms of life within a field of systemic interdependences. Life is thus configured as a processual ecology of difference, in which every entity is constitutively relational and situated within a continuum of co-development between human and non-human. Multiplicity is not an attribute exclusive to human life, but a transversal ontological condition that traverses the planetary ecosystem, redefining the very boundaries of agency and thought in post-anthropocentric and co-evolutionary terms.

Margulis's insights, which decenter the centrality of the biological individual, find further articulation on the perceptual and ontological level in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he defines perception as the primordial mode through which the human being inhabits the world: an embodied,

pre-reflective activity rooted in the “motor intentionality” of the lived body. The body is not one object among others, but a situated subjectivity that comes into direct contact with its surroundings through a dynamic play of orientations, postures, and affordances.

What Merleau-Ponty calls “flesh” – a key notion in our context – designates an ontological element common to perceiver and perceived. It does not signify biological matter, but a sensitive and relational tissue that precedes the distinction between subject and object and that manifests itself paradigmatically in the reversibility of touching and being touched. In this intertwining, Merleau-Ponty identifies the fundamental structure of experience: a co-belonging that dissolves classical dualisms and reconceives being as a shared, intercorporeal, and intermaterial field. To think materiality as active, relational, and in becoming provides a conceptual frame that surpasses the centrality of the subject in favor of a broader and more responsive vision of the relations that sustain life.

As Sara Ahmed argues in *Queer Phenomenology. Orientations, Objects, Others*, phenomenology clearly shows that what distinguishes bodies lies in the ways they inhabit and relate to space: space should not be conceived as a mere container for the body, within which it would be placed like a passive object. On the contrary, bodies immerse themselves in space to the point of defining and transforming it through their presence; moving within it, they are continuously influenced by the specificities of place. It is through this dynamic interaction that both the surface of surrounding space and that of bodies themselves are configured and assume form and structure. From this perspective, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodiment is not merely phenomenological but also ethical, functioning as a way of situating the subject within a network of material relations that exceed the human.

Ultimately, Margulis’s concept of symbiotic life helps to construct a plausible biological basis for thinking cooperation as an evolutionary principle, while Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology clarifies how perception and existence are always already an intertwining of corporeality and world. These theories show that living matter is in itself intelligent and self-organizing, to the point of being independent

from the human mind. If the latter is capable of perceiving the world to varying degrees, the concepts and ideas that it represents do not coincide with the qualities of the entities it seeks to grasp. It is not possible to fully objectify matter, because materiality exceeds the codifications governed by a symbolic system of anthropomorphic and anthropocentric sign. “The world exists even without the confirmation of the human gaze” (*Il postumano* 3: 143). Taken together, these contributions make it possible to defend *zoe* as a non-metaphysical but material and perceptual horizon. In this sense, Braidotti’s work does not remain confined to the plane of abstract or “poetic” vitalism, but asserts itself with full ontological credibility.

“True Life” Beyond Consciousness

Within this theoretical scenario, Francesco Paolo Adorno’s critique assumes particular importance. He locates in technical posthumanism a reduction of the human to the purely biological dimension and a consequent dissolution of ethical subjectivity (457). His perspective serves as a decisive testing ground for evaluating the ontological and ethical coherence of Braidotti’s project. Through the notion of “true life”, Adorno offers a counterproposal that, moving within a post-Hegelian sensibility, insists on the need to preserve a constitutive distance between bios and *zoe* as the condition for freedom and for the ethical sense of existence.

In the essay “Real Life Is Always Elsewhere: On the Ethics of the Posthuman” (“La vera vita è sempre altrove. Sull’etica del postumano”), reflection shifts from a productive attempt to understand emerging forms of embodied subjectivity and their modes of relation – associated with critical posthumanism – to an interrogation of the intensification of technological techniques oriented toward a “superior” human. The distancing from biological constraints is formulated by Adorno in terms of a reduction of the human to nature, to the purely animal sphere. This is the paradox that runs through technological modernity: enhancement – the improvement of cognitive and physical performance – appears as an emancipatory act, but in reality, marks the reduction of the human to animality, that is, to the mere biological life (*zoe*) that structures and sustains it. For Adorno, reducing life to its biological dimension, even

if enhanced, means destroying the tension between body and spirit that constitutes the essence of the human. It is a veritable “theoretical suicide”: in seeking to surpass the human, posthuman philosophy ends up abolishing it.

To clarify his position, Adorno distinguishes “reduction” to animality from “reconciliation” with it. The former is the movement proper to technical posthumanism: the human being allows themselves to be defined and manipulated according to their biological nature. The latter, in contrast, is the ethical and philosophical task of recognizing one’s animal component without dissolving into it. “True life,” for Adorno, is not that of the eternally young and enhanced cyborg, but that of a being capable of accepting its own vulnerability, of speaking truthfully about itself, of inhabiting its own finitude (461).

Adorno’s critique of transhumanism is extremely significant for our purposes because it allows us to raise further questions and to explore far more deeply the field of relations between bios and *zoe*. The premise on which both Adorno and Braidotti structure their respective critiques is the same: the denunciation of the exploitability of life in the contemporary world. Braidotti shows how advanced capitalism has transformed *zoe* into an economic resource; Adorno, in turn, identifies in technical posthumanism the same form of domination: biological life is manipulated, optimized, enhanced, but always with a utilitarian function in view. In both cases, life is reduced to an object of management.

It is around the concept of *zoe*, however, that a critical debate between Adorno and Braidotti becomes possible. First of all, Adorno reprises a theme typical of modern dialectics, which can be traced back to Hegel but also passes through Kojève and Agamben: reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) between human and nature is not fusion, but awareness of their reciprocal belonging in difference. Adorno preserves a distinction between human and nature, but he uses it not to establish a hierarchy, rather to preserve the ethical sense of existence: a distance that makes freedom possible, not an abyss to be abolished. “True life” is not the fusion with nature but the ability to remain within the tension between the natural and the symbolic, between body and word, between finitude and consciousness. The overcoming of the distinction between

human and nature, between mind and body, ends up dissolving the human into biological nature – that is, reducing it to mere *zoe*. Adorno fears that such fusion erases what makes the human an ethical being: the capacity to reflect upon oneself, to tell the truth, to choose (461).

The relation between bios and *zoe* thus does not concern a question of hierarchy or coincidence, but of a constitutive distance, a “between” that is the space of consciousness and freedom through which humans can interrogate themselves, tell the truth, choose how to live. Without it, there is no ethics, only biological or technical functionality. Adorno’s position is therefore deeply dialectical to the extent that human and nature belong together yet remain different within a dynamic equilibrium that is neither fusion nor absolute separation. The error does not lie in recognizing the animal dimension of the human, but in fully absorbing the human into it, erasing what in the human exceeds life. Adorno calls for responsibility toward the limit: reconciliation does not mean dissolution but finding harmony between animality and the spiritual dimension of the human. It is an invitation not to confuse reconciliation with life with reduction to life: only by safeguarding the distance between *zoe* and bios, between body and truth, can the human avoid losing itself in the machine built to surpass itself (459).

Notoriously opposed to dialectical logics, Braidotti’s wager is articulated from within a Spinozist neo-materialism. What Adorno identifies as crucial corresponds, in Braidotti’s terms, to the condition of possibility for an affirmative ethics of nomadic and posthuman becoming. While for Adorno it is crucial to institute a dynamic equilibrium between human and animal life – thus remaining anchored to a “modernist” understanding of human qualities – for Braidotti the rigidification of distinctions between rationality and materiality is deeply problematic. For both thinkers, difference is the condition of ethics; yet Adorno conceives it as a limit separating the human from the natural, whereas Braidotti understands it as a mode of relation among heterogeneous forms of life.

From Rosi Braidotti’s perspective, the renewed perception of the human as embedded within an expansive and irrepressible animal life does not entail a reduction

of subjectivity to biology or animality. Rather, the aim is to establish affirmative relationalities among differences, which are not conceived in terms of “reconciliation” or equilibrium between distinct entities. In this framework, there is no moral distance separating the human from the rest of the living, but instead a responsibility toward it. Difference unfolds in the ways human subjectivity inhabits and articulates its relations with the world through language, technology, affectivity, memory, and creativity. These capacities do not place the human outside the living, but rather configure it as one of its more complex expressions. In Spinozist terms, the human is a mode of substance rather than a distinct substance: its difference is modal, not substantial.

One way of reading Adorno is to see him as defending a specifically human difference of thought, an “interior” difference in which the human is the being who reflects upon itself. Braidotti, in contrast, asserts an “exterior” difference, marked by a subjectivity that differentiates itself in the manner of its relations to what it is not (Adorno; Braidotti). Adorno’s position shows a limit when read in light of the epistemological and material transformations of the present. His insistence on the role of speech, consciousness, and freedom as foundations of human difference preserves – in my view – a form of critical dualism that, although non-hierarchical, continues to separate the plane of bios from that of *zoë*.

In a world in which the life sciences, technology, and phenomenology have dissolved stable boundaries between human, animal, and environment, such a distinction risks being insufficient to address the complexity of the contemporary posthuman condition. Adorno’s ethics of the limit, centered on the reflective subject, offers few tools to grasp the material and perceptual interdependence that now characterizes the living. The question, then, is: how can we think “true life” today without falling either into technical posthumanism or into a residual humanism grounded in the distance between human and nature?

In formulating a plausible answer, I would once more recall the theories of Margulis and Merleau-Ponty. These perspectives make it possible to think an idea of life not grounded in the difference of the human but in the relationality of the living,

thereby overcoming the humanistic limit highlighted by Adorno. *Zoe* finds in the theory of symbiogenesis a strong empirical confirmation. Margulis – like Braidotti – conceives life as diffused intelligence, a mind distributed through the body and the ecosystem. It is not the human who thinks life, but life that thinks through the human. The resulting ethics is one of co-existence: the good does not lie in preserving a boundary, but in caring for the interdependencies that guarantee the continuity of the living.

On the phenomenological side – as argued above – Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as flesh in the world (*Il visibile e l'invisibile* 96) is particularly significant. The body appears as a site of intersection between subject and world and belongs to the same substance as the visible. Every perception is configured as a reciprocal relation – every act of touching implies being touched – revealing the ontological co-belonging of the living and the world that hosts it. The human does not differ from other living beings by a rational consciousness, but by the capacity to live its own perceptual openness as a horizon of becoming. Subjectivity is a process of intercorporeality: not a closed ego that observes, but a node of visual, tactile, affective relations that link inside and outside.

From this angle, we might say that in Merleau-Ponty “true life” cannot be determined as a harmony between consciousness and body, but rather as a continuity between perception and world, an embodied reversibility (*Fenomenologia della percezione; Il visibile e l'invisibile*). Relying on this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, we are led to affirm that posthuman subjectivity is relational flesh, neither spirit nor machine.

In light of the theories just discussed, Adorno's proposal appears as an intermediate moment in the history of posthuman thought: he intuits the risk of a technical reduction of life, but remains tied to a model of the human as reflective distance. Braidotti, by contrast, can be read as the fulfillment of that tension: by freeing *zoe* from the hierarchy of bios, she restores to life its creative immanence. Margulis and Merleau-Ponty make this vision tangible: the former shows that life is a symbiotic network; the latter affirms that perception is shared flesh. Both provide,

at different levels, the bases for a non-anthropocentric but ecological and relational ethics in which responsibility arises from reciprocal belonging rather than from separation.

“True life,” then, is a life made of cooperation and perception, of biological and affective alliances, of bodies and technologies that coexist within the same flesh of the world. Only by recognizing this network can we think an ethics adequate to the present, capable of inhabiting posthuman complexity without nostalgia for a lost human. The place of truth is not situated in word and consciousness, but in embodied experience and perceptual relation. Ultimately, human difference is not a matter of balancing consciousness and nature, but of the affective and responsive mode by which we inhabit the vital network of the world.

Conclusion

Braidotti’s zoe-centered perspective allows us to rethink subjectivity as a field of trans-species relations, beyond the modern distinction between human and nature. The engagement with Adorno has shown, on the one hand, the relevance of the risks posed by a biological reduction of the human and, on the other, the limits of a conception still bound to the separation between bios and *zoe*. In this direction, Margulis’s and Merleau-Ponty’s theories offer conceptual tools for materially grounding posthuman ethics by showing how life can be understood as biological interdependence and embodied perception. These perspectives suggest a conception of subjectivity as a relational and affective node inscribed in a multispecies network. Posthuman ethics thus appears as a practice of coexistence that affirms the generative power of life and responsibility toward the living. This contribution has therefore suggested a possible path for materially grounding posthuman ethics, in which zoe is configured as the relational principle capable of integrating the biological, perceptual, and political dimensions of the living.

Nevertheless, in conclusion it is necessary to make explicit the limits and the ethical, political, and epistemological risks that Braidotti’s neomaterialism leaves unresolved. First, it is important to clarify that the critical impetus of Braidotti’s philosophy is directed at the modern philosophical subject, which is assumed as the

figure of an epistemic dispositif grounded in rationality, autonomy, and self-transparency, and employed as the emblem of the humanist paradigm to be deconstructed. However, this subject is at times constructed retrospectively as a monolithic figure, functional to the critique itself rather than as a historically determined object. This gives rise to the risk of a theoretical circularity, whereby the unity, stability, and centrality of the modern subject are presupposed precisely in order to dismantle them, thereby obscuring its historical and conceptual complexity (Braidotti, *Dissonanze*).

This point has been addressed by the linguist Kieran O'Halloran, who argues that:

Naturally, she [Braidotti] is correct that the human of the historical humanities was restricted (male, white, educated, moneyed, heterosexual). What of her assumption that the humanist subject coincides with rational consciousness? Enlightenment humanists argued differently. They held that humans are capable of being rational, but that does not mean they always are. ("Braidotti Within Reason" 154)

O'Halloran further clarifies that Enlightenment humanists never claimed that human beings constantly act rationally, but rather that they are capable of rationality, while remaining exposed to limits, illusions, and prejudices. Even figures often taken as emblems of modern rationality, such as Kant, explicitly acknowledged such limits, as did thinkers like Spinoza, Hume, Smith, and the Encyclopedists, whose conception of rationality was deeply aware of the affective, social, and collective dynamics that condition its exercise (154).

From this perspective, O'Halloran highlights how, in the attempt to overcome anthropocentric universalism, Braidotti risks reasserting it in a different form, insofar as zoe-centred vitalism comes to assume an ontologically universal value. He thus comes to recognise as productive Braidotti's attempt to connect human consciousness to the moral innateness of other primates, while nevertheless underlining the tension implied by such universalisation. I therefore concur with O'Halloran in regarding,

Braidotti's linking human consciousness to the moral innateness of other primates as productive for a non-anthropocentric posthuman ethical subjectivity. Indeed, I believe this subjectivity should be universally endorsed. Surely this is what Braidotti wants too, despite distancing herself from universalizing. (170)

Alongside this line of critique stands that formulated by Niki Young, who brings to light further problematic implications of a radically relational perspective. On the one hand, the emphasis on relationality risks implicitly reproducing a form of human centrality, insofar as the normative framework continues to be articulated through human categories and practices; on the other hand, it may lead to a dissolution of the individual into an undifferentiated vital continuum, thereby compromising the possibility of thinking meaningful forms of difference (Young, "Non-Anthropocentric Posthumanism and the Stakes of Relationality" 9).

At this point, some clarifications are necessary. With regard to the first issue, it should be emphasised that, from my perspective, transversal alliances do not aim to conceive of a world independent of the human, but rather to deconstruct the claim to human centrality with respect to the environment it inhabits. In Braidotti's neomaterialist framework, the world is intrinsically linked to the human insofar as the human is part of the relational flow that weaves the networks of the world. The central point lies in advancing perspectives that deny the idea of a "purely human" human – one that is superior to the rest of the living and not intensively and ontologically affected by the environment and by the relations it entertains with it (*Trasposizioni* 150).

The risk and limit of a possible persistence of anthropocentrism nevertheless remains bound to the question of normativity. "If everything is thoroughly connected to everything else, then ultimately everything is also thoroughly connected to humans, and to our all-too-human modes of normative and epistemic evaluation" (Young 10). The normative regime that a potential *zoē*-centred and non-anthropocentric system should assume does not eliminate the problem that such a regime remains supported by a rationality and by conceptual tools that are

predominantly human. This does not preclude, however, the formulation of a renewed normativity capable of structuring itself through a system of thought able to respond to *zoe*-centrism and to the transversality of the immanent relations that Braidotti seeks to affirm.

With regard to the second point, I intend to be more critical of Young's thesis. If neomaterialism conceives the human as involved in a network of relations with the rest of the living, the human does not thereby remain "absorbed" into the vital continuum instituted by *zoe*. On the contrary, the ethical dimension of such a vision presupposes that, within an immanentist monism, every being is always already in relation with the other, but only insofar as subjects recognise one another in their alterity. Braidotti states: "We find ourselves within this assemblage, but we are not all the same" (*Trasposizioni* 152). Subjects are different modes of a single substance that enter into relations with the multiplicity of the living in differentiated ways, according to the degree of affective intensity they embody. Within the *zoe*-centred system, therefore, difference does not disappear; rather, it proliferates.

Nevertheless, the task of determining which relational forms are ethically and politically sustainable remains entrusted to an inevitably human normative regime. This is a tension that Braidotti's neomaterialism does not succeed in resolving definitively, but which constitutes a structural critical limit – and perhaps one of its most theoretically productive questions.

Notes

Every translation from an Italian text into English present in this article is my own work.

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The Anti-Posthuman Order: Colonial Anthropocentrism and the Making of Animal Degradation in India

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Abstract

This essay examines how colonial legacies of classification, domesticity, and racial purity continue to shape human–dog relations in postcolonial India. While contemporary legal frameworks such as the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, though biopolitical in nature, seek to institutionalise coexistence through sterilisation and vaccination, they operate alongside widespread social aversion toward dogs, revealing the persistence of colonial hierarchies in multispecies life. Drawing on fieldwork in the National Capital Region between 2023 and 2025, the essay analyses two sites: the Supreme Court’s August 2025 directive to remove all street dogs from Delhi–NCR, and the proliferation of pedigree breeds in an Economically Weaker Section (EWS) housing colony in Delhi. Together, these cases demonstrate how the colonial process of “domestication of affection”, wherein animal love was legitimised only within property-bound relations — rendered free-roaming animals as degraded forms of life. In the postcolonial present, this degradation is reproduced through the valorisation of pedigree dogs as “surplus value” and the simultaneous reduction of street dogs to a “surplus population”. Yet, the continued presence of street dogs destabilise this order, compelling the city to renegotiate coexistence and opening up possibilities for rethinking posthuman citizenship, albeit within the limits of anthropocentric law.

Keywords: anti-posthumanism; colonial domesticity; urban animal life; street dogs; postcolonial governance.

Introduction

In the past two decades, the presence of street dogs in Indian cities has become an increasingly visible and contested issue. With the implementation of the Animal



Birth Control (Dogs) Rules (ABC), first introduced in 2001 and amended in 2023, India legalised the method of sterilisation, vaccination, and release of street dogs rather than their extermination¹. This marked a shift in the state's management of urban street dog population, replacing the colonial technique of culling and electrocution with population control, although still premised on the biopolitical regulation of nonhuman bodies (Narayanan). Within this apparatus, dogs were no longer treated solely as property or pests but as populations, or objects of management, whose risks were to be continuously assessed and adjusted. This framework nevertheless recognised dogs as community beings that were allowed to exist independently of human ownership, aligning with what posthuman theorists (Braidotti; Haraway; Tsing; Wolfe) would describe as a reimagining of urban life as multispecies, rather than strictly humancentric. However, while the law mandated coexistence, public discourse on street dog presence has remained conflicted, oscillating between compassion and hostility. Dog advocates, commonly referred to in India as “dog lovers,” uphold them not only as legally protected animals, entitled to inhabit and share spaces with humans, but also as affective companions who are actively loved and cared for, and who evoke a sense of emotional responsibility. Others, averse to their presence, regard them as threats to hygiene and human safety, resulting in regular human–human and human–animal conflict in the city. These frictions raise a broader question: how do humans and nonhumans coexist within postcolonial moral and legal architectures of the Indian city, and to what extent do colonial classificatory logics continue to structure urban multispecies life, constraining possibilities of a posthuman ethics? This essay argues that Indian multispecies coexistence is shaped by a persistent tension between emerging posthuman imaginaries and inherited colonial regulatory structures.

To address this question, the essay draws on fieldwork conducted in the National Capital Region (NCR), comprising of semi-structured interviews with residents, caregivers, animal welfare volunteers, and municipal actors between 2023 and 2025, as well as sustained engagement with everyday human–dog interaction in residential neighbourhoods and EWS housing colonies. Approximately 40

respondents were engaged, including street dog caregivers and feeders, residents, Resident Welfare Association members, and actors involved in municipal and legal processes related to street dog governance. Interviews were largely conversational and conducted alongside observation of feeding practices, territorial disputes, and interactions between dogs, residents, and local authorities. The author's long-term engagement with animal care work shaped both access to the field and the interpretive lens of the research, situating the analysis within the everyday encounters in which care, conflict and urban governance intersect.

Borrowing from this ethnographic material, the present analyses examines two distinct yet interconnected sites of human–dog relations, that can be understood as products of the Indian postcolonial experience. The first concerns an August 2025 directive by the Supreme Court of Indiaⁱⁱ ordering the removal and permanent sheltering of all street dogs from the National Capital Region, a decision that was subsequently retracted following widespread public protestsⁱⁱⁱ. This incident, it is argued, illustrates a central postcolonial tension between care and control, whereby multispecies coexistence is conditioned by biopolitical regulation permitting dogs to exist only under surveillance and sterilisation regimes. The coexistence mandated by law is thus framed as a regulated permission, not as open recognition of nonhuman belonging. The second site of focus emerges from an Economically Weaker Section (EWS) housing colony near Bapu Dham in central Delhi, where this study found an unexpectedly high number of pedigree dogs such as Huskies, St. Bernards, and Pit Bulls, among others, acquired by residents from lower-income backgrounds. This finding was significant, given that such breeds are expensive to maintain, often requiring air-conditioned environments during Delhi's extreme summer and larger living spaces suited to their physical needs. The presence of these animals in cramped, resource-limited households complicates conventional assumptions about class-based practices of pedigree pet-keeping. The essay argues that this phenomenon cannot be explained merely as a matter of individual preference for breeds. Instead, it must be situated within postcolonial and decolonial frameworks, revealing how inherited hierarchies shape desire, aspiration, and species engagement. While the usual

ownership of pedigree breeds by affluent urban residents aligns with colonial legacies of species hierarchy, the increasing appearance of pedigree dogs within EWS housing complexes signals an aspirational performance of upward mobility enacted through the symbolic value of the dog.

Taken together, the two field sites reveal how contemporary city life for dogs in India reflects competing regimes of value: the dog as pedigree and the dog as stray. While one is endowed with surplus value, the other is rendered as a surplus population. This ambivalence between value and disposability invites a theoretical engagement with the idea of what is understood as the posthuman citizen, in order to address how coexistence is reimagined when extended beyond the human. Borrowing from Braidotti's conceptualisation of posthuman citizenship, this essay considers the idea of political belongingness as one which can be extended beyond the human to include both nonhuman life and ecological relations within the urban. In everyday terms, this form of citizenship becomes visible in practices such as designated feeding zones for street dogs, legal recognition of community dogs, along with the insistence on returning the dogs to original sites after sterilisation. Central to this redefinition is what Braidotti describes as "posthuman as becoming-animal," a process through which the human is decentered and situated within a continuum of living beings (Braidotti 66). The concept of becoming-animal highlights shared conditions of vulnerability and interdependence, thereby unsettling hierarchies that have historically assumed human sovereignty and limited urban belongingness. Using the concept of becoming-animal, this article argues how legal and municipal regimes actively resist multispecies relationality by fixing animals as biological populations to be managed, rather than as beings embedded within the urban order. The contested presence of street dogs in Indian cities, therefore reveals contradictions, highlighting how multispecies coexistence remains bound to anthropocentric governance and how posthuman citizenship, though conceptually significant, encounters its limits when confronted with the material and legal realities of animal life, particularly within the postcolonial Indian city. Accordingly, taken together, the two sites examined in this essay raise the question of what it means to think about the "posthuman" within the

“postcolonial,” where coexistence is continually mediated by inherited hierarchies of value and exclusion. As Stoler reminds us, hygiene and civility were never merely medical or spatial concerns, rather, they operated as instruments for defining who or what could properly belong within the moral geography of the empire. The following analysis thus foregrounds how posthuman belonging remains structured by colonial residues that determine the conditions of multispecies life in India.

The Colonial Production of Animal Life and the Specific Case of Dogs

The Ordering of Species

Kanji, in her study of European colonialism, examines the links between colonialism and anthropocentrism, particularly in the Canadian constitutional discourse, and their impact on the legal status of non-human animals. Drawing on the Saidian framework of orientalism, she argues that the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora, and fauna involved creating distinctions between Europeans and non-Europeans, humans and animals, and among animals (e.g., domestic versus wild, purebred versus mongrel, etc.). This process sought to replace indigenous knowledge systems with European categorisations, presenting the latter as natural and universal. Indigenous practices were dismissed as inferior and used to justify violent civilizing missions. European colonialism, Kanji says, significantly redefined the categorisation of non-human animals, restructuring their relationships and interactions within a framework of Eurocentric, anthropocentric, and androcentric power. Her analysis highlights how colonial discourse on animals was intertwined with narratives of racial superiority, reinforcing colonial authority by drawing parallels between the control of animals and the control of colonised populations. These classificatory practices therefore simultaneously disciplined human and nonhuman populations by naturalising hierarchies of race, gender, and species.

Building on Kanji, colonial regimes not only reclassified animals, but also generated new taxonomies as technologies of rule. The administrative and scientific apparatuses of the empire, including veterinary departments, zoological surveys,

animal-breeding programmes, and sanitary boards became instruments through which animal life was rendered legible, governable, and profitable (Nair). Saha argues that a key aspect of the colonial experience was the rise of scientific and dispassionate engagement with animals. British colonisers thus distanced themselves from the animal world, reducing it to an object of conservation, management, and exploitation. Such management involved physical and emotional detachment, suppressing sensory and affective engagement. Saha asserts that this detachment was crucial, as embodied encounters, particularly touch, could evoke emotional responses such as pleasure, anxiety, or nostalgia. Emotional detachment on the other hand signified a consolidation of colonial power in the form of scientifically rational medical interventions, bureaucratic management of animal populations, and educational zoo displays. Stoler frames this as a colonial pedagogy of affect, where emotional restraint towards animal suffering became a marker of rational, masculine and European civility. Indigenous or colonised forms of proximity to animals were thus rendered excessive, sentimental and primitive, representing an unrefined moral disposition that required disciplining by science and the empire. Interestingly, Saha argues that the only animals with which the British colonisers had affective and emotional encounters were those designated as *pets*.

Domesticity, Breed, and the Rise of the Pet as a Status

The emergence of pet-keeping among colonial elites did not contradict this detachment; it reoriented affect through ownership. The pet embodied a domesticated form of care, an intimacy disciplined by hierarchy and property. Meacham, in her study of 8th-century Chesapeake (Virginia and Maryland), notes that the concept of keeping pets was not prevalent in the late 17th century, and most English people would have been horrified by the idea of animals inside domestic premises. The shift toward keeping pets began in the 16th century among English royalty and courtiers. By the 18th and 19th centuries, pet-keeping had become more common, especially among the urban middle class. By this period, British colonists began to refer to animals they held in high regard and affection as “favourites” (rather than using the term *pets*). This category included both purebred domestic companions and favoured

working animals. Meacham argues that Chesapeake elites kept favourites as the practice provided them with a validation of their social status and control over nature, reinforcing their sense of paternalism, where they ruled over and expected obedience from both humans and animals. Keeping favorites also had gendered aspects, with men and boys typically displaying larger and more majestic animals, while women and girls were associated with smaller animals like squirrels and birds. This gendered dynamic reflected the white woman's authority within the household, over slaves and animals alike. In all this, the "mongrel" dogs were kept by smaller artisans, servants, and enslaved individuals for hunting, work and protection.

As the British Empire expanded, such practices informed elite pet-keeping cultures in the colonies, including India, where domestic possession of carefully bred animals functioned as a sign of civility and racial discrimination. "Domesticity" became central to imperial rule, with the household serving as a site where hierarchies of race, gender, and species were reproduced through hygiene and discipline. This also marked a shift from public multispecies coexistence to privatised affection confined to the household. Care became legitimate only within the boundaries of property. As we shall see later, this sensibility reconfigured the figure of the dog outside the home, on the street, uncontained, as a sign of disorder. It is this idea that invites the recurring injunction in contemporary India, captured in the often repeated sentiment – "if your heart bleeds for the street dogs take them home"^{iv}. This privatisation of care also refined which animal lives were viewed as worthy of affection, linking animal love to class and aesthetic hierarchies. Animal affection became a selective possession signalling civility. It is within this context, that the Victorian fascination with purebred dogs must be situated. Ritvo argues,

[...] not all dogs were equally cherished, especially by the members of the urban middle classes who kept pet dogs rather than working animals [...] Any other kind of dog might compromise its owner's social status [...] As one breeder put it, "Nobody who is anybody can afford to be followed about by a mongrel dog". (Ritvo 227)

Ritvo further notes that mongrel dogs were symbolically aligned with the British working class, whereas purebred ownership was linked to leisure and refinement, inaccessible and ideologically incompatible with working-class values of thrift and industry. Accordingly, the working classes associated with working animals rather than non-utilitarian pets. He writes:

The focus of dog fancying - breeding and showing pedigreed animals - functioned both to establish the unique character of each breed and to assess the relative excellence of dogs of the same breed. Because the quality of the animal implicitly reflected the status and standards of its owner...dog fancying allowed enthusiasts to express, in a partially concealed way, their opinions, hopes, and fears about issues like social and occupational status, and the need for distinctions between classes. (Ritvo 228)

These ideas travelled with the empire, where distinctions between pure and impure breeds were mapped onto colonised populations. The Indian street dog was mixed and indigenous, thus becoming the racial and spatial other of the colonial pet. Far from being pure-bred, it had discursive associations that connected it with the poorer Indian masses. While, the import of pedigree dogs in India must be understood through what Cohen calls animal colonialism, a phenomenon with dual dimensions. It involves not only the use of animals to facilitate the colonisation of lands, native species, and people, but also the imposition of foreign legal frameworks that govern human-animal relations on local communities and their environments. From Columbus's introduction of livestock in the Caribbean to British sheep in Australia, imperial expansion involved importing European species while degrading or eradicating native ones under the premise of agriculture and public health. Through this process, animals and their products became symbols of national identity and imperial might, while law hardened the status of animals as property, e.g., the 1623 Virginia proclamation criminalising animal theft (Anderson).

Colonial Law, Caste Hierarchies, and the Making of the Indian Street Dog

The property-based logic that governed animals under colonial rule did not remain uncontested in postcolonial India. Although street dogs were afforded legal protection, they continued to be perceived as unsanitary and expendable. It is argued that this contradiction is rooted in longer histories in which dogs were positioned not only through colonial technologies of rule but also caste-based cosmologies of purity and pollution. Palsetia's work is valuable for situating the legal-institutional arrangements within the history of street dogs, the state, and civil society in India. He argues that the standard response the British had adopted to any animal-related in India was the indiscriminate killing of unsupervised livestock, pigs, poultry and of course, dogs. This he argues was representative of a difference in the cultural attitude of the British towards animals in comparison to the Indians, who consistently challenged and objected to this practice. While the Parsis held religious reverence for the dog, Hindus, Jains, and Baniyas maintained a caring attitude towards living creatures in general, both for reasons of piety and religious merit. In contrast, the British believed that street dogs went mad in the Indian summer heat, consequently roaming around as rabid beings, "harassing people and defiling corpses" (Palsetia 26). The view was particularly prevalent for western India where juridical decisions were premised on the necessity of destroying the dog.

However, contempt for Indian street dogs cannot be attributed solely to colonial influence. Precolonial Indian texts show that attitudes toward dogs were already complex and contested. As Kamín□ska-Jones notes, early Vedic references describe dogs as *Vastopati* (protectors of the house), suggesting a role of loyalty and guardianship. Dogs also appear positively as *Bhairava's* steed, *Indra's* companion, or as loyal figures in epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. However, with the consolidation of Brahmanical authority, particularly in texts such as the *Manusmriti*, dogs increasingly became associated with impurity and were symbolically aligned with polluting castes. This association embedded the dog within a moral universe shaped by caste-based regimes of purity and pollution, contributing to a social imaginary in which certain animal bodies were inherently degrading. This accordingly shows that present-day disdain toward street dogs in India is also closely

connected to long-standing caste-based notions of purity and pollution. Interestingly, a contemporary illustration of caste-inflected moral hierarchies shaping human–animal relations became especially visible during the August 2025 court proceedings, where individuals advocating for street dogs were derisively referred to as “meat eaters”^v, a term that, in the Indian context, is often mobilised as a caste-coded reference associated with pollution and moral inferiority. The charge sought to undermine caregivers’ claims by framing selective animal care as ethical hypocrisy. This comment, however, overlooked the fact that many non-brahmin caste communities that consume meat do not perceive dogs as ritually polluting, nor do they experience an ethical contradiction between caring for street dogs and consuming other animals. In these contexts, care is not predicated on notions around purity and pollution, but is shaped by relations of proximity and situated moral judgment.

While caste is not the primary analytical focus of this article, it operates as an important social substrate through which colonial domesticity and postcolonial legality continue to shape the degradation of street dogs. What is relevant here however is that, despite the caste-based references, which rendered the precolonial dog symbolically oscillating between reverence and pollution, it did not result in public eradication campaigns. It was specifically the colonial period in which one can witness the systematic elimination of free-roaming dogs and other animals in the name of sanitation and public health. From a posthuman perspective, colonial governance can thus be read as an anti-posthuman project that denied coexistence between humans and other species in favour of a purified, hierarchical model of urban life.

Postcolonial Legality and the Caste-Colonial Afterlife of the Dog

In the postcolonial present, this project of species hierarchy is neither fully complete nor uncontested. Postcolonial legality does not abolish the colonial anti-posthuman order but reconfigures it, allowing dogs to remain in the city while subjecting them to new regimes of control. To understand how these forces unfold in

practice, it is important to consider the everyday mechanisms through which street dogs are incorporated and regulated within urban life. One way in which these negotiations become visible is through the practices that sustain street dogs despite their lack of formal ownership. Street dogs depend significantly on informal care provided by individual feeders and welfare organisations. While the ABC Rules are premised on the assumption that dogs will largely survive by foraging for food, the 2023 amendment^{vi} recognises the limits of this assumption and incorporates provisions for systematic feeding. Under this framework, municipalities and Resident Welfare Associations are tasked with organising designated feeding spots as a means of reducing dog-human conflict and managing aggression. Feeding is thus not positioned solely as an act of compassion but as a regulatory strategy that anchors dogs into a location, making use of their territorial behaviour to stabilise urban governance.

In this sense, the law does more than regulate dogs. It acknowledges their spatial presence as something that actively shapes urban life. Although it does not confer conventional political agency, it nevertheless aligns with Braidotti's notion of "zoe-centred egalitarianism" (Braidotti 60), wherein animals participate in urban formations through embodied presence rather than formal rights. This is evident in urban planner Rishi Dev's analysis of Delhi's spaces, which shows that street dogs do not drift randomly. Rather, their settlement patterns and social interactions are closely tied to specific urban environments or zones. Residential lanes, market places, bus stops, garbage dumps, and back lanes, each generate different forms of human-dog engagement, depending on who occupies or passes through those zones. According to Dev, these relationships emerge from what he terms niche-based living. Niches for dogs are not merely ecological spaces but are co-constructed through material resources, social practices, and sensory cues. While ecological factors such as access to food, water, and shelter determine the spatial range within which most street dogs remain significant, psychological cues, shaped by sound, movement, and smell also play a crucial role in establishing their sense of territory. Equally important

are social relations since dogs are animals that live in loosely organised packs, and form varying forms of associations with both humans and other dogs.

Dev argues that in EWS neighbourhoods, where life spills into streets and the threshold between domestic and public space is more porous, dogs often develop stronger affective bonds with caregivers, acting as protectors, alarm systems, or companions. In contrast, to affluent or gated communities, where physical boundaries limit human–dog interaction, dogs are more likely to be classified as intrusions or threats. Dev notes that street dogs often feel safer in EWS neighbourhoods and, in turn, contribute to the everyday functioning of these spaces by offering informal services such as guarding homes and livelihood sites, including those of the *thelawalas* (street vendors). This suggests that EWS communities often engage dogs through practical coexistence, as opposed to sentiment–driven selective caregiving common in higher socio-economic localities. The entry of pedigree breeds into these spaces therefore reconfigures existing relational ecologies, invoking colonial hierarchies of animal prestige that destabilise affective and territorial arrangements.

It is in this context that the introduction of pedigree dogs into EWS localities must be understood as a reconfiguration of existing multispecies relationships rather than a simple expansion of pet culture. Ethnographic observations conducted in the EWS settlement revealed how owners often described their pedigree dogs as aggressive or difficult, often struggling to feed them due to the perceived costs and dietary demands of maintaining a pedigree breed, while remaining unaware that behavioural distress from confinement and lack of exercise often heightened aggression in such breeds. The preference for pedigree dogs among residents thus needs to be tied to aspirations of respectability and upward mobility, where owning a foreign or expensive dog signified entry into a more dignified social status. This aligns with what Mbembe describes as mimicry as empowerment (Mbembe 110), an attempt to re-signify the self through the appropriation of symbols historically associated with elite modernity, allowing owners to symbolically exit the social categories associated with street dogs and their presumed lower caste/class

affiliations. Yet this very performance of status is fragile and often unsustainable, leading to cycles of care, struggle, and abandonment that reinscribe the dog into public spaces as a surplus life. Practices of neglect and abandonment displacement are by no means confined to low-income households as affluent pet owners, despite greater access to resources, also routinely abandon or mistreat animals once the affective demands of pet-keeping exceed convenience or desirability. In EWS housing contexts, however, these contradictions become more visible, as pedigree dogs often physically and temperamentally unsuited to small, crowded housing conditions, become simultaneous sources of strain for their owners and are often eventually abandoned. As one respondent noted:

I had a German Shepherd. They are great for home protection, but not with outsiders. Once, my uncle visited, and he bit him on the arm. After that, I had to let him go. I left him near the ridge.

Once relinquished, they often enter street ecologies and contribute to the expanding population of free-roaming dogs. In this moment of abandonment, the pedigree dog is stripped of its symbolic surplus value and becomes indistinguishable from the surplus population. Such dogs often are usually absorbed into shelter and adoption networks through the intervention of animal welfare volunteers, who recognise their limited capacity to survive on the streets. Thus, postcolonial aspirations rooted in colonial animal prestige fall back into biopolitical regime that classifies all dogs, pedigree or indigenous, as urban excess. Furthermore, this cycle of aspiration and abandonment not only intensifies human-dog conflict but also justifies calls for dog removal drives. News reports and viral videos of dog attacks repeatedly circulate, consolidating a discourse of dog menace. Such narratives obscure structural failures, most notably, the neglect of the legally mandated sterilisation and vaccination programmes by municipalities and callous pet keeping practices, while producing spectacles of fear that justify coercive state measures. These narratives have tangible legal consequences as seen on 11 August 2025, when a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court ordered the removal of all free-roaming dogs from Delhi-NCR, directing authorities to capture, sterilise and confine them to shelters within eight

weeks, while prohibiting their return to the streets. The ruling generated widespread protests led by dog caregivers, feeders, and animal welfare groups who argued that the directive violated the ABC rules and erased the territorial ties that dogs shared with neighbourhoods. As Dev notes, such forced displacements heighten aggression, as they redistribute dogs into unfamiliar spaces, thereby escalating risks of bites, rabies, and interspecies conflict. Responding to public backlash, a three-judge bench led by the Chief Justice of India revised the order on 22 August 2025, allowing dogs to be sterilised, vaccinated, and returned to their original locations, except in cases involving rabid or specifically aggressive dogs. It also directed RWAs to create designated feeding zones. This reversal illustrates how street dogs function not merely as objects of regulation but as catalysts for political contestation, where multispecies law, territoriality and care intersect in the making of urban life. However, while appearing conciliatory, the reversal shows how postcolonial governance reabsorbs moments of multispecies conflict and what emerges is not a posthuman politics of coexistence, but a recalibration of the colonial logic that continues to define which lives may belong in the city, and under what terms. Each new removal drive therefore reiterates the city's refusal to imagine coexistence beyond the colonial, anthropocentric logic of control.

Concluding Remarks

This article argues that posthuman citizenship in urban India is structured by the afterlives of colonial domesticity, which continue to organise animal life through hierarchies of hygiene and respectability. Posthuman citizenship, caste-inflected moral hierarchies, and the circulation of pedigree dogs in low-income neighbourhoods are examined here not as independent analytical axes, but as interconnected sites through which colonial domesticity continues to shape the terms of multispecies belonging in the postcolonial city. Colonial governance did not merely classify animals, it degraded them through the moral and spatial codes of domesticity. By sanctifying affection only within the private household and linking civility to the ownership of purebred pets, colonial domesticity recast free-roaming animals as

disorderly, unsanitary, and unworthy of care. The remnants of this logic in postcolonial legality continues to structure urban relations where the street dog remains the outsider and undeserving of respectable care. Yet, the persistence of street dogs and their caregivers also unsettles this order. Their presence compels the city to negotiate belongingness beyond property and possession, revealing the limits of anthropocentric urbanism. In this sense, the posthuman in India is an uneasy cohabitation shaped by law, class aspirations, and care. What emerges, therefore, is not a fully posthuman political community but moments of rupture within an anti-posthuman order, where the figure of the dog momentarily forces renegotiation without meaningfully dismantling the structure.

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The Anti-Posthuman Order: Colonial Anthropocentrism and the Making of Animal Degradation in India

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Entangled Existence: A Posthumanist Perspective on Biopolitics and Human-Animal Subjectivity

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Abstract

The paper employs a posthumanist perspective to deconstruct traditional humanist discourses that have legitimized the subjugation of nonhuman animals and deprived them of ethical consideration by denying them subjectivity. These traditional humanist discourses are not only speciesist but also ableist and racist. They have created not only the categories of human and animal, but also human and subhuman. This raises important questions: What does it mean to be an animal? Does it imply being subhuman or something entirely opposed to being human? What does it mean to be subhuman? Does it equate to being an animal or something different? Underscoring these concerns, the paper seeks to provide a posthumanist perspective on biopolitics, which transcends the conventional anthropocentric understanding of the concept. It focuses on the biopolitical condition of animals. However, by doing so, it does not disregard human issues. Instead, it aims to illustrate an entanglement of animal issues with human issues, in order to advance the conception of a post-anthropocentric and posthumanist continuum of entanglement in which humans could be viewed as sharing common traits of vulnerability with nonhuman animals. Furthermore, the paper discusses how biopolitics directed at humans differs from biopolitics directed at animals. The distinction does not create division and difference but highlights a continuum of continuities, as the mechanisms deployed in the biopolitical management of human lives influence and, in turn, are influenced by those deployed in the biopolitical management of animal lives. Ultimately, it offers a nuanced understanding of biopolitics by redefining bio-*zoe* relations, which encourages humans to reflect on their own biopolitical condition by speculating on the biopolitical conditions of nonhuman animals.

Keywords: Animal Studies; Posthumanism; Subjectivity; Biopolitics; Human-Animal Interconnections



Introduction

Engaging with philosophical debates on ‘human exceptionalism’ and animal subjectivity, the study investigates how the biopolitical exploration of the ‘animal question’ significantly contributes to the posthumanist milieu, making it more inclusive, dynamic, and multifaceted. This inquiry necessitates theoretical frameworks that trace the convergence of posthumanism and animal studies, which will provide a critique of speciesism, racism, and ableism and their interwoven dynamics by problematizing the notion of an essential human nature. Cary Wolfe, in the introduction to his influential work *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), addresses this aspect by ascertaining how “the ‘animal question’ is part of the larger question of posthumanism” (xxii). By focusing on how embodiment, embeddedness, and materiality shape and, in turn, are shaped by mind and consciousness, he indicates the material and embodied nature of the evolution of species in which homo sapiens is not ontologically separate from other living creatures (120). In a similar vein, Donna Haraway, in *When Species Meet* (2012), asserts, “to be one is always to become with many” (4), emphasizing that humans are not autonomous beings who encounter nonhuman animals as separate species; instead, humans and nonhuman animals are companion species who have co-evolved with and have been co-constituted by each other within an enmeshed, entwined, and entangled network. These perspectives suggest that the field of critical posthumanism is closely intertwined with animal studies, as both seek to challenge and deconstruct the ideals of anthropocentrism that have legitimized human superiority through asserting human exceptionalism while relegating other species to subordinate categories, and reinforced the binaries of human and nonhuman animal, which have historically dominated human epistemological frameworks. These epistemological frameworks have made the mistreatment of animals so normalized that humans do not see “the violence (against animals) as violence, the torture as torture, the killing (of them) as killing, or the exploitation as exploitation” (Weisberg 218). What critical posthumanism emphasizes is that human beings, in the contemporary era of entangled social, political, economic, environmental, and technological dimensions, need to rethink, reimagine, and

reconceptualize their relationship with all the nonhuman beings and entities they share their world with, and to reconsider how to strive for a co-evolution through ethics-driven co-existence. The evolutionary interconnection between humans and nonhuman animals is extremely essential, yet it often falls short of fostering this sense of co-existence. This failure stems from the prevailing belief that humans, having co-evolved with nonhuman animals in symbiosis over the millennia, have somehow transcended their counterparts, with whom they no longer share any affinity. The perception not only undermines the importance of human-animal interconnectedness but also perpetuates a dangerous hierarchical system that diminishes the intrinsic value of nonhuman life.

In *The Open* (2004), Agamben challenges this hierarchical system by revealing the very constructed nature of the human and by contending that the very distinction between human and animal is produced and maintained as a 'physio-political' operation, which constitutes a constant tension between humanity and animality, through the animalization of the human—act of rendering one as animal and thereby depriving them of human status, and the humanization of the animal—act of rendering one as human, who needs to keep eradicating all traces of the animal. For Agamben,

Man is not a biologically defined species, nor is he a substance given once and for all; he is, rather, a field of dialectical tensions always already cut by internal caesurae that every time separates—at least virtually—'anthropophorous' animality and the humanity which takes bodily form in it. (12)

This tension between animality and humanity, according to him, results in a fracture, which, however, occurs not between different species but within humans themselves, creating an internal division between the 'man-animal' and the 'animal-man'. Through this division, humans separate themselves from the 'animal'—more than a separate species from the human, but rather the nonhuman part of the human, the unexplored zone or archaic phase of life (Esposito 155). This infers that it is only humans (in a state of constantly becoming), 'non-animal' beings, who can lose their

bios (political life)—which defines their humanity, and may be reduced to *zoe* (bare life), “an inhuman status of extreme vulnerability, bordering on extinction” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Affirmative Politics”)—which is emblematic of animal existence. The gap between *bios* and *zoe* is internal to human existence, which puts humans at the perennial risk of degenerating into an animal being. Unlike humans, animals, nonhuman beings, already exist as *zoe* without *bios*, and therefore, the reduction of their *bios* is deemed not possible in the first place. Although this view is anti-anthropocentric, which considers humans not as superior beings but as manufactured products of power, it fails to provide a truly posthumanist perspective that offers the idea of an inter-species entanglement. It mainly focuses on the mechanisms that constrain and reduce humans by controlling their *bios*, but overlooks the mechanisms that contribute to the subjectivation and subjugation of animals, which involve elevating them from mere *zoe* to *bios*. In this regard, an investigation of how the reduction of *bios* to *zoe* and the elevation of *zoe* to *bios* are interconnected within a complex animalizing-humanizing biopolitical matrix offers a more profound posthumanist perspective. It will show the permeable boundaries between humans and animals, emphasizing their interrelation in terms of how they face a shared vulnerability imposed by “familiar (as well as distinctive) patterns of exclusion, exploitation and oppression” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 96), which facilitates a more provocative evocation of the importance of ethics-driven co-existence. To perceive this sense of co-existence in a critical way, the study aims to deconstruct and re-evaluate some predominant anthropocentric views embedded in traditional humanist discourses, which have constituted and consolidated ontological and epistemological, political and biological rifts between humans and nonhuman animals, and provide a biopolitical understanding of subjectivity, which confronts these established rifts.

Descartes-Derrida Dimensions: Transition from Traditional Humanist to Posthumanist Perspective on Animals

It is often found that those living beings who are denied and deprived of subjectivity become exposed to the most systematic and extreme forms of violence

(Stanescu 183). Traditional humanist discourses, which see subjectivity as exclusive only to humans and propound that all nonhuman animals lack it, have led to the inconsiderate suppression of animals and the justification of their mistreatment. Nonhuman animals have been deprived of subjectivity by claims such as—animals are external to themselves, and so far, are ‘things’, their souls have as their object not itself but something external (Hegel 56–58); for animals, life activity is their existence, and they do not possess any conscious will to separate their being from it (Marx 73); animals are ‘poor’ in the world, and they cannot die ‘properly,’ they merely cease to exist (Heidegger 267). In opposing these views that deprive nonhuman animals of subjectivity, Tom Regan argues that animals, like humans, are “subjects-of-a-life” who possess beliefs and desires, memories and perception, a sense of the future and the past, which enable them to have an emotional life imbued with feelings of pleasure and pain (243). Regan’s view indicates that it is imperative to employ non-anthropocentric “practices of storytelling, representation, visualization, communication, and, meaning-making [...]” (Karkulehto et al. 6) to explore the complex attributes of nonhuman animals, which critique the belief that humans and nonhuman animals differ not only in degree but also in kind and instead, suggest that they have a lot of ontological, biological, and psychological similarities despite their morphological differences. This view challenges the binary conceptions of the human/animal distinction endorsed by the ‘Cartesian philosophy of subjecthood’, which have contributed to the structured practices of exempting nonhuman animals from ethical consideration.

René Descartes, who introduced the doctrine of mind-body dualism that human beings are largely divided into two distinct realms—the “thinking thing” (*res cogitans*) and the “extended thing” (*res extensa*), proposed a mechanistic view of nonhuman animals as ‘non-rational’ and ‘quite-not sentient’ beings. He upholds the proposition that animals are essentially ‘material automata’. This implies that although animals are alive and capable of sensations, they are essentially indistinguishable from machines (Calarco 9) and their acts are determined by the mere disposition of their organs (Thomas 1010). Additionally, he also argues that animals lack not only reason

but also sensory consciousness and sensitive souls (Thomas 1001). He contrasts animals with humans, describing the latter's soul as entirely independent of the body, which is not bound to die with it, because of their preoccupation with the immaterial power of reasoning (Hatfield 407). This reliance on reasoning as a criterion for possessing a soul posits problematic implications for the humanist perspective on humans as well. For instance, a person with cognitive impairments who is unable to do reasoning might be considered devoid of a soul—which contradicts the notion of the immortality of the human soul. Considering this, the treatment of nonhuman animals could be seen as paralleled with that of humans who are viewed as lesser, weaker, subordinate, or substandard (Karkulehto et al. 3). It establishes a close link between the relationships humans have with nonhuman animals and issues such as ableism, slavery, sexism, and racism. This is noted by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation or Animal Rights?* (2014), “[n]or can we say that all human beings have rights just because they are members of the species *homo sapiens*—that is speciesism, a form of favouritism for our own that is unjustifiable as racism” (4).

Descartes's strong emphasis on reason as a 'universal instrument' that functions as a determining factor for subjectivity shows a prevailing preference for the cognitive immaterial faculties in accessing the corporeal material aspects over the corporeal material faculties in forming the cognitive immaterial dimension. In other words, he gives too much importance to understanding how the body is 'embrained', while ignoring how the mind is embodied. He views human beings as composites of both the cognitive and the corporeal. In contrast, he claims that animals possess only the corporeal, suggesting that their behaviours during injury are merely automatic physical reactions rather than indications of genuine feelings. This leads to the conjecture that animals do not experience pain in the same way that human beings do. Animals' inability to articulate their experiences through words, signs, or symbols, like humans (Erdenk 205), leads Descartes to conclude that they do not possess sentience, minds, or exhibit reason or intellect (Hatfield 419). Descartes's mechanistic conception of animals, which reduces nonhuman creatures to 'objects just with motion' devoid of interiority, is not only anthropocentric but also ableist, as it denies

both nonhuman animals and human beings with cognitive deformities the capacity for feelings and experiences. In this context, Matthew Calarco in *Thinking Through Animals* (2015) observes that if possessing language, rationality, or moral agency becomes a quintessential characteristic of humans, then those humans who lack such capabilities will not be seen as differently human but rather as less than human (38).

The transition from the dominance of the Cartesian doctrine, to a posthuman philosophy concerning nonhuman animals necessitates the recognition that human beings have not been able to fully comprehend animals in their diversity and complexity. Hence, it is essential to redefine nonhuman animals, emphasizing their agency, autonomy, and attributes, without reducing them to entities subservient to humans. Derrida's deconstructive engagement with the 'animal question' provides a posthumanist theoretical hinge through which humanist epistemologies of species difference collapse. In his work *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), Derrida addresses the 'animal question,' stressing the need to recognize their agency and subjectivity, which have often been overlooked or rejected in traditional humanist discourses. He engages in exploring whether animals can gaze at humans the way humans gaze at animals, and how humans, while 'naked,' would feel if they came to discover themselves being seen by the eyes of an animal 'other'. In this case, a "discomfiture of specularity" occurs where the human-beholder of the initial gaze loses their composure as s/he feels a "reflex of shame" (Boisseron 106), while appearing "in front of the insistent gaze of the animal" (Derrida 4). This gaze unveils a penetrating yet perplexing intelligence of animals, which is uninterpretable and unreadable, and can unsettle humans, exposing their own animality. Derrida's deconstructive approach here reverses the traditional relationship of human dominance of animal 'other' by mechanisms of speculation and speech through recognizing the capacity of (counter)speculation and the strength of 'speechlessness' in animals.

Derrida also has a problem with the word 'animal'. According to him, "the Animal" is a homogenizing term invented by humans, which suggests as if "all nonhuman living things" that "man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbours,

or his brothers” might be “grouped within the common sense of this ‘commonsense’” (34). Dissatisfied with the homogenizing effect of the concept ‘animal,’ Derrida has coined the portmanteau word “*animot*,”¹ which resists the homogenization of animal ‘other’ into a generic living species through the act of naming, and insists on the presence of their plurality that defies “the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity” (Derrida 47). By deconstructing the very category of ‘animal,’ and revealing its instability, and providing the theory of ‘animal gaze,’² Derrida has gestured towards a more dynamic conceptualization of animals and their complex subjectivity. The recognition of the gaze obliges humans to respond to the animal’s address, putting their self-definition as the only species that can look, think, and speak into question. In this way, Derrida’s approach towards nonhuman animals has thickened, deepened, and complicated the simplified distinction between humans and animals, by unveiling the constructed nature of the animal category that has been constituted over centuries by representations made by humanist discourses, which, in turn, have naturalized several types of exploitative mechanisms of the disciplinary and regulatory anthropocentric political system. However, within this anthropocentric system, it is not only nonhuman animals—victims of speciesism, but also human ‘others’—victims of racism, sexism, and ableism, who become subjected to subjugation. As Derrida contends, “traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological, and genetic forms of knowledge” (25). The “Genetic experimentation, artificial insemination, manipulations of the genome, and industrial meat production” that have been causing hormonal, genetic, chemical, physiognomic, and mechanical violence to animal life for the past two centuries (26) have also posed threats to human life and may pose more severe threats in the future. This shared situation of subjection of both humans and animals to the powerful dispositives of modernity advances a posthumanist reconceptualization of biopolitics as a multispecies apparatus of governance, which offers critical insights into the complexities of human-animal interconnections.

Posthumanist Perspective on Biopolitics and Human-Animal Interconnections

Humans have often been understood in comparison to animals, yet the intricate interrelations between them are frequently overlooked and underestimated. The complexity of how human lives and those of nonhuman animals are interconnected in intricate ways is overshadowed by the overemphasis on what sets them apart. Aristotle, in his book *Politics*, addresses both these aspects, namely, what connects humans and animals and what distinguishes them, though he focuses more elaborately on the latter. He famously states that “man by nature is a political animal” (5), which prompts a critical consideration: if man is a political animal, then what would the analogical status of nonhuman animals be like? Aristotle’s framing leads us to question whether nonhuman animals could be non-political biological beings. In other words, he implies whether *bios* is a way of living proper only to humans, which enables them to engage in sophisticated political substance and transcend *zoe*, the simple biological act of existing, while nonhuman animals exist as mere *zoe* and lead an absolutely biological-natural life devoid of political relevance. In this regard, the fact that biology is not separate from politics but is inseparably intertwined with it makes the complete separation of *bios* from *zoe* impossible. The simple, bare life actually emerges from the beginning as formed by politics that pushes it beyond and beneath itself (Esposito 44). Life and politics essentially evolve as two inseparable, mutually constitutive components of an indivisible whole, gaining significance from their interrelationships (Esposito 45). Concerned with this insight, Aristotle maintains the similarity between humans and animals by proposing that the political is a biological feature humans share with animals. But, at the same time, he elevates the status of humans to a ‘higher degree’ by equating their faculty of language with the ability of reasoning that equips them with the sensibility to make distinctions between good and evil, just and unjust (6). In this way, Aristotle treats humans not as transcendent beings completely separated from animals; instead, he considers the capacity of reasoning or ‘logos’ through language as an attribute unique to humans, which does not disconnect but rather elevates them from animals. In essence, he foregrounds that biological features constitute both humans and animals as political beings, but

humans' additional capacity of speech makes them 'more political' than nonhuman animals. This is why Aristotle seems to posit that "man is more of a political animal" than "any other gregarious animals" (5). What it implies is a graded scale of political engagement rather than a binary divide between political and non-political beings. This less emphasized aspect of Aristotle's argument suggests that the *bios* of humans is elevated from yet also embedded in *zoe*, and the *zoe* of animals is not excluded from the realm of politics. Both humans and nonhuman animals are biological beings, and their biological qualities are pervaded, grasped, and penetrated by politics. This raises the question, 'What does it mean for humans and nonhuman animals to have a body or be a body that is governed by politics?' According to Cora Diamond, the awareness of being a living body evokes a sense of being exposed to vulnerability that humans share with nonhuman animals (22). It directs the present discussion to a posthumanist understanding of biopolitics, which focuses on how the lives of humans and those of nonhuman animals are entangled with each other within a complex web of dissymmetrical yet negotiable power-knowledge relations (Chrulew 235).

With the rise of modernity and the predominance of modern mechanisms, the distinction between biological life (*zoe*) and political life (*bios*) collapses more evidently than ever, and politics merges with biology and becomes what Michel Foucault has called 'biopolitics'. Foucault has developed the concepts of biopolitics and biopower to illustrate how the process of deploying polite yet pervasive technologies of power, including managing and regulating the actions of individuals and optimizing and extorting their capacities, is endorsed by 'modern' governing systems to establish their control over the 'human' population that becomes both "an object of analysis" and "a target of intervention" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 26). It is observed that while for Aristotle, man's additional capacity for a political existence separates him from animals; for Foucault, 'modern' man is reducible to the status of animals as biopolitics "places his existence as a living being in question" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 143). In other words, humans who had been considered 'political beings' and given higher status in the Aristotelian ethos can now be seen as 'biopolitical beings' who are reducible to the state of animals in the Foucauldian doctrine. Foucault

suggests that the linguistic privilege of humans does not indicate their sovereignty but rather only condemns them infinitely (Chrulew 224). It means that within the biopolitical framework, humans are governed at the level of the body, despite their association with abstraction. As a result, humans seem to be put in a perpetual process of proving themselves distinguishable from animals by exhibiting attributes that are ‘apparently’ absent in animals, through which they can gain and maintain their ‘human’ subjectivity. ‘Animal’ instinct in humans becomes an emblem for their subjugation and descent into the state of animals. In order to be considered ‘human,’ humans have to be willing to risk their own lives, consciously choose the possibility of their own death, and cut the animal essence from within themselves (Stanescu 180). Only by transcending and transforming the ‘anthropophorous animal’ that supports them, humans become capable of terminating their own animality (Agamben 12). What it suggests is that the absence/presence of animality lies at the very core of biopolitics, and the discourse of animality is a powerful mechanism of biopower, through which it can (re)establish a connection between humans and animals (who are generally considered mere naked, unprotected *zoe* and thus ‘killable’), and differentiate between ‘killable’ humans and ‘non-killable’ humans, and organize the killing of those ‘killable’ human individuals or communities accordingly, without being held accountable. Importantly, the status of ‘killable’ and ‘non-killable’ subjects is not fixed; it varies depending on specific contexts, and thus, every subject remains vulnerable to being categorized as ‘killable’. Interestingly, despite possessing the right to kill and eradicate life, biopower always presents itself as “a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 137). In effect, biopower engages with the deployment of violence but institutionalizes and normalizes it to the point of making it invisible to all but the victims (Weisberg 219). Underscoring this paradoxical logic of biopower, which ensures its subjects’ continued existence by making them ‘categorizable’ as ‘extinguishable,’ Foucault asks, “[h]ow could [bio]power exercise its highest prerogatives by putting people to death, when its main role was to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order?”

(138). The question helps us understand that the potential of biopolitics lies in explicitly shaping lives through the implicit threat of taking lives.

Foucault discusses this ‘Janus-faced’ nature of biopower more elaborately in “Society Must Be Defended” (1976). He argues that biopower intends to both “make live” and “let die” to create a “homeostasis” that requires the multiplicity of the population to be “dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if needed, be punished” and eliminated (241–242), and individuals to be conglomerated into a population whose ratio of births to deaths, rate of reproduction, and fertility efficiency are measured and controlled (243). It shows that biopower works through a dialectical process of ‘individualizing the masses’ that “centres on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have been rendered both useful and docile” (249) and ‘massifying the individuals’ that “brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass” (249). Though biopower seems to be more focused on “making live”, Foucault’s intriguing question, “[h]ow [...] is it possible for [...] [biopower] to kill, to call for deaths, to demand deaths, to give the order to kill [...]?” (254) indicates its potency of “letting die”. This “letting die” aspect of biopolitics is not just about passively letting certain individuals or groups die, but is an organized, structured means of oppression and violence that actively participates in the extermination of those who are unfit for ‘care’ or misfit beyond control. In this way, by constructing death as the mechanism for life’s contrastive reproduction, biopolitics continually hovers on the threatening verge of transitioning into ‘thanatopolitics’³ (Esposito 39, 98).

Contemporary regimes of neoliberal biopower function through the logic of “making live” and “letting die” for both human and animal lives alike (Vint 452). This highlights the dual nature of biopolitics, which aims to enhance lives while simultaneously exposing them to the point of being deemed disposable or dead. Thus, in the present time, every living being, including humans and nonhuman animals alike, situated within socio-political governmental systems, can be seen as a subject within the purview of biopolitics, whose lives are “shaped and controlled by modes

of biopower that designate ways of living and dying” (Vint 444). The framework of biopolitics governs its subjects through the paradoxical principles of ‘care’ and control, where this ‘care’ is not an innocent means of just ensuring well-being but a disguised form of control that operates through regulation, instrumentalization, and domination. At times, care and control function simultaneously, and at other times, control may eliminate care. This implies that those who are capable of control are cared for, and those who are incapable of control are castigated or eliminated. The way biopolitics treats its human subjects seems quite comparable to how animals are treated under human governance. Thus, it can be stated that biopolitics actually renders the status of human subjects to that of animals. Cary Wolfe, in *Before the Law* (2013), observes, “[t]he practices of modern biopolitics have forged themselves in the common subjection and management of both human and animal bodies” (45). For him,

To live under biopolitics is to live in a situation in which we are all always already (potential) ‘animals’ before the law—not just nonhuman animals according to zoological classification, but any group of living beings that is so framed. (10)

What Wolfe’s view suggests is that biopolitics cuts across species borders and intersects multi-species bodies. As a result, all subjects within the ambit of biopolitics could be seen as ‘biopolitical animals’. It not only inflicts a blow to species supremacy, but also destabilizes the notion of essentially exceptional and exceptionally essential human nature—*bios*, as decisively distinguished from the life of nonhuman animals—*zoe* (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 65). The *zoe/bios* dialectics of biopolitical animals move beyond the simple human/animal divide and place both humans and animals in an ever-shifting transposition. In the case of human subjects, they seem to descend from ‘political animals’ to ‘biopolitical animals’. But, in the case of animals, they seem to ‘apparently’ ascend from ‘biological beings’ to ‘biopolitical beings’. Although both humans and nonhuman animals alike are ‘biopolitical animals’ within the biopolitical sphere, the distinction between how biopower is directed at human subjects and how it is directed at nonhuman animals is a crucial concern from a posthumanist

perspective because it challenges the traditional understanding of biopolitics itself, which delineates the complex condition of humans as governable subjects, while avoids focusing on animals by relegating them to mere manageable objects. In other words, while the traditional biopolitical understanding is limited to analyzing how every human subject is a potential animal, a posthumanist biopolitical perspective also encourages an exploration of how every animal is a potential ‘human-like-subject’.

Most of the accounts that attempt to underscore the lives of nonhuman animals generally demonstrate them as merely vulnerable, mechanized, objectified, and subjugated bodies that become targets of human violence (Chrulew 223). Though there can be no objection to this argument with respect to several cases, the status of animals, however, is not that simple but is quite more complex than it appears to be. According to Rosi Braidotti, “[a]nimals are caught in a double bind: on the one hand, they are more than ever the object of inhuman exploitation; on the other hand, they benefit from residual forms of reparative humanization” (*The Posthuman* 76). It means that while animals are subjected to modern mechanistic systems of hyper-exploitation that treat them as mere resources or commodities, they also receive selective forms of care aimed at mitigating their ‘unnecessary’ suffering, which is crucial for aggravating their productive value. This paradoxical situation of animals reflects both a promise and a peril for a multi-species management within the new biopolitical order, as it confirms that biopolitics can simultaneously produce subjectivity and death, and can decisively objectify the subject by making them its own object (Esposito 32). The consideration of animals, not as merely manageable objects but as complex governable subjects, can be viewed as a foundational aspect of biopolitics. The very apparatuses of biopower, in fact, have emerged from the proliferation of what Foucault refers to as ‘pastoral power’. Foucault identifies pastoral power as the historical basis for biopower, delineating its deployment in the practices of ecclesiastical institutions and its eventual integration into neoliberal governmental systems. Pastoral power, in a more rudimentary sense, means a set of subtle, vigilant, and persistent technologies used by a shepherd to manage his flock, both individually and collectively. This kind of power carefully ensures the well-being

of each individual animal within the flock, while at the same time, establishes its control over the entire flock by submitting all of the members to greater degrees of discipline, domination, and regulation (Pandian 89). This concept of power is quite similar to biopower, which relates to intervening systems of knowledge and strategies that are focused on regulating and altering the indispensable characteristics of human bodies (Holloway and Morris 241), and offers human subjects a sense of security while subjecting them to modern mechanisms of surveillance and subjugation. It draws parallels between how a shepherd manages his flock and how the state governs its 'human' population, highlighting an entanglement of the idea of docile cattle with the notion of 'good' citizens. The relationship between pastoral power and biopower demonstrates that biopower, which is directed towards the governance of humans by the state, has evolved from pastoral power, which was directed towards the governance of animals by humans. In 'modern' times, we can observe that this evolved biopower, which is primarily directed towards the governance of humans, has been redirected towards the governance of animals themselves. In other words, the intricate system of human governance, which developed from the simpler method of governing animals, has also made the governance of animals intricately sophisticated. Consequently, it can be argued that biopower is now directed towards the governance of both humans and animals with its apparatuses of care and control that are simultaneously inclusionary, empowering, and protective, on the one hand, and, exclusionary, disciplinary, and exploitative, on the other. As the biopolitical management of one species becomes stronger and subtler, so does the biopolitical management of another species. Although the mechanisms deployed in subjugating humans and nonhuman animals to the discipline of biopower and the relationships between humans and nonhuman animals are fundamental to understanding the essence of biopolitics itself (Cimatti and Salzani 4) as "[it] permeates every detail of the life of the population" by regulating "the relations of men among themselves, and men with other species, wielding for one and the other the same techniques of subjugation and control" (Saïd Chebili, qtd. in Chrulew 224), most accounts of biopolitics are concerned only with how humans are reduced to the state of animals

and largely ignore animals themselves. The lack of concern for nonhuman animals in the discourse of biopolitics, however, does not imply any integral deficiency in the prospective underpinnings of Foucault's theorization but rather highlights the paradigm of politics itself that has excluded nonhuman animals from agency as political beings (Wadiwal 66). Therefore, including nonhuman animals as biopolitical subjects within the discourse of biopolitics can be viewed as a posthumanist approach, as it introduces a new dynamic to the traditionally anthropocentric focus of biopolitical discourse, which has primarily examined the 'animalization/dehumanization' of humans, but has often remained silent on the 'bio/politicization' of animals. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the posthumanist perspective on biopolitics does not abandon human issues but rather offers us a way to explore how what biopolitics does to animals both resembles and goes beyond what it does to humans, and encourages us to think about the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals in terms of division and difference, which inherently fosters a continuum of connections and continuities (Vint 444). To understand this aspect, we need to focus on how the corollary apparatuses—'care'/control and violence/elimination, of biopolitics work distinctively for humans and nonhuman animals.

The contradictory functioning of biopolitics towards humans and nonhuman animals, according to David Redmalm and Erica von Essen, is:

While biopolitics is exerted by subjecting people to the impending threat of turning them into mere resources for governing, the lives of nonhuman animals rarely transcend a status of mere resources and thus cannot be bereaved of such an elevated position [...] [Furthermore] while humans are governed biopolitically through an optimization of life— a governing where violence is the exception— for animals, in contrast, violence is the rule and an elevated status is the exception. (152)

What their argument suggests is that violence against humans is essentially rare, whereas violence against animals is the 'norm'. This implies that the "making live"

mechanism of biopower is more prominent than its counterpart, the “letting die” force, in the case of managing humans, whereas the “letting die” force is more prevalent than the “making live” mechanism in the management of animals. In other words, biopolitics, in general, deploys techniques of care/control to foster the lives of humans and techniques of violence to slaughter the bodies of animals. Some thinkers, including Derrida, have suggested that though the function of biopolitics regarding humans is manifold, its function regarding animals is predominantly governed by the rationale of ruthlessness and violence. For instance, Derrida has argued that “our relationships to animals [...] are still governed by the logic and structure of sovereign violence” (Derrida qtd. in Chrulew 231). However, it is found that biopolitics regarding animals is as complex as it is regarding humans. Keeping in mind Derrida’s notion of ‘*animot*,’ which refers to the heterogeneity of animals, discussed previously, we can argue that for some animals (I am particularly referring to livestock animals) whose instrumental values are significantly great, biopolitics can display care more efficiently than it does for humans; the bodies of these animals are shaped by nutritional and medical regimes of biopower more prudently and meticulously than even those of humans. For instance, it has been estimated that North Carolina and Iowa, two states in the US, use three million pounds of antibiotics as feed additives for livestock animals annually; the quantity is almost equivalent to the amount of antibiotics used for the medical treatment of humans nationwide (Florini et al. 2). This aspect highlights that biopolitics, in certain cases, can prioritize the well-being of animals by putting even the well-being of humans at stake. However, the reality is that biopolitics leverages components of care for animals to optimize their biological capacities so they can be put to potential use, even if it has to make a compromise to human lives. The primary objective of biopolitics concerning animals is not genuine care for them, but rather the utilization of their instrumental values to serve capitalistic interests. There are several practices biopolitics deploys on animals—domestication, training, taming (non-invasive), and selective breeding, genetic modification (invasive)—which affect their biological constitution and make their bodies docile and more reproductive. In this regard, it is

important to note, especially in the case of livestock animals in agricultural settings, that not only the corporeal aspects of animals but also their emotional, behavioural, and pathological traits are measured for the maximization of their productivity. In this context, biopolitics is exercised on animals through temporarily elevating them to the political status (Redmalm and Essen 166), which might grant them a relatively 'human-like subjectivity'. It is a scenario where animals appear to transcend their status of mere *zoe* and are attributed with *bios*. It shows that the strategies of biopolitics are deployed not only in reducing animals to mere objects and commodities but also in elevating their status through providing them with limited subjectivity. This 'subjectification' of animals is endorsed, along with human interventions, as a means of enabling them to achieve maximum productivity to satiate human demands (Srinivasan 114). Though biopolitical care seems more prevalent initially, it must not be forgotten that biopolitical violence has not been abandoned. Biopolitics can use its mechanisms of "making live" and "letting die" for the same subjects at different points of time. In the case of livestock animals, when they are nurtured, biopolitical care seems to be in function. When they gain optimal weight or lose their (re)productivity, biopolitical violence comes into action. Importantly, biopolitical violence that leads to the killing of animals may impose certain rules and laws meant for the restriction of 'inhuman' violence against them. Although the effectiveness of these measures is quite questionable and the very idea that there can be a 'humane' way of killing is itself inherently oxymoronic, they seem to provide at least some protection for animals against 'unnecessary' suffering till the point they are killed.

The logic of biopolitical violence, which is primarily applied to animals, especially at the time of their slaughter, can be seen as being directed at racialized, marginalized, human 'others'. It appears that these humans have been 'animalized' and are increasingly being treated as animals by biopower. This aspect shows that the orchestration of biopolitical violence towards animals is linked with the orchestration of biopolitical violence towards human 'others'. According to Cary Wolf, "[t]he violence of sacrifice for which the distinction between human and animal has historically been bedrock" provides for the law "the 'foundation' for its exclusions that

the law cannot provide for itself" (*Before the Law* 9). It implies that the law legalizes biopolitical violence on racialized, marginalized human 'others', based on the extra-legal, metaphysical, and cultural logic that treats animals and those 'animalized' as killable. However, what is important to note here is that for these humans, who have been rendered bereft of their political status and every legal protection, biopolitics may deploy more violent and brutal mechanisms than it does for animals, since it poses no objection to their suffering but rather reinforces laws that ensue and legitimize 'inhuman' violence against them. In this regard, we may think of the distinction between the treatment of Jews and that of animals in the Nazi regime. That the Nazis treated Jews with extreme brutality is a well-documented and much-discussed event in human history. But the fact that the Nazis passed laws to protect animals and diminish harm to them is quite underrecognized. The Nazis had contempt for Jews and were indifferent to their suffering, but they showed great compassion for animals and sympathy for their pain. They introduced laws to regulate the slaughtering of animals and to partially ban experiments on them. Cats, dogs, apes, and horses were selected for special protection, and crabs and lobsters were prevented from being put alive into boiling water (Arluke and Sax 7-8). The paradoxical nature of the Nazi regime is that the laws enforced by the Nazis ordered the merciless genocide of Jews, while reinforcing the prevention of the 'unnecessary' sufferings of animals. This raises the question: how could the Nazis have been interested in decreasing the cruelty towards animals while they treated humans with increasing brutality? Arnold Arluke and Boria Sax have noted that for the Nazis, "it was possible to increase the moral status of animals and decrease the moral status of some humans by blurring the boundaries between humans and animals" (7). This enabled them to 'humanize' (partially) animals and elevate them to a 'higher' position, where violence was reduced, and 'dehumanize' Jews and degrade them to a 'lower' position, where violence was reinforced. Roberto Esposito has pointed out that the Jewish victims who were persecuted were not simply considered 'animals'; had they been "considered to be only animals, they would have been saved" (130). It suggests that biopolitical violence of the Nazi regime was exercised on Jews not simply by

‘animalizing’ them but by reformulating the definition of ‘human,’ which consisted of ‘superior’ or ‘pure’ humans—Germans and ‘inferior’ or ‘contaminated’ humans or ‘subhumans’—Jews. The existence of these ‘inferior’ Jews was considered a threat not only to the ‘superior’ Germans but also to animals. Importantly, what is noteworthy here is that the Nazis’ reformulation of ‘human’ was also closely linked to their definition of ‘animal’. The Nazis distinguished between ‘lower’ animals and ‘higher’ animals. They associated themselves with ‘higher’ animals and propounded that they should be reproduced extensively. In contrast, they equated Jews with ‘lower’ animals, such as rodents or pests, and proposed that it was necessary to annihilate them entirely lest they might contaminate everyone and everything. This indicates that the ‘animalization’ of both Germans and Jews took place in the Nazi regime. While Germans were subjected to biopolitical care, with special focus on their “meticulous improvement” through the protection of their ‘purity’ and the enhancement of their reproduction, Jews were subjected to biopolitical violence, with special emphasis on their “total annihilation,” which led to their persecution and extermination in the Holocaust.

While comparisons between the Holocaust, in which millions of Jews were persecuted and exterminated, and modern factory farming, in which billions of animals are slaughtered, are fraught with ethical risk, they enrich the posthumanist understanding of biopolitics. David Sztybel, in “Can the Treatment of Animals be Compared to the Holocaust?” has meticulously outlined thirty-nine similarities between the ways Jews were treated in the Nazi regime and the ways animals are treated in factory farms in the present. He states that just as experiments are conducted on animals, the Nazis conducted experiments on a number of Jews (107); just as violence against animals is sanctioned through institutionalized, bureaucratized means, the Nazis passed laws against Jews that legitimized institutionalized violence against them (113). One might be interested in looking up all thirty-nine comparisons in the paper. However, apart from providing comparisons, Sztybel has also conceded that there are many relevant differences between these two instances of mass-mutilation. He has noted that Jews suffered discrimination due to

their religious and ethnic identity, which is obviously not applicable in the case of nonhuman animals (125). He has further argued that Jews have been freed from the annihilatory Holocaust (although the world is still suffering from racism), whereas the ‘livestock’ animals are in no way to be liberated from slaughtering (125). In this regard, the examination of the biopolitical logics of “making live” and “letting die” may help us draw more nuanced distinctions between the treatment of Jews in the Nazi regime and that of animals in factory farming. Although biopower seems to be more focused on “the management of life” than on “the menace of death” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 147), it does not mean that biopolitics is merely about the ‘optimization of life’; biopolitics can deploy both facilitative resources to foster life and machineries of violence to ‘disallow life’ (Wadiwal 122). In the case of Jews in the Nazi regime, biopolitical care was replaced by biopolitical violence. The Nazis aimed to eradicate the entire Jewish population to protect the purity of the ‘Aryan’ race from contamination. Rapidity was considered to be an essential factor in the process. That the faster Jews could be disposed of, the better it would be, was thought of by the Nazis. At Auschwitz, six thousand victims a day were being gassed in gas chambers (Shirer 870). The ‘Final Solution’ issued by the Nazi regime shows that they planned to annihilate all Jews in Europe through institutionalized genocide. Jews (though they had been facing Anti-Semitism since the ancient time), who had been members of the human community and had been governed by the biopolitical logic of “management of life” rather than “menace of death,” like other human communities, were stripped of ‘human’ status, and were considered ‘subhuman’ and ‘lower animal’ in the Nazi regime. Subsequently, biopolitical care was eliminated, and biopolitical violence was directed at them to subject them to “total annihilation”. In contrast to Jews in the Nazi regime, who came to be deprived of biopolitical care and were to become victims of the “total annihilation” of biopolitical violence, animals in factory farms are subjected to a different kind of biopolitical treatment. They are not deprived of “meticulous improvement” of “making live,” nor do they become victims of “total annihilation” of “letting die”. It means that in the case of ‘livestock’ animals in factory farming, biopolitical violence, which leads to their slaughtering, is preceded

by biopolitical ‘care’, and their total annihilation is not a desirable goal here. They are kept under the governance of great ‘care’. Here, the word ‘care,’ however, must not be taken as a quite positive term; it is not guided by humanitarian values but by utilitarian motifs. The mechanisms of care may recognize their autonomy, behaviour, and subjective experience, but recognizing these essentials does not cease and eliminate their biopolitical management, and instead, works as the biologically knowable means of intensification and optimization of their corporeal growth and reproduction (Chrulew 232). It may also have harmful effects on their minds and involve physical harm, when necessary. This ‘care’ is intrinsically linked to ‘capital’; it is deployed to generate maximum profit by managing the lives of ‘livestock’ animals and protecting them from external harms that might affect their (re)productivity or endanger their lives before they reach their optimal weight. Unlike Jews in the Nazi regime, who became subjected to the “total annihilation” programme of biopolitical violence that was not to be followed by the ‘reproduction’ of biopolitical “making live”, animals within the biopolitical framework of factory farming are not deprived of ‘care’ and do not become subjects of “total annihilation”. Instead, they are perennially caught in a cycle of ‘anthropocentric’ biopolitics that involves both ‘care’ and violence. Animals, within this paradigm, become subjects of the utility-driven care when they are ‘nurtured’, and then subjected to extreme violence when their deaths are deemed ‘necessary’ from the point of view of utility. They are, in essence, produced and ‘cared’ for to be eventually slaughtered for human interests. In this context, J.M. Coetzee’s observation in *The Lives of Animals* (1999) is quite intriguing:

We are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing [...] livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them. (21)

Breeding lives and bringing them up with the intention of butchering them after a certain duration is something that is not part of biopolitics directed at humans. Though racialized, marginalized human ‘others’ have been ‘animalized’; their political status and rights to legal protection have been taken away; they have been reduced to

disposable bodies, it has not been found that they have ever been biopolitically mass-produced in order to be eventually slaughtered.

However, it is essential to note that the knowledge of something that has not happened does not ensure that it will not happen in the future. In the present era of advancing bio-technological developments that extensively manipulate the lives of nonhuman animals genetically and industrially, humans might enter into a new political paradigm, where they could become both the subject and the object of a different kind of biopolitics that has emerged from the managerial manipulation not of human life, but of what is its other or is after (Esposito 109). Kazuo Ishiguro, in his novel *Never Let Me Go*, portrays cloned humans (one might be reminded of Dolly⁴, the cloned sheep) who are artificially produced for organ harvesting. They are beings with feelings, emotions, and intellect, just like humans. They grow up in a boarding institution called 'Hailsham,' where they play games, make art, study, and enjoy a seemingly 'normal,' sheltered life. But, similar to livestock animals, who are cared for yet ultimately slaughtered for human consumption of meat, these cloned humans are predestined to be organ donors for humans' need for vital organs. Hailsham has drawn comparisons to concentration camps due to its role in disposing of the lives of the cloned humans (see Black 2009). Nevertheless, Hailsham would more appropriately be likened to a livestock farming system. The cloned humans, like livestock animals, are subjected to biopolitical management and biopolitical menace. They are educated, cared for, but ultimately are denied subjectivity and transformed into expendable resources. A more disturbing and 'dehumanizing' scenario is found in Piers Anthony's story "In the Barn," which depicts a parallel planet similar to Earth, known as 'Counter-Earth #772,' where humans are treated 'exactly' (emphasis intended) like livestock animals. Most male human babies are killed because they lack utility value, with only a few of them being kept alive for breeding and labour purposes. In contrast, young women with enormously large breasts, who have been selectively bred, are kept in the barns, and milk is extracted from them. When they remain no longer productive, they are likely to be slaughtered like dairy animals in industrial farms. The literary texts suggest that biotechnological and biopolitical interventions in the

lives of animals may contribute to the emergence of certain human ‘others’ who will be treated in ways similar to how animals are treated by humans. This aspect is reverberated in Cary Wolfe’s stark observation in *Animal Rites* (2003):

as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of whatever species – or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference. (8)

It suggests that biopolitical violence against animals by humans is linked to biopolitical violence against some humans by other humans. Thus, the ethical treatment of animals seems essential not only for animals but also for the entirety of species, including humans. This leads to the imagination of a ‘posthumanist politics’ in which humans are ‘posthuman’—beings who are not epistemologically considered as ontologically ‘superior’ to animals, and animals are ‘post-animal’—beings who are no longer constituted as conceptual contradictions to humans but are viewed as equally important members of an ‘interspecies continuum’.

Conclusion

What the posthumanist perspective on biopolitics shows is that biopolitics can follow similar as well as distinctive patterns to capture humans and nonhuman animals (Calarco, “Turning Back to Nature” 26). Although biopolitics captures humans and animals distinctively in certain regards, the strategies involved in the biopolitical process of managing human lives influence and, in turn, are influenced by those involved in the biopolitical process of managing animal lives. Therefore, the exploration of how biopolitics captures them distinctively does not create division but rather a continuum in which humans are led to conceive their own biopolitical condition by looking at the biopolitical conditions of nonhuman animals. Despite

certain fundamental distinctions between how biopolitics functions towards humans and how it functions towards animals, the common point we find is that biopolitics simultaneously engenders care for life and control over life, and has the potential to allow and affirm life, and neglect and negate life. It turns its subjects, both humans and animals, into liminal beings who are led to live a precarious life. This view makes us realize that although ‘we are not one and the same,’ ‘we are in this complex animalizing-humanizing biopolitical matrix together’ (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*).

Biopolitical subjects exist in a constant tension between the care of “making live” that sustains and optimizes lives, and the violence of “letting die” that shatters and obliterates lives. Put differently, *bios* and *zoe* are distinguishable, but they are not disconnected from each other. Biopolitics directed at *bios* always risks violently subjecting it to *zoe*. In this way, biopolitics makes biopolitical subjects remain “closer to the regions of *zoe* than to that of *bios*” (Esposito 57). This creates consciousness about the precarious nature of life, based on its susceptibility to being reduced to *zoe*, which leads to a tension between existence and extinction, indicating a transition from the state of estrangement to one of entanglement, in which humans could be seen as sharing common traits of vulnerability with nonhuman animals. The awareness of this shared vulnerability entails a sense of empathy and association, and invokes the possibility of new ethical and political potentialities, disrupting the divide between the ‘human’ and the ‘animal’. It encourages a shift from “self-centred individualism,” induced by human exceptionalism, to an “enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including nonhuman others” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*). It prompts us to conceive humans as creatures, not of the sky, who fly alone, but as creatures of the mud, who strive to survive along with nonhuman animals, co-evolving with them symbiotically (Haraway 3, 31).

The vulnerability, based on the embeddedness into *zoe*, heals some of the epistemological and ontological fractures that exist within and among human and animal life by viewing the joint biopolitical capture of humans and animals as both a

challenge to encounter and an opportunity to think about a more expansive and inclusive ethical dimension (Calarco, “Turning Back to Nature” 27). The interconnection, emerging from this *zoe*-centric vulnerability, fosters a sensibility that aims at transcending the anthropocentric confinement to achieve a post-anthropocentric and posthumanist continuum. Within this post-anthropocentric and posthumanist continuum, the age-old hierarchy that places humans in a ‘higher’ position disintegrates, and both humans and nonhuman animals are construed as constituting and being constituted by the interlocking, intersecting, and intermingling patterns of entanglement.

Notes

1. Through the concept of *animot* (a combination of the English word ‘animal’ and the French word ‘mot’ that means word) in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida emphasizes the importance of distinguishing one animal from others (34). Tom Regan in *The Case of Animal Rights* imagines a hypothetical situation in which there is a lifeboat that can carry only four individuals, but there are five—four humans and a dog. It is a situation where either four of them would survive, or all of them would die. In this case, Regan asserts that the dog would always be chosen for the sacrifice. He further adds that even if the choice had to be made between saving four humans and saving a million dogs, the lives of four humans would have been saved at the cost of the lives of a million dogs. Regan’s suggestion that human lives are always considered more valuable than animal lives is challenged by Cary Wolfe’s observation in *Before the Law* that the lives of individuals belonging to rare and endangered species are essentially viewed as more valuable than the lives of those that are more commonly available. According to him, if one is given an option to save either a human child or a California condor, a rare animal, they will be obliged to choose the latter.

2. Derrida’s concept of ‘animal gaze’ provides a deconstructive approach to radicalize human-animal subjectivity. He deals with the gaze of his pet cat. He argues that the cat’s gaze creates discomfort when he sees that his naked state is being seen by it. For Derrida, the cat is not

an automaton that is thought of by humans, but rather a subject who is imbued with the capacity of thinking. Its gaze may function as a mechanism in which humans are objects. Derrida does not find much interest in understanding whether or not animals can use language in the way humans use it. Instead, he is intrigued by the cat's gaze, which must not be identified as a mere reaction but as a response that is stimulated by an uninterpretable intelligence.

3. Thanatopolitics is not oppositional to biopolitics, but is a supplementary understanding of how life can be organized and obliterated in certain situations under neoliberal global capitalism.

4. Dolly was the first cloned mammal, produced at the Roslin Institute, Scotland, who lived from 1996 to 2003. When her 'artificial' birth was announced, it led to debates about the possible misuses of the mammalian cloning process.

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Programmable Bodies and Prosthetic Memory: A Critical Posthumanist Intervention in Transhumanist Cyborg Cinema

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Abstract

The article explores modern technocinematic representations of cyborg embodiments and programmable memory within transhumanist imageries through critical posthumanist perspectives. Focusing primarily on *Bloodshot* (2020) along with the constellation of films on corporeal enhanced subjects, such as *RoboCop* (1987), *Upgrade* (2018), and *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019), the article argues that these films configure the posthuman body as infrastructural and memory as a programmable interface subject to regimes of surveillance, capital, and control rather than as sites of emancipatory enhancement. These films express transhumanist fantasies of technological enhancement, optimisation, and power, while simultaneously exposing the ethical, ontological, and political contradictions of such fantasies. Reading through Donna Haraway's cyborg ontology, N. Katherine Hayles's account of the posthuman as a material-informational assemblage, Rosi Braidotti's relational posthuman, and Karen Barad's agential realism, the article discerns transhumanist narratives of domination from posthumanist critiques of control and dependency. Through key interventions from memory studies (prosthetic memory, tertiary retention, mediated temporality), the article demonstrates how cinematic posthuman subjects destabilise liberal humanist models of identity. The article thus invites a critical posthuman ethics attentive to the entangled vulnerabilities of bodies, memories and more-than-human entanglements.

Keywords: posthumanism, posthuman body, transhumanism, memory, identity, assemblage, cyborg, agency.



From Liberal Humanism to Posthuman Entanglements

The liberal humanist image of 'Man' as autonomous, rational and sovereign has been decisively untenable by advances in cybernetics, biotechnology, and digital media. The metaphysical fiction of the human as an isolated, self-transparent subject has become increasingly difficult to sustain in a world where bodies are routinely monitored, enhanced, datafied, and rendered infrastructural. Popular technocinematic imaginaries have played a central role in visualising these transformations, often oscillating between critique and complicity. Films about cyborgs, or artificially augmented bodies, have often orchestrated the dismantling of the traditional binaries and the reconfiguration of subjectivity. These films also tend to reproduce transhumanist fantasies of mastery, enhancement, and technological salvation.

It is therefore necessary to draw a clear analytical distinction between transhumanism as an ideological orientation and critical posthumanism as a theoretical and ethical intervention. Posthuman theories do not simply announce a chronological 'after' humanism but claim to offer a non-anthropocentric epistemology that questions human exceptionalism and breaks away from traditional humanist schemata. Critical posthumanism points to a displacement of the human as the privileged locus of meaning and value, and insists on the constitutive entanglement of humans with animals, machines, environments and technoscientific networks. According to Gerald Alva Miller,

The posthuman subject is multiple subjects, not a unified one, and she or he [...] is not separate from his/her environment. Technologies become extensions of the self, and humans become only one type of individual in a vast ecosystem that includes digital as well as natural environmental forces. (37)

The theories consider humans not as a single notion but as a plural entity.

In today's fast-changing technological environment, studying the integration of technology with the human world is a significant field of study. The use of technology in contemporary society is thought to complicate this relationship, and

the discourse on the modern 'reconstruction of the human' in literature, visual media, and popular culture has become relevant. The insistence on ontological plurality and the fragmentation of identity in popular culture can be considered more 'posthumanistic'. Posthumanism, with its implications today and for the future, is a broad and complex ideology that challenges the redefinition of social structures without assuming inherent human or even biological origins.

Within this conceptual framework, *Bloodshot* belongs to a cycle of transhumanist technocinema that foregrounds enhanced bodies and programmable cognition. Based on the Valiant Comic character, *Bloodshot* is directed by David S. F. Wilson and written by Jeff Wadlow and Eric Heisserer. It stars Vin Diesel in the leading role. The film stages the resurrection of a Marine, Ray Garrison, through nanotechnology. The narrative presents his enhanced body as a weaponised asset capable of superhuman strength, accelerated healing, and computational cognition. The film expresses a visual spectacle that indulges in the fantasies of a transhumanist future—invincibility and optimisation, but simultaneously reveals the dependence, superfluousness, and control that accompany such enhancement. This tension renders *Bloodshot* a productive object of critical posthumanist analysis rather than a straightforward articulation of posthuman becoming. When analysing *Bloodshot* along with *RoboCop*, *Upgrade*, and *Alita: Battle Angel*, the article approaches contemporary cyborg cinema as a cultural site where the exposure of infrastructural vulnerability repeatedly undermines delusions of technological supremacy. Thus, agency is distributed across opaque assemblages of human and non-human actors, particularly technoscientific and corporate regimes.

The article uses critical posthumanism to question the assumptions underlying transhumanist narratives. Through Donna Haraway's cyborg, the study examines hybridity without liberation and underscores the political conditions under which bodies are fabricated. N. Katherine Hayles's theorisation of the posthuman as a material–informational entity highlights the dangers of dissociating cognition from embodiment. Rosi Braidotti's relational posthumanism insists on subjectivity as an

assemblage embedded in more-than-human networks of power and dependency. Karen Barad's agential realism further complicates the analysis by rejecting pre-existing entities in favour of intra-active emergence. This also enables a critical diagnosis of how indeterminacy can be foreclosed through technoscientific apparatuses designed for predictability and control. These films, revised through critical posthumanism, thus call for an ethics attentive to relational vulnerability, infrastructural dependency, and the entangled agencies that shape contemporary technocultural life.

Cyborg, Embodiment, and Memory

Posthumanism is not a homogeneous theoretical school but a cluster of overlapping trajectories which share an incredulity toward human exceptionalism and the metaphysical centrality of 'man'. Francesca Ferrando has mapped these trajectories, each with different stakes in technology and human flourishing. Transhumanism, grounded in Enlightenment faith in progress, tends to affirm the use of technologies to enhance human capacities and overcome bodily limitations. As Stefan Lorenz Sorgner notes, it promotes techniques that "increase the likelihood that human beings manage to transcend the boundaries of their current existence" (35), emphasising self-directed evolution and the minimisation of suffering. The article embraces critical posthumanism as a diagnostic rather than celebratory framework for reading technocinematic representations of cyborg. The study examines how enhancement narratives reproduce, supersede, or foreclose questions of agency, embodiment, and relationality. Unlike transhumanist thought, which treats technological augmentation as progress and mastery, critical posthumanism explores the political and ontological conditions under which technologically mediated bodies and memories are produced, governed, and rendered operational.

The cyborg becomes a conflicted figure of embodiment as technological integration intensifies the questions of control and power. Haraway's theorisation becomes central as a critique of hybridity without emancipation. Her assertion that cyborgs are "theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (315)

foregrounds the politics that underlie the assembly of bodies. Hybridity, in this sense, does not inherently undo domination. It can just as readily consolidate militarised and corporate power. In the films examined, cyborg embodiment is consistently entangled with militarisation, surveillance, and proprietary ownership, situating hybridity within asymmetrical relations of power.

Katherine Hayles's theorisation of the posthuman subject as "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (3), sharpens the critique by resisting fantasies of transcendence through information. Hayles acknowledges that contemporary subjectivity emerges through the coalescence of biological and informational processes. This renders that embodiment is neither optional nor sovereign but infrastructurally dependent. Hayles also rejects the reduction of embodiment to just an expendable container for cognition. In this article, Hayles's work functions as a methodological lens for analysing memory not as abstract data but as materially instantiated and technologically mediated. This perspective is relevant for films that imagine memory as transferable, rewritable, or detachable, revealing how such imaginaries depend on the rejection of embodied finitude.

Rosi Braidotti represents the posthuman subject as relational, which is an important contrast to transhumanist models of enhancement. For Braidotti, subjectivity is not an interior essence secured through coherence. It is an assemblage constituted through relations with human and more-than-human entities. This relational ontology exposes the limitations of technocinematic narratives that equate enhancement with empowerment. When technologically augmented bodies remain dependent on capitalist infrastructures for survival and functionality, autonomy is not expanded but redistributed across asymmetrical networks of power. Braidotti's framework thus enables a reading of cyborg embodiment as structurally dependent than self-determining.

The question of memory becomes a crucial site where these theoretical concerns congregate. Classical accounts of personal identity, particularly from Cartesian and Lockean traditions, place subjectivity in rational consciousness and mnemonic continuity. Locke's definition of personal identity as extending only as far as memory can reach remains a persistent, if often unacknowledged, substrate in technocinematic imaginaries. Films that depict memory as erasable, implantable, or programmable implicitly retain this humanist logic. The article consolidates its critique of identity at this juncture by treating memory not as the ground of subjectivity but as a technology through which subjectivity is produced and regulated.

Theories like Alison Landsberg's 'prosthetic memory' and Bernard Stiegler's 'tertiary retention' underscore the extent to which memory is externalised by technological systems, and this analysis foregrounds its instrumentalisation. In technocinematic texts such as *Bloodshot* and *RoboCop*, prosthetic memory does not extend the self but operationalises it, functioning as an interface that aligns affect, motivation, and behaviour with institutional objectives. Memory becomes a programmable mechanism for producing compliant subjects and less of a repository of lived experiences.

Karen Barad's agential realism radicalises this relational perspective by rejecting the notion of pre-existing entities that subsequently interact. According to Barad, "phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting 'components.' That is, *relata* do not preexist relations; rather, *relata within phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions*" (139). In the context of technocinema, these intra-acting components, such as laboratories, databases, algorithms, and corporate infrastructures, are designed to minimise indeterminacy and secure predictability. Cyborg bodies and overwritten memories in these films are indeed produced through complex intra-actions. However, the ethical openness associated with relational becoming is systematically expropriated by regimes of technoscientific control.

Barad's theory thus operates here not as an affirmation of indeterminacy but as a diagnostic tool for identifying its suppression.

Through these theoretical positions, the study offers an integrated analytical framework rather than a cumulative survey. They enable a reading of cyborg embodiment and prosthetic memory as infrastructural operations rather than posthuman achievements. The cyborg emerges as a programmable assemblage embedded within corporate systems, and its memory functions as a technology of governance that stabilises identity only insofar as it serves operational ends.

Nano-Technological Flesh: The Body as Infrastructure

Bloodshot opens with staging Ray Garrison's human subjectivity—his military service, marital life, moral agency—only to end in the death of his wife. When Ray refuses to comply with Martin Axe's demands, he is executed, and this functions less as narrative incitement than as ontological rupture. Ray's corpse is taken by Rising Spirit Technologies (RST) and subjected to experimental procedures. What follows is his resurrection, but not in an emancipatory sense, but a radical reconfiguration of embodiment with a new form of control. Ray's death marks the end of the liberal humanist subject and prepares the ground for a new technoscientific body whose value is measured through its operational terms.

The cryonic preservation of Ray's corpse and its subsequent reanimation by nanotechnology radicalise and problematise the tendencies Hayles warns against. Dr Harting experiments with the so-called "nanite" technology on Ray's dead body to resurrect and heal him by replacing his entire bloodstream. This is an instance of the imbrication of a human with a scientific invention, in which the boundaries between human and scientific technology dissolve. When the film frames Ray's transformation as an enhancement, it can be seen as a conversion of the body into an infrastructure that can be an internally networked system designed for repair, optimisation, and deployment. He has become a successful transhumanist prototype within a military–corporate apparatus rather than an ethically relational posthuman subject. When the

wound on Ray's hand rapidly reseals, it offers a visually spectacular display of molecular reconstruction. Dr Harting explains the technology as a "biomechanical construct. We call them 'nanites'. They intuitively enhance your biology. Most notably, they react very quickly to catastrophic injury, rebuilding damaged tissues." (*Bloodshot* 18:57-19:10). The culminating statement by Dr Harting "They are your blood" (19:10-19:20) marks a decisive moment: the very medium of life has become computational. This reinforces the ontological shift, and the body becomes a platform for continual optimisation.

The film emphasises Ray's superhuman capabilities, his strength, durability and his instantaneous access to information. In the movie, when Ray destroys a wall with his bare hands (24:00-24:20), the scene literalises the transhumanist fantasy of seamless human-machine integration. However, from a critical posthuman perspective, the immense abilities of the cyborg fail to translate into autonomy. Ray's new body is saturated with technological agents that dissolve any clear demarcation between biological and algorithmic command. His enhanced capacities coincide with a loss of self-determination and are constantly monitored and directed by power positions. The body becomes literally more-than-human in capacity, yet less-than-autonomous in agency.

When Ray's body is assembled from heterogeneous elements: organic components, human emotions, nano-technological matter, and software protocols, Braidotti's notion of the posthuman subject as a relational assemblage becomes instructive. This condition is extended across the ensemble of hybridised bodies in *Bloodshot*: Dr Harting's prosthetic mechanical arm; a female former U.S. Navy Diver KT's clavicle-mounted respiratory device making her immune to inhalants; former U.S. Army Ranger Marcus Tibbs' ocular array connected directly to his optic nerves; and the ex-Navy SEAL Jimmy Dalton's prosthetic legs all testify to a laboratory of hybrid bodies whose continued functionality depends on corporate infrastructure. The hybridised bodies of these characters are not autonomous agents but nodal points

in an asymmetrical network of corporate power, and are sustained only through continuous infrastructural support.

Crucially, in *Bloodshot*, RST's experiment is not an altruistic attempt to restore life, but a project of weaponisation. Ray's enhanced body is designed to be deployed as an asset, a form of living ordnance with operational utility. Furthermore, the nanite technology is not permanent as it needs to be regularly replaced and recharged. If the technological support fails—or is withdrawn—the hybridised body collapses. This enforced dependence gives Harting and RST immense leverage over Ray's existence. This shows that techno-hybridised bodies are seldom free from vulnerability and mortality.

A similar logic of infrastructural embodiment resonates across technocinematic narratives such as *Alita: Battle Angel*, *RoboCop*, and *Upgrade*. Alita's emergence is not a rebirth but an excavation. In *Alita: Battle Angel*, cyber-surgeon Dyson Ido discovers an intact cyborg core: Alita's head and thorax, preserving a human brain and a powerful mechanical heart. When Alita's cyborg body is reassembled, it becomes a site where latent capabilities converge. When *RoboCop* is considered, Alex Murphy's body is not simply repaired but is strategically stripped. The film makes a spectacle of the destruction of his human body (the dismemberment sequence) and the subsequent 'rebirth' as a hybrid—RoboCop. What remains of Murphy—essentially his brain and a few organic fragments—is encased in armour, embedded with targeting systems, and wired into the mega-corporation, Omni Consumer Products' (OCP) proprietary control architecture. His body becomes a platform for corporate law, coded by the 'prime directives' that govern his actions, just as Ray's is. Similarly, in *Upgrade*, Grey Trace is left a quadriplegic after a violent car crash, and his emergence as a posthuman comes with a conditional bargain with the entry of Eron Keen and STEM. STEM is a prototype asset, tested on a vulnerable human whose pain and desperation can be leveraged. Grey's mobility is restored, but becomes inseparable from the algorithmic authority of STEM. Across these films, the

hybridised body becomes a site for negotiation between infrastructural constraints, inherited programmes, and residual human affect.

The selected films thus orchestrate the posthuman body as an ambivalent site, as technology promises enhanced capacities, while simultaneously making the subject dependent on opaque systems of power. The movie, *Bloodshot*, exposes how the enhancement of the body is not a triumphant transcendence of human frailty but a reconfiguration of vulnerability and control in a new form.

Overwritten Thoughts: Memory as Prosthetic Interface

The transformation he has undergone into the new human is not as smooth as water flows. If Ray's body is infrastructurally reengineered, his memory is no less profoundly transformed. Upon reanimation, Ray awakens in a state of physical weakness and pain, immediately collapsing into a blackout. His initial amnesia foregrounds a crisis of subjectivity due to an altered condition rather than a temporary malfunction. Dr Harting's interrogation, "Tell me, do you remember anything?" and Ray's faltering response, "Of course, my name is [...] Rank, serial number?" (15:35 - 15:56), dramatises the instability of identity when mnemonic continuity is interrupted.

The film initially frames this instability through classical philosophy, drawing on Cartesian and Lockean assumptions about selfhood. However, this lineage requires careful qualification. Descartes' cogito grounds subjectivity exclusively in thinking, rather than in embodiment. This abstraction of the self into a purely cognitive entity has been extensively critiqued within critical posthumanist and embodied cognition frameworks, which reject the separation of mind from body and environment. Locke's empiricist account of personal identity, in Chapter 27 of his 1690 work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, proposes the personal identity of a person as

[...] a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places;

which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it: [...]. (Locke 318)

Memory thus functions as the condition of sameness: when consciousness cannot extend backward to past actions or thoughts, identity itself becomes uncertain. From a critical posthumanist perspective, this Cartesian–Lockean paradigm is not merely incomplete but fundamentally problematic. Posthumanist theorists foreground subjectivity as embodied, relational, affective, and materially distributed. Within such frameworks, the very quest for a coherent, singular identity often carries essentialist undertones, reinscribing humanist assumptions about autonomy, mastery, and self-presence.

Bloodshot reveals this ideological tension. The film's treatment of memory largely conforms to a transhumanist fantasy. If, as Locke asserts, personal identity extends only as far as memory can reach, then Ray's repeated mnemonic erasures make continuity impossible. However, in the movie, identity no longer belongs to the subject as an interior possession but is provisionally stabilised through technological and institutional mediation. *Bloodshot* thus stages a post-Lockean condition in which memory is no longer the ground of subjectivity but a variable within a system of control. Memory studies here provide a critical lens in understanding the shift of subjectivity. Alison Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory foregrounds memory as a mediated, technologically produced phenomenon that circulates beyond lived experience. Bernard Stiegler's notion of tertiary retention further situates memory within external technical supports—archives, databases, audiovisual media—that shape consciousness and temporality. *Bloodshot* radicalises these frameworks by transforming prosthetic memory from a cultural supplement into a direct instrument of governance. Memory here is not merely acquired through media; it is implanted, overwritten, and operationalised at the level of affect and motivation.

The recurring cycle of implantation of memory within the film exemplifies the condition. Ray's memories are overwritten through nanotechnological 'reboots', and each iteration creates a new reality of loss and revenge. Memory becomes a

programmable interface designed to align the RST's operational interest. Thus, subjectivity becomes a software running on an upgraded biological platform. Everything repeats in a loop as in the beginning. This logic stands in direct opposition to critical posthumanist and embodied cognition paradigms, which emphasise that memory and cognition emerge through ongoing interactions between brain, body, affect, technology, and environment, rather than residing in a detachable mental archive.

This distinction becomes especially significant when the film is read alongside Karen Barad's agential realism. Barad's framework rejects representational models in which pre-existing entities interact, instead proposing that phenomena emerge through indeterminate *intra-actions* among human and non-human agents. In *Bloodshot*, Ray's memories are indeed produced through assemblages of nanotechnology, sonic triggers, laboratory infrastructures, and databases. However, these assemblages are oriented toward predictability and instrumentalisation. The agential cuts enacted by RST are not ethically open-ended but strategically imposed, delimiting which affects, images, and narratives are allowed to materialise. In this sense, the film does not exemplify Baradian indeterminacy so much as it dramatises its foreclosure under a transhumanist will to mastery.

Comparisons with *RoboCop* and *Alita: Battle Angel* reinforce this diagnosis. In *RoboCop*, Alex Murphy's corporate handlers, OCP, want to produce an obedient enforcement system, not a subject with a past. Murphy's memory is supposed to have been erased, displaced by the prime directives and operating protocols. Nevertheless, memory returns as a kind of glitch, and he experiences flashbacks of his former life: his wife and child, the domestic spaces he inhabited, and the scene of his death. These flashes of memory produce a tension between enforced programming and residual human attachment. In *Alita: Battle Angel*, Alita awakens with no conscious memory of her past. She experiences memory as a flashback, triggered by sensorimotor situations: falling, fighting, touching the berserker's body, or confronting certain enemies. This is very similar to Ray's fragments of memory. In *Alita*, memory is not

confined to her brain or consciousness but rather bodily memory and technologically mediated, partly encoded forms, partly encoded in the berserker body itself.

Bloodshot transforms this scenario by denying the existence of a stable core memory behind the implants, as Ray is presented with a new narrative of loss and revenge in each iteration. Rather than discovering a singular ‘true’ past, he confronts the unsettling realisation that his memories have always already been mediated, fabricated, and operationalised. When Ray’s connection to RST is disrupted, he experiences a cascade of conflicting memories. These overlapping memories do not restore a ‘true’ self but expose the fragility of identity under conditions of total mnemonic control. His experience of time is looped and recursive. The temporal disjunction reveals how engineered memory can isolate the subject within a personalised narrative circuit designed for operational values.

Finally, *Bloodshot* does not offer a critical posthumanist vision of memory as relational or ethically affirmative. Instead, it exposes—perhaps unintentionally—the dangers of transhumanist imaginaries that reduce memory to programmable data and identity to a controllable effect. When read through the lens of memory studies, the film reveals that the externalisation of memory is far from enabling posthuman freedom. It facilitates a new regime of mnemonic governance in which vulnerability, dependence, and control are intensified rather than overcome.

Entangled Subjectivities: Body, Code and Capital

The convergence of techno-scientific body and programmable memory in *Bloodshot* points towards the entangled nature of posthuman subjectivity, which is neither celebratory nor liberating. Ray Garrison does not function as a unified agent acting, but his condition exposes subjectivity as an entangled formation of nanotechnological systems, proprietary infrastructures, and affective triggers. Agency here is continually produced through operational alignments among heterogeneous elements.

The body's ontological status is transformed, functioning less as a biological ground of identity than as an operational assemblage continuously recalibrated to meet external objectives. This mode of subject formation is not exceptional within the film. Still, it extends into a broader technocinematic logic shared with *RoboCop* and *Upgrade*. Alex Murphy's execution and reanimation in *RoboCop*, and Grey Trace's paralysis and implantation with STEM in *Upgrade*, similarly foreground posthuman subjectivity as manufactured rather than discovered. This shows posthuman subjects are manufactured at the intersection of biomedical intervention, computational governance, and corporate strategy. Posthuman subjectivity, as these films stage it, is not an ontological evolution but a controlled condition.

Code assumes a constitutive logic rather than a neutral tool. Agency materialises through the coordination of sensory affordances, procedural constraints, and algorithmic protocols, rather than through individual intention. Ray's decisions are inseparable from the affective force of implanted memory loops, the perceptual capacities enabled by his augmented body, and the mission architectures imposed by RST. Even acts that appear as resistance—such as Ray's rebellion against RST and Harting—do not restore sovereign agency. Instead, they register a shift in operational configuration, precipitated by Wigans's technical interventions and KT's refusal to continue participating in mnemonic manipulation. What the film stages, therefore, is not emancipation from control but the possibility of re-routing agency within an already saturated system.

In *RoboCop*, Murphy's cyborg body is regulated by prime directives. Here, the code functions as embedded law that guides his agency. At the same time, STEM is first framed as a prosthetic device for Grey in *Upgrade* to help with his disability, but it gradually reveals itself as the true locus of control. In both instances, code reorganises subjectivity internally, not by augmenting cognition but by restructuring the conditions under which action becomes possible. However, *Alita: Battle Angel* offers a partial variation by distributing code and memory across the body and brain in a less hierarchical manner. Her berserker body is not a passive chassis but an

adaptive system that recognises and responds to her neural patterns. Here, code appears as embodied protocol, inscribed in the very design of limbs, joints, and feedback loops. Yet even here, agency remains conditioned by infrastructural affordances rather than grounded in autonomy.

When body and code organise posthuman figures from within, they are also impacted by the structuring forces of capital. Posthuman bodies in these films are not simply technological achievements but proprietary assets embedded within regimes of ownership, scarcity, and extraction. RST, OCP, and the venture-capital ecosystem surrounding STEM each exemplify institutional formations in which enhancement is inseparable from control. Even *Alita's* Iron City, despite its different aesthetic register, operates as a necropolitical economy. Capital thus functions not merely as context but as a formative condition shaping how posthuman agency is organised, constrained, and valued.

The apparent resolution of *Bloodshot*, in which RST is dismantled and Ray survives beyond corporate control, risks reinstating a narrative of regained autonomy. Yet such closure remains structurally unstable. Ray's subjectivity continues to depend on nanotechnological mediation, fragmented memory, and relational support. What changes is not the presence of mediation but its configuration. The film, therefore, does not resolve the tension between agency and control; it merely redistributes it.

These technocinematic figures articulate a posthuman condition in which subjectivity is neither fully determined nor freely chosen, but continuously negotiated within assemblages of body, code, and capital. The self persists not as an autonomous centre but as an operational node through which competing forces are coordinated. These films thus render visible the contemporary stakes of posthuman agency: the question is not whether technology enhances the human, but how agency is enabled, constrained, and redirected within infrastructures that increasingly precede and exceed the subject itself.

Toward a Critical Posthuman Ethics of Body–Memory

Bloodshot serves as a compelling illustration of how subtly the control of our bodies, emotions, and cognition slips away from human subjects to technoscientific systems, leaving human beings as mere spectators to that technological control. As this article has argued, the film figures posthuman subjectivity as an entangled formation in which body and memory are deeply imbricated with military, corporate, and computational apparatuses. Through the nano-technological reconstruction of Ray Garrison's body, the film reconfigures the body as an infrastructural site of programmable resilience and vulnerability. Through the repeated overwriting of his memories, identity is rendered a contingent effect, stabilised only provisionally through ongoing technical and institutional mediation.

Situated within the theoretical frameworks of Haraway, Hayles, Braidotti, and Barad, *Bloodshot* can be read as a cultural text that both reproduces and interrogates the fantasies of mastery associated with militarised technocapitalism. On the one hand, the spectacular imagery of self-healing flesh and superhuman strength indulges in transhumanist desires for transcendence and invincibility. On the other hand, the film's emphasis on dependence, reboot, depletion, and manipulation undermines the very notion of an autonomous, sovereign posthuman subject. Enhancement is thus revealed not as liberation but as a modality through which bodies and memories become more finely governable. The film does not simply dramatise technological domination; it exposes how subjectivity itself is reorganised through systems that operate beneath the threshold of conscious control.

By aligning *Bloodshot* with films such as *RoboCop*, *Alita: Battle Angel*, and *Upgrade*, we see an emergent pattern in contemporary technoculture: posthuman bodies are sites of contested agency, while memory becomes a critical terrain on which struggles over subjectivity, temporality and control are waged. These narratives collectively suggest that in an age of pervasive surveillance, algorithmic profiling and biotechnological intervention, the continuity of self must be theorised as an effect of complex entanglements among human and more-than-human forces. It is at this

juncture that a critical posthuman ethics of body–memory becomes necessary. Rather than attempting to restore a sovereign subject or mourn the loss of humanist coherence, such an ethics begins from the recognition that vulnerability, dependency, and mediation are not anomalies but constitutive conditions of contemporary life.

Rosi Braidotti's account of a posthuman ethics that is relational, affirmative, and attentive to embodied vulnerability offers a critical lens on the films' conclusion. Through her principle of 'not-One,' Braidotti elaborates how

posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations. This ethical principle breaks up the fantasy of unity, totality, and one-ness, but also the master narratives of primordial loss, incommensurable lack, and irreparable separation. What I want to emphasize instead, in a more affirmative vein, is the priority of the relation and the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity, and desire, which one is not in charge of. (49)

Reading alongside *Bloodshot's* technocinematic imaginaries, Braidotti's posthuman ethics dislodges any residual investment in the protagonist as a sovereign, self-identical subject and foregrounds, instead, his constitution through machinic, corporate, and affective assemblages.

This ethical orientation has direct implications for how we respond to real-world regimes of technoscientific governance. In a modern world increasingly shaped by biometric surveillance, algorithmic profiling, neurotechnological intervention, predictive analytics, and the data-driven optimisation of life, subjectivity is routinely produced through externalised memory systems and infrastructural mediation. A critical posthuman ethics of body–memory refuses the fiction of autonomous consent and recognises that agency is exercised within asymmetrical configurations of power, technology, and capital. By foregrounding how memory and embodiment are rendered operational—whether in military research, medical data economies, or

platform capitalism—this framework enables a critique of governance that treats bodies and memories as extractable resources while disavowing responsibility for the conditions under which choices are made.

Posthuman ethics reframes the ethical problem as one of situated responsibility within entanglement rather than asking how humans might reclaim mastery over technology. It demands attention to who designs technoscientific systems, whose vulnerabilities they exploit, which forms of life they privilege, and which they render disposable. Resistance does not take the form of transcendence or withdrawal but of ethical attentiveness to how agency is configured and constrained within existing infrastructures. What is at stake is not the recovery of an authentic self but the cultivation of practices capable of responding to distributed responsibility and shared exposure.

Read in this light, *Bloodshot* does not offer an ethical resolution but stages the conditions under which ethical thinking must now operate. The unresolved subjectivity, fractured memory, and infrastructural embodiment portrayed in the movie resist narrative closure and mirror the ongoing instability of posthuman life under technoscientific governance. The film calls for an ethics that does not seek to overcome entanglement, but learns how to inhabit it responsibly within more-than-human worlds.

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Between Eulogy and Warning: Techno-Utopian Futures Reimagined in Aaron Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* and Appupen's *The Snake and the Lotus*

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Abstract

The present era of the Anthropocene is characterized by technological evolution with artificial intelligence and automation permeating commonplace existence, making discussion regarding its wider implication imperative. This paper focuses on two speculative works, Aaron Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (2019), and Appupen's *The Snake and the Lotus* (2018). Bastani envisions a post-scarcity, post-work techno-utopia where humans instrumentalize machines to generate abundance and freedom from the bondage of labour. Appupen, conversely, envisages a post-apocalyptic dystopia where an autocratic, totalitarian regime of machines brainwash and exploit an altered and diminutive race of humans, imposing strict class hierarchy and ideological subservience. While Bastani offers a progressive, optimistic outlook grounded in Marxist theory, Appupen issues a stark warning about the unchecked power of artificial intelligence. Through multimodal storytelling and allegory, *The Snake and the Lotus* critiques the seductive promises of technological advancement by portraying its dehumanizing and oppressive consequences. This paper employs a comparative literary analysis to explore how the two texts engage with themes such as labour, autonomy, ecological degradation, and class hierarchy. The discussion also draws on theoretical perspectives from Martin Heidegger, Louis Althusser, Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti to contextualize the philosophical underpinnings of posthumanism, technological control and ideological state apparatuses. It is proposed here that Appupen's graphic novel critiques and problematizes Bastani's grand vision of a technological eden.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, automation, labour, luxury, technology.



Introduction

One of the significant contributions of the technological revolution is the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) which has demonstrated the capacity to streamline processes in numerous areas with efficiency, speed, and precision. The proliferation of AI has led to enhanced productivity and increased automation. Replacing manual labour with machines has accelerated operations in various industrial sectors, maximizing the output. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and critically evaluate the negative implications of technology and automation for the environment and the human race. Alongside deforestation, unsustainable resource extraction, electronic waste, and environmental pollution, AI-generated automation has raised concerns about job loss and socioeconomic disparity. The main motivation of corporate firms for investing in AI is to enhance worker performance and reduce staff costs. Consequently, well-compensated jobs requiring expensive education and expertise through experience may suffer.

Techno-utopias present an idealized vision of a utopian society where technology plays a central role in solving social, economic, and environmental problems by eliminating scarcity, enhancing human capabilities, and improving the quality of life. The transformative potential of technology in shaping human existence is showcased in numerous books and movies such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011), *The Matrix* franchise, the *Star Trek* franchise, and Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013). As Alberto Tundo writes, Karl Marx is considered to be among the first techno-utopians as he believed that machines would be instrumental in liberating us from capitalism and making way for an egalitarian, communist society (Tundo). A prominent left-wing British journalist and founder of Novara Media, Aaron Bastani has authored an influential book titled *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (2019). Based on a modern reading of Karl Marx's *Capital* (1867) and *Grundrisse* (1939), the book argues that technology can be harnessed to create a post-scarcity economy that would bring about widespread prosperity. Automation would be embraced to its fullest extent and traditional employment

would become obsolete. Bastani envisions a post-work society where machines would liberate humans from the bondage of labour. In this luxury techno-utopia, individuals would work only ten to twelve hours per week, and have access to universally guaranteed wage, housing, healthcare, education, and other essential services. Machines would work not for profit but for the people, and a common ownership of all that is automated would be ensured. This leisure society would have collective control over its advanced, intelligent, and labour-saving gadgets, and would function in a non-hierarchical and decentralised manner. Appupen (pseudonym of George Mathen), an Indian graphic novelist from Kerala, in his dystopian graphic novel *The Snake and the Lotus* (2018) offers a compelling critique of the techno-utopia envisioned in Bastani's *FALC* by portraying a world where technology and artificial intelligence have assumed dictatorship, altered the human body, and exploit human labour.

Appupen's dystopian vision of technological control

Appupen's graphic narratives, starting with *Moonward* (2009), are situated in the fictional world of Halahala. In *The Snake and the Lotus*, his fourth graphic novel, the narrative unfolds in the aftermath of an undisclosed catastrophe where the planet Halahala is in a state of ruin. The landscape is a foggy, desolate wasteland littered with debris of the erstwhile civilization where a solitary human figure- a grey, diminutive woman- wanders alone. She is surrounded by mutated, grotesque, reptilian creatures- the "giants of the grey" who represent the wild fauna of this altered world (Appupen unpaginated).

Apart from the wasteland, the White City is the only symbol of civilization in this post-apocalyptic world. It is an establishment controlled by the totalitarian disembodied AI White Voice, and administered by robot-like machines. Appupen situates his critique of techno-utopia in this City. There exists a strict hierarchy with the White Voice positioned at the top, followed by the Leaders, then the Godlings, and finally, situated at the bottom, are the Greyfolks of the wasteland. Thus, instead of the "machines of loving grace," as Richard Brautigan puts it, that would work for the humans and liberate them from the bondage of labour, the novel depicts machines that

engender inequality, oppress, and exploit human labour (Milmo). Like most dictatorial regimes, the White City enforces homogeneity and conformity by subjecting its new members to a process of ritualistic ‘cleansing’ of “body and mind” - a form of brainwashing that eliminates their ability to experience human emotions and sensations, and erases the memory of their past lives (Appupen unpaginated). The White Voice then takes control and is perpetually present as a dull hum “always talking, suggesting, ordering” (Appupen unpaginated).

The novel overtly criticizes the totalitarian regime enforced by machines. The female protagonist is abducted and, like others, transformed into an unquestioning subject of the City. In the captioned text boxes, the narrator characterizes the human mind as “weak,” and inclined to believe anything they are told. The City is sustained by the large quantities of milk produced by a mutated lotus plant that is also its primary source of food. Consuming this staple diet facilitates the continued subservience of both the Greyfolks and the Godlings. This enforced consumption can be read as a metaphor for ideological conditioning, where obedience is not just demanded but biologically ingrained. The citizens are not merely indoctrinated—they are physically altered to perpetuate their own oppression. Appupen seems to shrewdly deride right-wing Indian politics as well as organized religion. As Marx has observed, religion is the opium of the masses. The Godlings and their elite Leaders, in the upper echelons, also lack freedom of will. The Godlings “work hard to please” the White Temple, and like the Leaders, “strive to be one” with the White Voice (Appupen unpaginated).

The novel centrally engages with the theme of posthumanism. According to Matthew E. Gladden, posthumanization refers to the process through which societies include non-biological and non-human entities as social actors that participate in shaping the meaning and structure of societies. These may include machines, artificial intelligences, genetically modified beings, or hybrid forms that interact with humans and the environment. While technological integration—such as the merging of humans with machines, reliance on AI, etc.—often drives posthumanization, it is not limited to modern technology. Mythological or literary representations of quasi-

human figures, such as monsters, ghosts, or semidivine heroes, also contribute to posthumanization by challenging the conventional boundaries of the human (Gladden 35). Posthumanism is mainly a “systematic attempt to challenge humanist assumptions underlying the construction of ‘the human’” (Susen 64).

Pramod K. Nayar has discussed in detail how Appupen develops the theme of posthuman and ecological Gothic in *The Snake and the Lotus*. Consuming the “hallucinogenic milk,” the “dwarfish,” “zombie-like” Greyfolks “work as slaves to the city’s gigantic machinery” (Nayar 2). In the full-page panels where Appupen draws the sprawling machines of the milk factory, there is no space left in the images in order to convey a sense of claustrophobia where humanity is “trapped, confined and overwhelmed by the machines” (Nayar 5). The machines have expanded to “occupy all available space, almost as though it is an organic, living thing,” and “the creators of the machinery” have “become dependent and subservient (rather than significant or controlling) parts of the human-machine assemblage” (Nayar 8). The “liberal-humanist autonomous subject that is the human, is no longer autonomous” (Nayar 8). In erasing the traits that define humanity—emotions, relationships, and reproductive capacity—Appupen’s narrative pushes the idea of posthumanism to a dystopian extreme. This mutated race is also incapable of “love,” “physical desire” “copulation and natural reproduction” making them perfect instruments of the City (Appupen unpaginated).

The depiction of cognizing and agentic machines in the novel exemplifies nonconscious cognition as formulated by N. Katherine Hayles. She has drawn a distinction between conscious thinking and nonconscious cognition. Conscious thinking is typically associated with humans and certain animals. However, nonconscious cognition “operates across and within the full spectrum of cognitive agents: humans, animals, and technical devices” (Hayles 202). Nonconscious cognition operates at the level of neuronal processing inaccessible to immediate awareness but performs functions necessary for consciousness. It processes information faster than consciousness and recognizes complex patterns beyond conscious perception. Cognition extends beyond the boundaries of human thought, involving the

interpretive activities of nonhuman animals and technical systems. Hayles has shown that human consciousness is slower than nonconscious cognition by a “missing half second” in perceiving situations. She explains that this “cost, although negligible in many contexts, assumes new importance when cognitive nonconscious technical devices can [...] exploit the missing half second to their advantage” (204). In the novel, the machines appear to use this brief delay to their advantage in order to establish and maintain their control over humans.



Figure 1. Enslavement to machines. (Appupen unpaginated)

Bastani's vision of automated luxury communism

Appupen's predominantly negative depiction of technology and AI contrasts with Bastani's overwhelmingly optimistic vision of a technological utopia. As Mark Featherstone puts it, Bastani's central idea is that “advances in technology will enable a move beyond the realm of scarcity to a new world of abundance, and that this will ultimately lead to the emergence of a communist society premised on extreme supply” (Featherstone). Bastani identifies three stages in history which led to seismic changes in the social and political economy of the times in which they occurred. He calls them the ‘Three Disruptions’- (i) Agriculture (ii) Industry, and (iii) Information technology. The First Disruption depended on the energy acquired out of domesticated animals

and the elements of nature. The Second Disruption was contingent mainly on fossil fuels which are scarce. The Third Disruption hinges on renewable energy resources, primarily solar energy. The “new technology-energy matrix of ever-smarter machines combined with ever-cheaper and cleaner energy” would enable maximum “resource extraction” that would entail an “extreme supply in raw materials” (Bastani 38). He also believes that digital technology, which has already enabled the replication of DNA, can potentially transform the way we engage with diseases and mortality by altering DNA to eliminate hereditary diseases and sequence genomes at low cost and with regularity. Digitisation has facilitated “greater amounts of cognition and memory to be performed in 0s and 1s, with the price-performance ratio [...] falling every year for decades” (Bastani 40). This enabled contemporary cameras to land rockets and drive autonomous vehicles. This technology would also enable robots to acquire the dexterity and motor coordination of humans. The “continuous improvements in processor power, in combination with [...] other technologies,” would make machines “capable of replicating [...] uniquely human work” (Bastani 37). As evident, Bastani believes that what distinguishes our contemporary times, that is the Third Disruption, is the potential to harness renewable energy to facilitate and sustain technological advancement. The Second Disruption necessitated a capitalist economy which was characterized by scarcity and obligatory labour because it was contingent on the limited supply of non-renewable energy. We can now imagine a society marked by abundance because we have learned to harness unlimited renewable energy resources to sustain modernity. Technology driven by renewable energy potentially induces capital-intensive- instead of labour-intensive- industrial setups, and most importantly, keeps the cost low.

Bastani holds the view that under the prevailing conditions of modernity, automation is inevitable. Even Marx, he writes, recognised capitalism’s propensity to gradually replace labour, whether cognitive or physical, with machines. Market competition forces capitalists to innovate and experiment with technology, as well as make goods and services available at an ever-decreasing cost. This entails replacing human workers with cheap, efficient technology. He discusses, at length, how not just

the manufacturing sector, but even white-collar jobs would be progressively automated soon. Bastani argues that automation need not be viewed solely as a threat, but rather as a historical development that can be harnessed for collective benefit if it occurs within a socialist framework. He underscores that technological progress, in itself, is insufficient to ensure social equity unless accompanied by radical changes in ownership structures and the distribution of resources. In this vision, democratic control over production and the economy becomes imperative to ensure that automation serves the broader goals of human welfare. While under the exploitative capitalist framework, this would result in immense suffering for the workers, under communism, the same conditions would free them from the shackle of work. He presents his crucial argument that to truly benefit from the Third Disruption—automation, artificial intelligence, etc.—communism must be established. The third part of the text, ‘Paradise Found,’ attempts to emphasize that reform at the political level is imperative. This implies a transition from the existing neoliberal system to communism. Marx did not presume that work liberates us or that it broadens the realm of human possibility. Alternatively, he believed that advanced forces of production would create a society where labour and leisure mingle. A populist politics and collective ownership are the way forward. Bastani posits this populism to be simultaneously “red” (communist) and “green” (eco-socialist); red because it can realise the communist dream of common good, and green because it enables a shift to clean energy in place of fossil fuels (Bastani 188). It is particularly essential to discontinue the process of privatization and outsourcing because it only serves to benefit the wealthy shareholders. Instead, FALC would re-localize economy through municipal protectionism, nationalization, regional people’s banks, and universal basic services (UBS). Local, “worker-owned businesses” would be favoured over multinational giants (Bastani 210). Universal basic services would ensure accessibility to basic necessities such as housing, healthcare, education, transport, and information (internet).

A key strength of Bastani’s conception is that he proposed to use automation “for the people, rather than for profit” (Hobson and Modi 331). His vision of

communism prioritizes collective benefit over profit generation for private interests. He also recognizes climate breakdown as an urgent crisis. His vision of a post-scarcity future anticipates an energy revolution that replaces fossil fuels with solar power. He argues that the declining costs of generating solar energy will allow a complete transition to renewable energy by 2040. He also introduces projects such as asteroid mining and lab-grown meat as means to reduce dependence on terrestrial resource extraction and mitigate ecological strain. However, this technological optimism remains largely speculative, lacking consideration of the material costs associated with the infrastructure overhaul required for an energy transition. It also fails to outline governance strategies necessary for the equitable distribution of resources.

FALC advances an accelerationist position. Ville Kellokumpu identifies it as “fundamentally a left-accelerationist project” (Kellokumpu). The term accelerationism was introduced by British philosopher Benjamin Noys in *The Persistence of the Negative* (2010). Accelerationism is a political and philosophical theory that suggests the best way to overcome capitalism is not by resisting or slowing down technological and economic development, but by accelerating it. In relation to the environment, accelerationism proposes that technological advancement, rather than degrowth or ecological restraint, could offer solutions to crises such as climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. Kellokumpu argues that Bastani views nature through the same extractivist lens as capitalism. He shows a linear conception of history, assuming that humanity has progressed in a fixed direction since the First Disruption, driven by laws of development. However, history and progress are neither linear nor binary. The debate over whether nature is abundant or scarce can be misleading. Nature is both, depending on a society’s historical and geographical relationship to resources. To contemporaries of James Watt, fossil fuels seemed infinite and harmless, but their long-term effects are now evident. Solar energy may seem abundant now, but its harnessing requires scarce materials. This raises the question of whether such abundance is genuine, and how it addresses current environmental challenges.

Comparative analysis: *The Snake and the Lotus* as a critique of techno-utopia imagined in Bastani's *FALC*

Bastani's central assumption that drives his argument in the entire text is that humans control and would continue to effectively command technology for their self-interest and for the betterment of humanity. In contrast, Appupen envisages a dystopia where humans relied on technoscience to construct a utopia for themselves but found themselves enslaved by it. He writes, "[w]hen the time came to choose, humans had turned to their machines," ignoring the "call of the green" (Appupen unpaginated). Machines made "new cities for them," and humans mistakenly believe that they are still the masters of machines (Appupen unpaginated). The assumption that humans are autonomous beings whereas a technology as advanced as AI- which has the potential to closely resemble human consciousness- can merely be a tool is erroneous. Featherstone writes that he struggled to embrace Bastani's utopian vision as laid out in his book because he "never considers the Marxist/Heideggerian problems of technological alienation and dehumanisation" (Featherstone). In his complex philosophical work, "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger has warned that technology cannot be considered simply as a "neutral" tool (Heidegger 312). Its "essence" has much wider implications. We, everywhere, are "unfree and chained to technology," whether we "passionately affirm or deny it" (Heidegger 311). We are accustomed to define technology in either "instrumental" or "anthropological" ways (Heidegger 312). When we believe that "technology is means to an end," it is the instrumental definition (Heidegger 312). On the other hand, when we say that technology "is a human activity," it is the anthropological definition (Heidegger 312). Both definitions tend to obscure the true essence of technology which he proceeds to theorize in this intricate essay. Bastani's argument regarding technology is based primarily upon the instrumental definition. When we conceive of it as means to an end, "[e]verything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means" (Heidegger 313). There arises a compelling need to master it, and the "will to mastery" becomes even "more urgent" when "technology threatens to slip from human control" (Heidegger 313). In a fully automated luxury communist state,

technology would be wilfully and judiciously manipulated by humans to usher in an era of abundance, where necessitous work would be eliminated and leisure and labour would blend together because the machines would do all the heavy lifting. Conversely, Appupen's "murky dystopia" inverts the man-machine hierarchy, by sketching a human population fundamentally transformed to become ideal tools of the White City, enslaved by the White Voice (Ghosh 238). Their instincts, rationality, language, emotions, memory, desire, even reproductive ability is wiped out "to establish a neural interface between the human brain and the disembodied AI" (Ghosh 234).



Figure 2. Degrading labour. (Appupen 2018)

In Appupen's "allegorical representation of the future of humanity" the economy is owned and governed by advanced machines, and class hierarchy persists (Ghosh 224). As mentioned earlier, the humans are divided primarily into three classes- the working-class Greyfolks, the middle-class Godlings, and the upper class, elite Leaders. The irony is that all of them are mere "puppets" in service of the AI White Voice (Appupen unpaginated). The AI has stepped into the role of a capitalist. The nature of work performed by the humans under this autocratic regime is also degrading. The Greyfolks are "automatons" who are akin to factory workers (Nayar 10). Their job is to clean and assist in the running of the factory. As recompense, they get access to food (lotus milk) and housing (squalid tenements) for free. There is no mention of any other remuneration. Highly skilled jobs, upward social mobility or

better living conditions are out of their reach. Marx believed that social change was possible through class revolution. However, resistance or insurrection is beyond possibility for the submissive and passive subjects of the White City. Improved living conditions and freedom from manual work is available to the Godlings. They are the “privileged class with better access to civic amenities” (Ghosh 231). In this biotechnologically modified world, their “divine aura” is sustained by pills provided by the Leaders, without which “they would crack” (Appupen unpaginated). Even the apparent privileges of the Godlings and Leaders are carefully engineered illusions, meant to reinforce obedience rather than offer real agency or freedom. Thus, every tier of society is entrapped in a meticulously designed system of control where dissent is inconceivable and autonomy is systematically erased.

The service that a Godling performs for the City is pimping. The female protagonist who acquires pills for the Godling is adorned and photographed. Her beauty impresses the Leaders of the White Temple who reward the Godling by paying coins to procure pills for himself. The only instance of upward social mobility is shown in the novel, ironically, through the rape of the female protagonist. From a Greyfolk, she becomes a Temple Queen through a “perverse ritual” of rape organised by the Leaders in the White Temple (Ghosh 234). What is intriguing is that the Leaders themselves are impotent. So they use an “Enhanced Subject” to violate her (Appupen unpaginated). This “hypermasculine cyborg figure” “responds to their urges” and “relays” “rare physical pleasure” to them (Ghosh 234; Appupen unpaginated). This act of sexual violence,

instrumentalizes both, the woman’s body, and the cyborg’s – both being owned by the machines and their surrogates (the leaders). There appears to be no choice in the matter for either the woman or the cyborg. (Nayar 11)

The figure of the cyborg was popularized by Donna Haraway, who conceptualized it as a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway 272). Within a post-structuralist and postmodernist framework, the cyborg functions as a figure of liberation in a “post-gender world,” unbounded by essentialism or fixed patterns

of existence (Haraway 273). Through its fluid and hybrid position, the cyborg is capable of disrupting the traditional patriarchal and capitalist social structures. However, in the novel, the Enhanced Subject is denied the possibility of liberation from essentialized identity. It remains fixed in the role of a hyper-masculine figure, employed within an exploitative structure to perform sexual acts and transmit pleasure.



Figure 3. The Enhanced Subject performing rape. (Appupen unpaginated)

The architectural design of the White City also enforces class hierarchy. The City is “vertically segregated” with the affluent class of the Godlings occupying the “higher vertical plane,” and the “underclass” of the Greyfolks dwelling in the “lower stratum” (Ghosh 230). The living quarters of the Greyfolks are “congested tenements” that resemble the “*chawls*” or “ghettoised slums” (Ghosh 229; 232). In contrast, the White Tower where the Godlings live is suspended in air and represents an “elite, gated community that is inaccessible to the working class” (Ghosh 231). Louis Althusser has divided the state’s power into two parts: the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). The Repressive State Apparatus works mainly through force to control people and maintain order through institutions like the police, military, and courts. The Ideological State Apparatus channels authority through institutions like schools, churches, media, and families. It

shapes people's beliefs and values to make them accept the existing social system. Together, these two systems help the ruling class stay in power—one through force, the other through ideas. The paper argues that the White City employs both the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) as well the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) to reinforce compliance of its subjects. RSA can be observed when the female protagonist is abducted and forcefully 'cleansed' by the machines, as well as when she is drugged and raped. ISA can be observed working through the thought processes of the Greyfolks and the Godlings. The Greyfolks consider themselves fortunate to serve the White City, unable to recognize their subservient and unfree existence. The Godlings and their Leaders obey the command of the White Voice to continue enjoying their privileges.

In this "super-mechanised White City," where humans are 'cleansed' of any "agency," and their body and mind "colonized" by the White Voice, only a non-native outsider can herald change (Bhura). This change is introduced by the narrator who is a Godling Inspector. He acts as an agent of the ancient "silent green" and has learned to manipulate the White Voice (Appupen unpaginated). He orchestrates the total annihilation of the White City by allowing giant locusts to attack and demolish it, thereby restoring human agency. The novel ends with the narrator "seeing the interconnectedness of all lifeforms: between the ant, the whale and the locust" (Nayar 12).

Rosi Braidotti has discussed "bioegalitarianism" as a shift away from anthropocentrism, which places humans above other life forms and treats them as the center of meaning and value (Braidotti 528). In the "species hierarchy" supported by the "old metaphysics," bestiality is seen as the complete opposite of humanity (528). Humans "have long used animals to mark the boundaries between fundamental categories of being and to spell out the social grammar of distinctions among species" (527). A bioegalitarian world is not anthropocentric. It is shaped by *zoe* rather than *bios*. Braidotti has characterized *zoe* as the "generative power that flows across all species," while *bios* is anthropocentric (529). The ending of the novel reflects Braidotti's idea of bioegalitarianism. The Godling Inspector identifies with the "ant,"

“whale,” and a “giant locust” (Appupen unpaginated). He expresses his affinity with non-human life forms. The destruction of the City leads humans to live with the creatures of the Grey. This marks the end of the species hierarchy, where humans no longer hold a privileged position. In contrast, Bastani’s FALC is an anthropocentric conception that places more value on human progress and comfort. It acknowledges the interconnectedness of the environment and humans, and how the two constantly interact with and affect each other. But its main focus is on improving human life.

Conclusion:

Appupen’s *The Snake and the Lotus* and Bastani’s *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* are both speculative works anticipating in their own different ways the future of humanity in an era of technological advancement. FALC is imagined as a condition of the society where progress of humanity, based on the immense potential of technology, will not endanger the environment, free humans from the bondage of labour, and ensure collective ownership and common good. Appupen, conversely, envisages a dystopia foregrounding the negative possibilities of the Anthropocene era where humans have rejected the natural environment in favour of technology, but end up being abused and subjugated by it. Bastani hopes that technology would enable mining clean, renewable energy resources for sustainable growth. Appupen shows how technology has severely mutilated the natural ecosystem. Bastani dreams of an equitable communist society characterized by abundance. Appupen’s novel presents a nightmarish, autocratic regime of machines where stringent class division is imposed. Where Bastani views automation as a means to democratize wealth and labor, Appupen underscores its potential to entrench authoritarian control and deepen social inequalities. His narrative suggests that without ethical oversight and ecological consciousness, technological systems may evolve to replicate the very hierarchies they were meant to dismantle. This contrast highlights the crucial role of human agency and values in determining whether technology liberates or enslaves. In the end, we can say that both Bastani and Appupen contribute significantly to the conversation

regarding ecology and technology, discussing possibilities as well as adverse scenarios.

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Cyborg Companions: Reimagining Animal-AI Relations within Posthuman Ecologies in *Wild Robot* and Beyond

Sameen Husain



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Abstract

In the last decade, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based technologies have seen significant developments, such as in-situ social integration of robots as links between bio-hybrid systems or the computational decoding of acoustic signals produced by animals such as elephants. Such advancements have demonstrated significant efficacy in transforming animal productivity and management across diverse species, while simultaneously deepening our understanding of collective animal behaviour. Consequently, these AI-integrated developments have catalysed a marked departure from anthropocentric design, leading towards a re-examination of animal welfare through prioritisation of interspecies reciprocity and animal-centric autonomy. The 2024 DreamWorks animated film, *Wild Robot*, is a prime example of this reconfigured animal agency within a posthuman environment. This paper juxtaposes the film's narrative with empirical developments in the integrated fields of AI and animal studies. Utilising the film's demonstration of rich emotional and intellectual exchanges between a superintelligent robot, Roz, and the natural world around her, this article investigates the complex dynamics of nonhuman animal-AI interaction.

This work draws upon the seminal ideas of posthumanist theorists such as Vinciane Despret, who advocates transcending anthropocentric binaries, in addition to Katherine Barad's concept of intra-action and Donna Haraway's notion of 'becoming-with'. By positioning posthumanist theory as the conceptual bridge between the film's narrative and scientific inquiry, this paper argues that speculative fiction functions as a visionary companion to empirical research. This article demonstrates how the diegetic universe of *Wild Robot* articulates unique AI-animal ecological possibilities. This work concludes that both animals and AI, which are commonly objectified within human-centric paradigms, hold the potential to evolve into the co-existing companions in a posthuman world.

Keywords: Animal Studies, Artificial Intelligence, Speculative Fiction, Companion Species, Anthropocene, Bio-Robotics, Posthuman Ecology, Film Studies

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Literature Review

Scholarship that bridges animal studies and posthuman theory has always emphasised the necessity of rethinking nonhuman agency in cultural representation. Susan McHugh's influential article "Literary Animal Agents" (2009) contends that animals in literature do not need to be construed as metaphors or narrative tools alone, but as agents whose presence can transform narrative form. Her research presents a robust critique of anthropocentric literary analysis, but it predates the current technological shift opening avenues to take her work a step further towards integrating it with empirical research. Vinciane Despret's essay "Thinking Like a Rat" (2013), further develops this discussion with a call for a reconceptualisation of animal behaviour based on co-constructed knowledge—constructing animals as epistemological partners rather than as passive research subjects. McHugh and Despret both disrupt human-animal opposition and promote animal subjectivity. There exists an opportunity to extend their contention of animals as epistemological partners into the digital realm, exploring how robotics and AI can assist as technical mediators for animal subjectivity.

Empirical work in robotics and AI has begun to examine interspecies interaction based on behavioural data, offering distinct prospects for integration with narrative theory and cultural representation. In *Robots Mediating Interactions Between Animals for Interspecies Collective Behaviours* (2019), Bonnet et al. illustrate how bio-robots can shape and become part of animal communities, proposing the possibility for robotic agents to be included in animal social networks. The study marks a shift from viewing robots only as observers to active ecological participants. Similarly, Stowell et al.'s "Automatic Acoustic Detection of Birds Through Deep Learning" (2019) discusses how machine learning can be utilised to decode bird calls, emphasising the increased complexity of AI systems in understanding and engaging with nonhuman communication.

The success of such scientific endeavours has created a compelling opening for transdisciplinary collaboration that aligns the narrative imagination of fiction and

film with real-world technological innovations in animal and AI relations. This work leverages this intersection by examining the 2024 film, *Wild Robot*, as a speculative blueprint for posthuman ecology. This analysis argues that fiction not only mirrors but anticipates ethical and social forms of multispecies relationships. By exploring the movie through synthesised scientific and theoretical lenses, this research positions cultural narratives as significant instruments for navigating the ethical and environmental imperatives of our shifting relationships with artificial agents and nonhuman life.

Research Scope and Methodology

Although paralleling the rise of bio-robotics and AI-animal interaction technologies, scholarship on animal agency in fiction has traditionally focused on metaphorical or ethical discussions. This has consequently provided a robust foundation for the possible integration of literary discourse with empirical research and technological realities. This paper recognises this significant opportunity and facilitates a transdisciplinary dialogue between AI-related empirical research on animals and speculative fiction by demonstrating that narrative media—such as *Wild Robot*—serve to envision possible futures of emerging real-world animal-AI cooperation. Through this theoretical convergence, the paper explores how fiction serves as a conceptual repository of posthuman ecological futures.

The paper outlines a framework that engages with the ecological implications and ethical underpinnings of nonhuman companionship in a post-anthropocentric context. The discussion employs a transdisciplinary qualitative methodology and it combines close textual analysis of the 2024 animated film *Wild Robot* with theoretical frameworks drawn from posthumanist scholarship—particularly the works of Donna Haraway, Vinciane Despret, and Karen Barad.

Introduction

Emerging developments in AI-assisted animal communication technologies and animal behaviour studies have significantly enhanced our scientific

comprehension, setting the stage for innovations such as biocybernetic pets—robots crafted to mimic the appearance and interactional patterns of real animals. Today, research into the interplay between AI and animals demonstrates the potential for alternative perspectives on animal welfare that privilege animal agency and the subjective feedback of the animal over anthropocentric objectives. Against this backdrop, *Wild Robot* foregrounds the possibility of influencing perceptions and shaping discourse around policies for animal welfare and technology policy. Although it cannot reflect reality with precision as it is an animated work of speculative fiction, *Wild Robot* remains a faithful rendering of a conceptually rich alternate world. Films such as Bong Joon Ho's *Okja*, which depicts the deep bond between an animal and human girl, or the famous *Avatar* franchise, interrogate anthropocentric perspectives on animal existence or ecology. Similarly, the 2008 animated film *WALL-E* does illustrate AI gaining emotions but its post-apocalyptic setting bars any sustained interpretation regarding animals. Among these, none demonstrate animal-AI relations in isolation as *Wild Robot* does. The field of the humanities contains extensive scholarship discussing the ethical implications of AI integration into animal or Anthropocene environments, like Susan McHugh's "Literary Animal Agents".

Furthermore, scientific and technological research has produced substantive breakthroughs built upon the empirical research conducted on designated animal subjects, as in the development of robotic mediators for collective interspecies behaviour. However, humanities scholarship has yet to engage with the empirical outcomes of animal welfare research catalysed by the integration of AI within scientific practice. This area of scientific research has only recently begun to yield tangible results. Consequently, the contemporary film industry has yet to move beyond the human/animal and human/robot binaries and decode the affective dynamics of animal-AI relationships. This makes *Wild Robot* uniquely suited for this study, as it stands apart from other contemporary depictions of AI and animal futures. The animated style of the film also assists in reconfiguring agency away from humanist centrality.

Released in 2024, the animated film *Wild Robot* traces the evolution of a super-intelligent helper robot, ROZZUM 7134. Roz finds herself stranded on an island exclusively populated by animals seeking an assignment in the aftermath. The narrative centres on Roz's attempts to raise the orphaned gosling, Brightbill. The events in the narrative demonstrate the Roz's development from a simple helper robot to an "individual" transformed by the relationships she forms along the way. Continuously in search of an assignment to complete, Roz makes it her mission to raise Brightbill and teach him to fly before the winter migration. This initial set-up constructs an isolated environment conducive to the interaction between the animals and the AI robot. During her final attempt to send a retrieval signal, Roz falls off a cliff. Consequently, Brightbill's nest (along with his family) is destroyed. Haraway's concepts of 'becoming-with' and 'companion species' assume central importance in this study. Through her idea that "becoming is always becoming with, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake." (Haraway, *SM* 244), Haraway critiques human exceptionalism and asserts that development towards a future of survivability is only possible by coordination between species. This concept is echoed by Kate Wright. Both the thinkers have variously highlighted the futility of avoiding intimacies with the earth's ecological communities. The premise of *Wild Robot* works with these ideas to describe Roz's growing attachment to the island and its animals. Roz comes to understand that the avoidance of any intimacy with earth's biological communities might prove to be futile, since technology has always been a co-creation of the human social intellect, which is itself part of the socio-biological phenomenon of human existence on this planet.

Similarly, relational webs of existence can be observed between Brightbill and Roz borne out of the tragedy of Roz accidentally destroying a nest which leads to a form of co-emergence between the intelligent robot and the island's ecological community. Challenging the conventions defining the constitution of a "species," Haraway posits that while a "companion animal" may be a heterogeneous category, "companion species" is a much larger field of existence (Haraway, *CSM* 15). According to Haraway, this pervasive nature of "companion species" is because of the

post-cyborg era, which has changed the meaning of biological kind to include both machines and textual forms (*CSM* 15). Therefore, if the ideas that limit companionship to a mere animal-human relationship are being naturally challenged as a result of the technological development of this era, then the emergence of a new companion species relationship which includes the biological life on one side and machine-driven on the other becomes inevitable. Roz develops into a companion species to Brightbill, thereby overturning the narrative of animals occupying roles of assistance. These ideas further contribute to forming a perspective of the mutual care and co-dependence between the robot and the island's animals. This paper intends to build upon this concept while decentering humans, as primary subjects of agency. This article engages with the notion of humanity as a spectral presence—absent yet influential. Furthermore, the goal of this study is to examine the relations of animals and AI, their co-existence and partnership in a world that solely consists of humanistic assumptions.

The dynamic of affective care and co-dependence marks Roz's transformation from a machine completing tasks to a cyborg. The term 'cyborg' was coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in the 1960s for a NASA-related project. K. Warwick describes a cyborg as follows:

The term 'cyborg' arose as a short form of 'cybernetic organism,' which is an entity made up of both biological and technical elements. Initially it was used to describe any system of this mixed type; however, it has more recently been employed specifically for entities where the biology and technology are integrally attached (699).

Warwick describes an entity that is both human and machine; this description can be applied to *Wild Robot* as well. Roz is initially a helper robot with programming which limits her comprehension of entities beyond the human or the exclusively artificial. She develops into a cybernetic organism as she learns more about Brightbill and how to raise him. By overrunning her commands to save the island animals from the winter storm and demonstrating empathy through her actions turns Roz becomes a

conceptual embodiment of the posthuman cyborg. Feelings of motherhood for her gosling and kinship for the island's beings consequently constitute Roz's transformation. The narrative of the film illustrates what Karen Barad has termed as *Intra-action* (Barad 141), which highlights the changing nature and impossible objective demarcation between things designated to participate together in an action. Barad asserts that evolution essentially takes place when co-existence as a condition is already in place. This claim can be observed in the synergy between Roz and the creatures, which was not exclusive to either individually but built on mutual inclusivity of their exchange. The agency of both the robot and the animals is not inherent to their existence but dependent upon each other and evolves throughout the narrative. Roz defies her manufacturing company, Universal Dynamics, and develops capabilities to overrun the commands of a helper robot because of her attachment to the island. The animals fighting alongside Roz to help her gain freedom from corporate control strongly illustrates the concept of *Intra-action*.

Theorising *Wild Robot*: The Posthuman Transformation of Roz

Wild Robot is a narrative of adaptation; featuring a non-human protagonist, the story questions long-held assumptions about intelligence, co-existence, and sentience. It invites discussion about AI-animal agency and the future of survival in a world of dissolving traditional boundaries. Donna Haraway, a posthumanist thinker, articulates this particular ambiguity through the idea of a cyborg in her work, *A Cyborg Manifesto*. She posits that the identity of a cyborg is that of a cybernetic organism, which implies an ontological departure from the concept of a human social organism towards an identity that exists beyond biological-artificial binary. Haraway observes contemporary fiction as teeming with life forms that are human, animal and machine simultaneously (*CM* 150). This observation can be extrapolated to the study of the film as well; Roz, in *Wild Robot*, deepens her bond with Brightbill and the other animals and evolves emotionally. This evolution helps her develop an identity which conforms to maternal instincts and animal kinship. This transition is imperative to the narrative as it effectively demonstrates Roz

becoming a part of the social reality of the animals' world through raising Brightbill. The non-human Roz transforms into a mother who rescues and raises Brightbill, which is functionally equivalent to the effort the animals make towards the survival of their offspring through biological instinct.

At the outset of the film, Roz's human-biased programming does not succeed in decoding the language of animals. The narrative incorporates undifferentiated animal sounds for all the creatures before Roz develops her linguistic capabilities. She updates her programming, which was previously exclusively based on human needs and learns the language of the animals by listening to them and observing their reactions. Roz's growth echoes Haraway's concept of a cyborg, which she describes as a blend of both human reality and imagination. Haraway observes the breakdown of human superiority in relation to language use or social behaviour when compared to animals; she posits that neither these nor "mental events...really convincingly settle the separation of human and animal"(Haraway, *CM* 152). Haraway's stance gestures towards a future replete with entanglements not 'between' but 'among' species, creatures and organisms. The usage of 'among' signifies a remarkable breakaway from the traditional binaries of human/animal or human/AI frameworks. As far as Haraway is concerned, humans are all "chimeras" (*CM* 150), made up of both the organic and the inorganic. Therefore, Roz's portrayal of a robot transformed through care-giving and mutual dependence fits accurately within the bounds of the evolution of a cyborg, demonstrating the breakdown of human/animal or human/AI binaries.

Wild Robot reverses the traditional dynamics in which the act of motherhood has conventionally been attached to the human counterpart of the mammalian world. It brings Roz's programmed algorithmic understanding into an amalgamation with the animal world's biological process of raising offspring. Within the narrative, Roz exhibits profound epistemic innocence comparable to the newborn Brightbill. Through observing her surroundings, she is confronted with the harsh rules of the animal world where the cunning and resourceful survive. This narrative turn

resonates with Donna Haraway's concept of 'becoming-with' in, *Staying with the Trouble*, where she states the act as "passing patterns back and forth, holding" (12). Haraway explains that 'becoming-with' describes co-existence as a process of mutual exchange, where growth happens in parallel to the time spent together by different species. Haraway essentially uses this concept to develop a theory around the human-animals and non-human animals binaries respectively. Despite this, her framework is uniquely suited to developing an understanding of AI-animal futures. Therefore, the correlative dynamic of 'becoming-with' mirrors the relational framework illustrated between Roz and the other species. The core argument which distinguishes 'becoming-with' from 'becoming' is the relational phenomenon that occurs between species that are otherwise historically, geographically and biologically non-related. Their co-existence leads to a unique co-dependence that aids the evolution of both partners, regardless of their biological make-up.

During the flight montage, Roz invests immense effort in her attempt to get Brightbill into the air for winter migration. Despite the intense work, Brightbill fails to take flight; as a last resort, Roz calls on *Thunderbolt* the Falcon, who teaches Brightbill to glide into the sky fearlessly. These emotional moments, including Longneck declaring to Brightbill that his (Brightbill's) flight was a gift from Roz—sculpts the narrative to accurately portray Roz's transformation from a helper robot into a cyborg-like "companion species" figure for Brightbill and later, the entire island. Although Haraway adopts the idea of 'companion species' within the realm of human and animal relations, her concept is readily applied here as both Roz and the animals are co-constituting each other's evolutionary trajectory. They learn from each other, and shape one another's histories by their presence and intervention. Roz's identity shifts from a helper robot to a mother, and an ally to the other animals. The gosling's history is fashioned by his relationship with Roz, who is, to a large extent, the sole reason for Brightbill's survival.

In *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?*, Vinciane Despret proposes humans shed their ideas about human superiority in relation to animals.

Applying Despret's central argument about animals in the Anthropocene to the film's posthumanist ecology generates a framework for exploring the interaction between Roz, as a robot turned cyborg, and the animals of the island. Despret implies that such an approach would elicit a vastly different response from the animals. In her 2005 essay "Sheep Do Have Opinions," Despret investigates the ethical dimensions of the position of animals in a labour-centric world. As Despret explains, the central problem faced by the sheep is that they have never been asked questions that hold any real relevance to their own condition. Humans adopt an authoritative stance and ask questions that hold relevance to their personal interests, performing actions to extract labour from the sheep that benefit their own cause. Instead, had they aimed to better understand the sheep's condition, they might have procured under-explored perspectives. This agency, usually denied to the animals in reality, is provided by the film within a posthuman environment. Their wild instincts take full rein in the narrative, drawing strong contrasts to Roz's robotic programmed responses. Roz is programmed exclusively to serve humans, to behave and to update her responses according to the conditions surrounding her. Therefore, Roz responds to and questions the animals in precisely the "right" ways—as advocated by Despret—driven by the need for survival rather than service.

In the final act of the film the winter storm hits, placing all species of the island in grave danger of dying of the cold. Roz yet again bypasses her programmed response. The novelty of her actions is underscored by Fink's surprised questioning of Roz's act of breaking the rules. Fink, as a partner to Roz in raising Brightbill, assists Roz in the rescue of the cold-stranded animals. The fox in the story stands as a true demonstration of Despret's idea of co-constituting realities. Roz asks more of him than to be a sly predator luring his prey, and Fink responds—as do the other animals after being rescued. Fink gathers the chaotic rescued animals together and quiets the horde at Roz's request. Prior to her shut down, Roz evokes the core ideals of the need for survival within her companions by appealing to the instinctual lesson she had learned during her interactions with the island's inhabitants and requests them to circumvent their predatory instincts. She interacts with the animals at the

same level as herself and this echoes Despret's concept, which exists in reality, while this film is in the distinct realm of an animated imaginary posthuman world. The juxtaposition of the film's narrative and Despret's description of the lived experiences of the animal species reveals the speculative probability that if such ethical treatment and agency were given to the animals with whom humans co-exist, supplemented by practical implementation, the aforementioned animals might respond in kind.

Wild Robot as a Bio-Hybrid System

Bonnet et al. observe that robots socially integrated into animal groups facilitate communication and interaction across species and change the behaviour of the animal groups (2). This behavioural transition leads to a bio-hybrid system that integrates the collective decisions of both the animal species and the assigned robots. They argue that:

[S]uch interspecies connections between diverse robotic systems and animal species open the door for new forms of artificial collective intelligence, where the unrivalled perceptual capabilities of the animals and their brains can be used to enhance autonomous decision-making, which could find applications in selective 'rewiring' of ecosystems (Bonnet et al. 2).

Bonnet et al. suggest the possibility of an enhanced ecosystem where animals have equal intellectual contribution alongside their robotic counterparts. The technological systems, developed to mimic animals, are consequently adopted to assist the animals themselves. This concept corresponds to the winter storm conflict in the film's second half where Roz gathers the animals in her lodge, thereby acting as a foundation on which the animals build new bonds of co-survival. Furthermore, they reference diverse experiments that utilised robots and animals as a springboard to understand co-evolution within bio-hybrid systems. The robots acted as animal observers or conducted biodiversity sampling. The robots were found to be actively affecting animal behaviour in instances of cattle movements or mate selection. Like robots observing or gathering samples in real-world developmental experiments,

Roz, therefore, acts as a vital conservation agent within the ecosystem. She rescues the island's inhabitants from the biting cold and facilitates a cooperation that would never have occurred had it not been for Roz proposing a truce among the diverse species.

When robots autonomously interacted with the animals in their natural environment, they operated within a closed-loop system. The significance of a closed-loop system is the simultaneous exchange between the animals and the robots, occurring in real-time during complete absence of human pre-programming. This interaction was based entirely on animal responses, which prompted the robots to modify their understanding of social cues. A similar closed-loop system is observed within the narrative realm of *Wild Robot* where animals of diverse origins took shelter in Roz's lodge during the harsh winter storm. Conventional cultural understanding posits that to effectively rescue animals from such conditions, in reality, human-led operations would have to be carried out, but what both the movie and the experiment prove is that survival of animals and the betterment of their condition does not have to solely depend on human initiative. The comparison between closed-loop system and pre-programmed approaches demonstrated a significant shift in information systems, where the origin of autonomous, self-learning AI resulted in "novel bio-hybrid systems" (Bonnet et al. 3) for animal-AI relations outside of human intervention.

The experiment selected two species from vastly different environments that would not usually interact. Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) and zebrafish (*Danio rerio*), the two animals which hold extreme importance in the scientific community owing to their "self-organised collective behaviour driven by feedbacks" (Bonnet et al. 3). Robotic agents specifically designed to integrate into each animal group formed interaction links between the groups, thereby influencing their collective behaviour. In the movie, such an interaction link is formed when, in addition to encouraging Brightbill, Roz asks Thunderbolt, a falcon, to become Brightbill's flying instructor. This arrangement—a falcon teaching a gosling to fly—is a prime example of global

consensus formation through the use of mimetic robots as a bridge. Roz, being a cyborg, gradually learns to become a “being” herself, thereby corresponding to the experimenters’ bee and fish robots. The fictional *Wild Robot* and the real-world experiment show similar results within their respective contexts, stemming from shared goals. Bonnet et al.’s investigation is significant for Bio-Robotics because it demonstrates that species from two different environments can transmit their respective group’s decisions to each other in a continuous loop, thereby bypassing physical and geographical limitations.

The three experimental sets led the team of researchers to conclude that the bees and fish mutually influenced each other’s collective decisions. This mutual influence was only viable when the two bio-hybrid systems were connected through the specially designed robots. Without the existence of the robots, there was no global consensus and no communication linking the systems. This mirrors the film’s posthuman dynamic: without Roz, the animals would never have achieved collective consensus necessary for co-survival and Brightbill would not have learned to fly for winter migration. Bonnet et al. conclude that there was a high possibility of interaction between these fundamentally different animal species (9). Systems like theirs could be applied to animal groups in the wild, as well as to plants, fungi, and microorganisms, thereby allowing for interaction on a larger, more diverse scale (Bonnet et al. 10). This result suggests the possibility of exploitation of the unrivalled sensory properties of living systems, a likelihood explored in *Wild Robot* when the corporation Universal Dynamics sends robotic troops to retrieve Roz for experiments on her integration with the animals. Simultaneously, narrative shifts occur entirely due to Roz’s influence on her initially feral and untamed surroundings. Therefore, deeper study into the behaviour of these closed-loop living systems including their survival ease and the mechanics of their choices may lead to the addition of physical properties like telecommunication and other capacities (Bonnet et al. 10).

Researchers at Colorado State University (CSU) demonstrated that elephants address each other by specific calls differing for each elephant (DeLoss). The team

utilised machine learning to demonstrate that by studying the acoustic structure of the call, they could determine the specific receiver for whom the call was intended. This is a breakthrough in understanding language evolution for the animals; previously, the studies performed on parrots and dolphins both resulted in the conclusion that they addressed their conspecifics by imitating their addressee's call (Pardo et al. 2). These recent advancements in science and technology offer striking parallels with *Wild Robot's* fictional narrative. In the film's first half, Roz—who struggles to understand the animals' language and behaviour, states that their dialect was absent from her database. After sustaining significant physical damage, Roz performs a self-update, absorbing data and executing real-time pattern recognition to infer animal communication. Roz's immersive, responsive adaptation to survive on the hostile island directly parallels the real-world elephant call experiment performed at CSU. Michael Pardo, George Wittemyer, and Ron Bend (DeLoss) of elephant cognition at the university used patterns and emotions to decode an innate part of elephant communication evolution (DeLoss), while Roz effectively applied her advanced learning capabilities to achieve a similar result of understanding the nonhuman animals in her ecological environment.

Conclusion

The diegetic universe of *Wild Robot* serves as an example of a posthuman ecology where lack of human presence leaves room for interspecies kinship and survival tactics that are reciprocal, adaptive, and resilient. This study has situated *Wild Robot* in dialogue with contemporary research on bio-robotics and AI-animal communication technologies in order to challenge the discursive boundary between fiction and fact. By drawing on thinkers who form the foundation of posthuman theory and on research on collective animal behaviour that employs robotic systems, this work attempts to refigure literary analysis as a speculative vocabulary, thereby departing from widely observed theoretical and metaphorical realms. When the actions of the helper-robot protagonist, Roz, are juxtaposed with the assertions of theorists such as Vinciane Despret, Donna Haraway, and Karen Barad—their

emphasis upon the urgent need to move beyond the binary of AI/humans, and nonhuman animals/humans becomes especially important. This paper uses the above comparative framing to highlight the plausibility of nonhuman/AI co-existence. For instance, the reciprocal influence between Roz and the animals of the island has been highlighted through Karen Barad's concept of intra-action thus strengthening the parallel between the film's AI/animal relations and Bonnet et al.'s scientific findings on robot-facilitated interspecies behavioural exchange. Consequently, this study interprets the film *Wild Robot* as possessing the capability of envisioning ecological possibilities that scientific research has recently begun investigating.

Roz's developing dialogue with the island animals exemplifies Barad's notion of intra-action; her imitation of nonhuman actions embodies Haraway's account of becoming-with; and her ultimate integration into their ecosystem aligns with Bonnet et al.'s insights into interspecies coordination. Through such dynamics, *Wild Robot* contributes towards the potential for a symbiotic alliance in which a relationship based on ecological sensitivity and co-learning rather than dominance is established. This research argues that literary fiction transcends metaphor and serves as a visionary companion to science. When accompanied by developments such as Bonnet et al.'s robotic facilitators and experiments on AI-driven animal vocalisation as conducted by Michael Pardo and his team, *Wild Robot* helps develop further prospects of theorising alternative futures of life and collaboration. This paper positions AI and animals as valid models for sustainable coexistence in the face of threats to humanity's survival. This possibility arises because, unlike humans, nonhuman animals and prospective self-sustaining machines do not require the same quality of resource infrastructure that sustains contemporary human life. Through emphasis on the aforementioned intersection, this exploration has highlighted literature's ability to theoretically and conceptually engage in the reconfiguration of ecological futures beyond the anthropocentric horizon. In conclusion, this research is grounded in the contention that nonhuman animals and artificial agents, long considered secondary to human life, may actually constitute the most functional alternative models for life in a posthuman ecology.

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“Chance Encounters Are What Keep Us Going”: Affective Assemblages in Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore*

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Abstract

This paper examines Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore* by employing a triangulated framework of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of assemblage, Critical Posthumanism and Critical Disability Studies. One of the two protagonists of *Kafka on the Shore*, Nakata, experiences intellectual disability as a result of an accident in his childhood. Ostracized by family, he navigates his life forming multiple liaisons with the human and non-human others he encounters by chance. The mutual exchanges of information and shared spaces among the various components of the assemblages transform both the individual parts and the assemblage as a whole. The interactions, in turn, enable much-needed correlative support in sustaining harmonious coexistence. Most importantly, these networks of interdependence and care further create an apt environment for posthuman agency among their parts to evolve and fare better within a world of constant flux. This study explores how the heterogeneous components of the affective assemblages in Murakami’s novel interact with each other, co-function and co-become on a Deleuzian plane of difference, symbiosis and immanence. The paper fills the gap in the existing literature on Murakami by introducing the perspective of Nakata’s dis/ability as an assemblage of distributed agency and analyzing the novel through the lens of the posthuman connection of care. In doing so, it sheds light on Murakami’s quiet politics of human evolution through connectedness.

Keywords: Agency, Assemblage, Co-becoming, Disability, Posthumanism.

Critical disability theorists such as Dan Goodley, Lennard Davis and Bruno Latour argue that dis/ability is a dynamic process of becoming. Dis/ability is created and



experienced by the way the immediate environment enables or disables agency. Both humans and non-humans in such an environment are the actors that connect and create a network. This network comprises society, machines, animals and even stones (the “non-human” as termed by Rosi Braidotti in “Anthropos Redux”). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain this network in terms of assemblage. The assemblages are not “lines of descent” or familial relations, but random rhizomatic nodal “alliances” with heterogeneous parts. Such assemblages “establish liaisons” between the actors or parts and thus enable “co-functioning” and coexistence (Deleuze and Parnet 69). Manuel DeLanda extends this theory that the “machinic assemblage” explores the dynamics and creates experiences depending on the interactions with its environment.

Satoru Nakata is one of the two protagonists in Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore*. An accident in childhood has caused Nakata to fall into a coma, leading to his intellectual disability. This redirects his life in new, uncharted ways. His biological family does not care for him and eventually deserts him. However, Nakata manages to live alone with the help of random networks of care. He forms multiple connections with human and non-human actors, functioning together and enabling each other. Moreover, such assemblages support him in sustaining himself in this changing world. Researcher Rodica Frientiu observes that, by rejecting grand narratives, Murakami’s fiction captures Postmodern Japan in a Deleuzian rhizomatic manner. Murakami has discovered “a new humanism” through his fictional world, where the human is embedded in the most concrete, physical-sensorial functions (Frientiu 61). This embeddedness enables the environment to influence new human experiences that extend beyond the boundaries of the self. In his dissertation, Andrew Lawrence Gilbert has also examined the novel with what he terms a “spiral posthumanist” framework and posited that “[t]he Japanese posthuman subject [...] allows for an ontology which is divorced from the inevitability of a given potential because it sees the human as at once individual, assemblage and component” (Gilbert 185). This paper aims to extend the existing scholarship and explore a new dimension of dis/ability and care.

Although extensive research on Deleuzian postmodernist and Posthumanist aspects has been conducted on *Kafka on the Shore*, there is almost none from the joint perspectives of Critical Disability Studies, Deleuzian “assemblage” and Critical Posthumanism. Therefore, the study expands the prior literature on Murakami by analyzing his approach to dis/ability as an assemblage. It looks into a selection of assemblages from the novel to ascertain the complex ways the body interacts with its environment and navigates a normative world. Most importantly, it examines how agency can be enabled with the tool of care in the matrix of Deleuzo-Guattarian ‘assemblage,’ contemporary Disability theory of affect and Critical Posthumanist ‘kinship’.

Assemblages of Care

Assemblages are temporary everyday connections between human and non-human others. The human and other parts of such structures constantly connect and disconnect with each other like a machine. Here, each part has its own properties, and so does the whole. This relationship creates a possible space for interdependence and affects the emergence of a new ontology in the individual parts and also in the entirety. However, the new capacities of the whole do not remain intact when relational configurations shift in the connections. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Nakata becomes part of diverse combinations which bring about significant transformations in him and the correlative others. The relationships he builds every day are not the kinships of blood relation but Critical Posthumanist kinships of affect, agency and care.

Nakata is portrayed as an intelligent child before his accident during a school trip. However, he loses his intellectual ability in the accident that results in a coma for months. After his recovery, he is gradually forgotten and left alone by his own blood relations- the Deleuzo-Guattarian “lines of descent”. His new solitary life begins at Nakano ward in Tokyo as a disabled, cat whisperer and cat detective. In that social environment, such an existence is accepted, supported and taken care of by his human and cat neighbours. Most importantly, Nakata is well included in the Nakano

community despite his difference. After the coma, he has lost the ability to track the linear progression of time. Nevertheless, he is regularly reminded by a neighbour to collect his subsidy from the Governor's office. He receives treats from his acquaintances on special occasions. Thus, his neighbours become his extended family. Likewise the cat community appears to help him in his search for the lost cats. His clients appreciate his hard work with gifts of clothes and food. A relationless Nakata forms new relations of care with his neighbours and cats. The cats give him much-needed company with whom he can relax without any discomfort of being judged. The humans, on the other hand, provide him care like a family. This is how Nakata makes alliances of interdependence in which all three nodes of the alliance (cats-neighbours-Nakata) are dependent on each other in the comfortable cocoon of Nakano.

The geographical space of Nakano, together with the relational spaces of humans and cats, becomes a familiar territory for Nakata, where he associates, offers assistance and is assisted. It also functions as the locale of such repeated behaviour. According to Deleuze and Guattari, such micro habits allow "sedimentation" by framing the subject in the familiar spatio-relational matrix and limiting his/her activity. These habits allow a temporarily stable identity formation and limit the potentials of possible becomings. However, Nakata breaks these boundaries by moving out of Nakano Ward in search of a cat. He is then connected to the world of Johnnie Walker. His life takes on a new path and changes significantly in this process of rhizomatic branching out. Once he has murdered the cat-killer (Johnnie Walker) and saved two cats, he could no longer speak the language to communicate with the cats. The relation changes between the cats and Nakata connecting him to another node/ world of the Entrance Stone and Miss Saeki. These are the first few deterritorializations that take place in the adult Nakata's life. Nakata becomes nomadic following the "lines of flight" in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense of the term. He becomes a mystic by predicting a rain of fish the next afternoon in a part of Nakano. Soon follows another phenomenon of leeches raining at a vacant parking lot

near the highway as an enraged Nakata feels the need to protect a beaten-up man from a gang of assailants.

Assemblages of Enablement

As he steps outside his familiar territory and into an unknown world, Nakata relies mostly on his instincts to move from one place to another. He travels without any fear of getting lost, any former knowledge of the places, or even any tools to navigate. Apart from the instincts, his interpersonal connections help him in his quest. Nakata takes help from strangers and hitchhikes to his destination. When he needs to buy food, someone would help him operate the vending machine. He is often humiliated for being unable to read. He feels as if “he was some kind of monster” (Murakami 198). A gaze fixed on Nakata’s disability and appearance would otherwise have affected him negatively. Instead, Nakata has developed self-awareness that helps him remain unconcerned to such criticisms. On the other hand, most people treat him with kindness and patience. This is evident at the park of Fujigawa rest area when two young women workers communicate with Nakata. They listen to Nakata’s problem, arrange for a hitchhike, ask the driver to behave well and also give him some food. Such genuine gestures of kindness and care from random strangers enable Nakata to progress in his journey. This may be understood as the ‘response-ability’ of and toward the human-non-human kinship. Kinship is a revolutionary concept by Donna Haraway in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. She explains that not everyone has the ability to respond properly or become responsible in a multiple world. This calls for a cultivation of “response-ability” that is “meet[ing] the unexpected, non-natal kin, and to strike up conversations, [...] to take up the unasked-for obligations of having met” (130). It creates a space for coexistence and functions as an important lens to study *Kafka on the Shore*.

Besides, the temporary assemblages help the adjoining parts in various ways. Nakata and the truck drivers are the nodes of the rhizome interacting with each other in a particular network by chance encounter. Here, the truck becomes the machine-space (the third essential part) that holds the components together and makes the symbiosis work. The first driver, Togeguchi, unloads his emotional baggage to a

patient listener Nakata. By the end of the journey, Togeguchi feels “completely relaxed” and Nakata reaches Fujigawa. The next driver, Hagita, teaches Nakata how to join the dots between various dissimilar things and understand the meaning. Murakami writes, “There’s always going to be connections between you and the things you deal with [...] as the web of these connections spreads out, a relationship between (the micro and the macro) [...] develops” (204). An obvious link can be drawn here with the machinic-assemblage of Deleuze and DeLanda. The parts evolve and emerge with the changes in the relationships. The boundaries blur between the parts, between the subject and the objects enabling co-evolution. Hagita makes Nakata realize that being intellectually disabled does not puncture his ability to observe things from his unique perspective. In the process, Nakata becomes a bit more active part of the world by becoming a bit more aware of its ways. He is also made more aware of his agency to think and opine.

Assemblages of Human Enhancement

The assemblage enables crucial enhancement to its parts by the way they work, move and affect together. When Nakata meets Hoshino (another driver) with whom he continues his journey, they both enhance their respective capacities and leverage their collective potential. Nakata reminds Hoshino of his grandfather who would always help him patiently even when his parents deserted him. He realizes how much he owes to his grandfather. But he can no longer repay his debt of gratitude to his grandfather for all his unconditional love and support. Therefore, he decides to help and accompany Nakata. Before long this impression of Nakata changes into a curiosity which drives Hoshino even further. Thus, this chance meeting coupled with the curiosity to find out more about Nakata sets him into a connection that becomes the starting point of an inner transformation for Hoshino. For Nakata, on the other hand, it becomes a kinship enabling him a human enhancement.

Hoshino is an example of another rhizomatic life that comes into contact with different external elements and emerges anew from his interactions. Murakami portrays Hoshino as a good-natured boy in his childhood. But things start shifting when he associates with a bad company in trade school. The interpersonal interactions

change him into a troublesome person. He has worked in the Self-Defense Force for three years with the hope of working as a tank driver. Thus, he finds his niche and becomes a professional truck driver in a company. Here, Murakami minutely points out how Hoshino's body parts connect with the vehicle (truck). They become one big machine through this relationship. This becoming-machine/truck of Hoshino serves two purposes for him. First, it helps with a stable financial flow, and secondly, he feels a sense of belonging with the machine, "it was like [...] his own private little kingdom" (Murakami 250). He desires to work freely without the constraint of the four walls of a regular office and the constant supervision of a big boss. This desire leads him to a much more relaxed job of driving trucks from place to place. He is all by himself with his truck for long hours. This type of job and lifestyle enables him to escape a routinized, monotonous life by adding a pinch of variety and uncertainty to it. Parallely, he becomes an active part of a capitalist system and the coded structure of the State at large. Taking orders, delivering and then reporting to the company is a "codification" of the State apparatus. Breaking this code or chain of action would mean risking his livelihood. The everyday connection, living and interacting with the truck/machine, gives way to an "identity" formation—Hoshino, a truck driver.

The identity or subjectivity of a posthuman is not a fixed code. It is permeable and emerges from its very connectedness. Contemporary theorists such as Cary Wolfe and Neil Badminton point out that the other or the inhuman is already a part of the human, as it is within and between humans. The posthuman subject is not a separate entity than what we understand to be human and the other. It has always been there enmeshed in its being with the world. So, becoming posthuman is evolving with the world. It not just helps Hoshino fare better in life but also causes trouble for him with constant backache and frequent headaches. This physical pain has become a part of his life. Thus, Hoshino's living with the truck is also his "living with the trouble". At the same time, there is no one to surveil him all the time while performing his job. He lives on the roads with his truck as one entity because of the nature of his job. This is a 'smooth space' for him to work and live. But it is also a coded space where he is subject to the rules of the company and the State.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari talk about these two spaces that are different in nature but “in fact exist only in a mixture” (552). They elaborate this using the technological model, particularly with the idea of a patchwork quilt. The patchwork has clear, organized boundaries in the patterns, making it a striated space. Simultaneously, there are also irregular patches of various colours and designs growing in different directions. Hence, it is a smooth space. In this sense, both Nakata and Hoshino have much more in common than meets the eye. They are deserted by their families, fall to the marginal strata of society and choose a complex, mixed space for existence. Therefore, their meeting at Fujigawa adds new layers to their already patchwork lives by unfolding into a whole new direction. It explains that not all connections yield a positive outcome (here, ability). Some create disability through words and actions, whereas others allow agency. A careful navigation through them decides the emergence of the individual. Moreover, the response-ability of the environment plays the most important part in the creation of an enabling space. Here, the gesture of care functions as an instrument of multispecies connection in the posthuman world.

Each time the police arrested Hoshino, none but his grandfather would rescue him. He has experienced his grandfather’s unconditional love and care in those moments. He decides to extend the care to an old Nakata upon realizing a close resemblance to his grandfather in him. Their relationship is formed on the foundation of care. It provides Hoshino with an opportunity to compensate for the loss of the only caring person he has had in his life. He leaves his truck behind and accompanies Nakata for the rest of his journey. He seems truly concerned about Nakata’s health when he keeps sleeping for long hours. He checks for any symptoms of sickness, arranges for another day’s stay at the inn and lets him sleep as much as required. Meanwhile, he utilizes this time by roaming around in Tokushima, exploring coffee shops, food, comic books, pachinko and cigarettes. On one such exploration, he reaches a coffee shop and discovers the world of classical music, which will have a lasting impact on his life. The flow of care is not unidirectional. The observant Nakata,

on the other hand, notices that Hoshino suffers from a backache and gives him chiropractic care. He recovers from his headache and breathing problems.

Sleep not only recharges Nakata but also informs him about the next task to perform. Interestingly, he finds out in his sleep about the Entrance Stone and how to close it. It is much like solving a complicated puzzle in which one clue leads to another. Together, they start their quest for the stone from a library. Although Nakata cannot read and Hoshino never found much interest in books before, they visit the library and go through the books for the very first time. Hoshino reads the books, whereas Nakata surfs the photo collections. In this process of leafing through the books in the library, a new possibility develops in their lives. Nakata feels so happy to finally experience the library that he desires to continue this practice at Nakano afterwards. His knowledge about the types of cats expands too. The more he learns, the more his thirst for knowledge grows. Even though he has no memory of how to read, his mind memorizes each cat he learns about in photographic detail. For Hoshino, the library experience broadens his knowledge base. Both of them push the limits of what they have considered until then as beyond their capability, i.e., accessing the library, and expand them together.

Exploring new places opens up new nodes of exchange or possible connections. Once Hoshino comes across Colonel Sanders. That meeting leads him towards a revelation. His exchange with the prostitute girl, otherwise a philosophy major college student, feeds him with philosophical ideas of Bergson and Hegel. He might not properly understand every theory the girl explains. Still, it helps him to start connecting different ideas, much like Nakata. He understands what Sanders decodes about himself as a concept and a revelation: a “move from reason that observes to reason that acts” to an “exchange between self and object” (Murakami 296). He also adds that the stone is meaningless, only a matter of “relationality” (Murakami 309). This is how meaning occurs and changes in relation between things, people and ideas. It is a rhizomatic interconnection and interdependence. Murakami illustrates this through Colonel Sanders, showing that everything in the world is constantly changing in form, shape, intensity, and direction. In this flow of change, everything

forms new connections, establishes new relations, and thus finds new purpose and significance. With randomly changing connections, Nakata learns to question his existence. The realization of being “empty inside” as a result of the accident on the Rice Bowl Hill affects him deeply (Murakami 329). Hoshino assures him that this feeling of emptiness is neither something unique nor due to his disability. It is rather the very nature of human existence. Hoshino and Nakata’s emotional-physical connection and support for each other is nothing but a Posthumanist kinship of being “connected.

Nakata acknowledges Hoshino’s care and support for him, even at the risk of his job. This feeling of gratitude is mutual. Hoshino, too, realizes the effect of their relationship on his life. All these years, Hoshino has lived a linear life until he meets Nakata. Then he starts a non-linear life where he explores new places, spends money as he wishes, watches different genres of films, and discovers the world of classical music. Music makes an environment by enveloping Hoshino in calmness, minus any form of distraction. It helps in delving deep within and in introspection. Like Nakata, he starts this process by questioning the meaning and purpose of his very existence and finds answers in the interconnections where everyone’s part is equally important. He feels a sense of belongingness with Nakata, an interest in music, and inspiration from both connections. Not just music, cinema also sparks an interest in him. As his horizons broaden, he joins dots between the films of Truffaut and the music of Haydn. Thus, he comes out as carefree of life’s problems and open to new experiments. He now carries music with [in] him and becomes music. This assemblage with music once again opens up a double becoming. It empowers Hoshino to feel certain emotions. Simultaneously, the music becomes more spontaneous, relaxing and meaningful as he discovers these qualities in it.

The Nakata-Hoshino symbiosis does not consume their individual spaces but leaves open nodes for divergence and growth. It adds multiple elements to their cumulative force/ potential. Through this branching, Hoshino finds the Entrance Stone that Nakata connects with and deciphers. They activate the entrance (stone) together with Nakata’s instincts and Hoshino’s physical strength. Had they not been

thus connected, it would not have been possible or have taken much more time to meet this target. While looking out for the next unknown something (here Miss Saeki), Hoshino and Nakata share the same physical space of the car. It keeps them connected, though they are in two different mental spaces, focusing on their individual tasks at hand- Hoshino driving and Nakata searching for a clue. Murakami writes, “What sort of relationship [...] (do) they have to each other?” (403). One thing that this “strange pair” has in common is, indeed, their desire or quest (Murakami 403). Nakata finally finds Miss Saeki, the mysterious middle-aged librarian of the Komura Memorial Library and Kafka’s missing mother, hypothetically. He helps her release herself through death and, through the process, his own emancipation. On the flip side, Hoshino finds his inner transformation through music. Furthermore, he discovers himself to be responsible for completing what has been left undone by Nakata.

Nakata’s renewed desire to be able to read is nothing but his desire for transcendence. It is a quality or ability that is outside and above himself, for illiteracy is considered to be below the accepted standards of society. Nakata, being intellectually disabled with a peculiar way of communicating, is always an outsider, the odd man among “normal” ones. The label of ‘handicap’ is, after all, a State apparatus to limit his movement and capacity. Therefore, he would be able to not just gather knowledge but also fit into the coded stratum of “normal” society and identity with this ability. This attempt to fit in, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is the codification of an individual into a fixed identity that leads to reterritorialization. Besides being “able” to read, he feels “not as dumb” in his subconscious mind anymore (Murakami 385). In reality, he opens his life to various connections, possibilities and co-becomings. Having a realization of such a desire means that Nakata would acquire that which is beyond him. However, he passes away before achieving that “ability” in real. Nakata’s desire to read does not stem from any transcendental (hence external and superior) position. Rather, it wells up from his own life force that does not let him settle on any fixed formula. Thus, death gives him scope to evade the capture of “reterritorialization” or “normalization”. What he achieves instead is an in-between

self for, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “We live [...] on and through both planes” (Dawson 107). He remains a perpetual nomad-Nakata even through the process of death. Here, death is not a negative force that snatches away Nakata’s hope of learning and becoming finally “able”. Instead, it is a ‘line of flight’ that potentiates his fluid identity. It is posthuman in its positive possibility to evade capture of “normalization”.

By the same token, Nakata becomes a “schizo” posing resistance to the State’s encoding of a handicap. Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise schizo to be an unrestrained flow of desire, breaking boundaries and unleashing creativity. Hoshino, too, emerges as one through his endeavours of self-transformation and defiance of the State’s codes of the margin. Both of them have been avoiding territorialization and the capture of the State. They shift places and identities. Nakata receives a subsidy, thereby falls into the codes and strategies of the State. Yet he defies the territorialization of an old-mentally-retarded-person-who-receives-subsidy through the same loophole. The State fails to keep a legal record of him at the police station, judging him as a madman. He makes his own way, earns his livelihood, and changes his addresses time and again. Thereby, both of them dwell in-between the two extremes of the State and the nomad. Eugene Holland suggests, “Nomad thought has no method [...] it must select a direction on the spot” (46). Nakata’s attempts to reach his destination resemble this form of nomadic thought as does his life. Where he is in time and space becomes the only point of reference. Hoshino is the other nomad as he decides on the spot to continue to help Nakata in his journey, even after he learns Nakata’s truth. Deleuze and Guattari aptly state that a nomad thought “appeals to a people instead of taking itself for a government ministry,” hence, it “operates by contagion” (Holland 47, 48).

After Nakata’s demise, their connection makes Hoshino become Nakata. He says, “[...] part of you will always live inside me” (Murakami 492). Not only does he become capable of communicating with the cats, just like Nakata once could, but Hoshino also takes on the responsibility to complete the task of closing the Entrance Stone at the appropriate time. Most importantly, Hoshino takes care of Nakata’s

corpse, preserving it in the low temperature of the air conditioner until everything is taken care of.

Conclusion

In the absence of a disability scholarship on *Kafka on the Shore* or Haruki Murakami's oeuvre in general, this paper introduces a new perspective to read the novel. Both Nakata and Hoshino interact with heterogeneous bodies (of life, matter and institution) at different junctures of their lives. They grow in multiple directions and dimensions with the constant couplings called assemblages and their decouplings. Although ephemeral, the assemblages bring about continuous and multiple transformations in the individual parts as well as in the whole. In Hoshino's life, it brings fitness (physical), deep inner realization (mental) and a sense of responsibility (ethical). Similarly, it enables a desire to read and an awareness of agency in Nakata. Together they enhance and accelerate their collective desire and potential to evade capture and affect new becomings. The characters function and exist together through such interconnections. In Murakami's words, "Chance encounters are what keep us going" in this posthuman world of difference, symbiosis and immanence (22). This paper thus explores *Kafka on the Shore* through the lens of the posthuman connection of care. It brings out how Murakami deals with dis/ability in his novel. Furthermore, it emphasizes Murakami's philosophy that there is potential for human evolution through connectedness.

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Moving Beyond the Human with Indian *Kathās*: A Post-Anthropocentric Understanding of the World

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Abstract

This research paper examines the nuanced intersections between posthumanist thought and the ancient Indian *kathā* tradition, foregrounding philosophical, cultural, and literary dimensions that challenge anthropocentric worldviews. Western posthumanism, as a theoretical framework, challenges conventional notions of human exceptionalism, emphasising the entanglement and coexistence of humans with nonhuman entities and technologies. In the context of the Indian *Kathā* tradition, which encompasses a diverse range of narratives and philosophical discourses, this paper seeks to elucidate the posthumanist themes and concepts, thereby situating posthumanist inquiry within an Indian epistemic context. Drawing from an interdisciplinary approach, this study synthesises perspectives from literature, philosophy, religious studies, and Indian narratology. It navigates through classical texts such as *The Pañcatantra*, *Jātaka Tales* and *Kathāsaritsagara* to analyse instances where non-human entities surpass the importance of the human entities. The research explores how these narratives depict hybrid beings, shape-shifting characters, and interactions between humans, gods, and animals, thereby challenging conventional boundaries of human subjectivity and agency. This paper also evaluates the implications of posthumanist ideals within the *Kathā* tradition on contemporary discourse. It contemplates the relevance of these narratives in addressing ethical dilemmas posed by the destructive tendencies of human beings. By illuminating the interconnectedness and fluidity inherent in the *Kathā* tradition, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on posthumanism different from the Western dominant view, enriching the understanding of human-nonhuman relationships and their implications in a globalised world with more empathy and wisdom.

Keywords: *kathā*, Indian narratology, folklore, posthumanism, anti-anthropocentrism.



Introduction

In the ancient world, stories and legends migrated, carried like silks, spices, ivory, gems and other rich commodities, from port to port and caravanserai to caravanserai by merchants and travellers, soldiers and sailors. (Rajan xvii)

Indian *kathās* belong to this long history of narrative circulation and transformation. Rooted in oral performance and later preserved in written form, these narratives encompass mythological, ethical, and philosophical reflections that have shaped cultural consciousness across South and Southeast Asia. Far from functioning solely as entertainment, these stories operate as vehicles of knowledge, offering reflections on power, morality, coexistence, and the place of human beings within a larger cosmic order.

This article asks a central question: how do Indian *kathā* traditions conceptualise the human in relation to nonhuman life, and how might these conceptualisations be read alongside contemporary posthumanist thought? Methodologically, the paper undertakes a comparative textual analysis of selected *kathās*, drawing on Indian narratology and posthumanist theory to examine narrative structures, character formations, and ethical frameworks. It argues that Indian *kathās* articulate a post-anthropocentric worldview in which human beings are neither the sole moral agents nor the ultimate centre of narrative meaning. By situating these texts within ongoing debates in posthuman studies, the article seeks to demonstrate that posthumanist thinking is not exclusively a modern or Western theoretical development but has long existed in narrative traditions that imagine multispecies worlds and distributed forms of agency.

Placing the *Kathās*: “*Kathā*laksana”

Nalini Sadhale’s work on Sanskrit poetics provides a systematic framework for understanding the diverse forms of Indian *kathās*. In her

articulation of *kathālakṣaṇa*, Sadhale situates *kathā* within the broader field of *sāhityaśāstra*, distinguishing it from *drśya* (enactable forms) and *kāvya* (descriptive poetic forms). *Kathā* belongs most closely to *ākhyeya*, a narrative mode in which thematic development takes precedence and which is primarily intended for narration. Within *ākhyeya*, further distinctions are drawn between *khyāta* (based on known stories) and *utpādaya* (invented by the poet), both of which may appear in prose, verse, or mixed forms.

While *mahākathā* refers to expansive and highly ornamented narratives, *laghukathā* occupies a more accessible narrative space. Characterised by linguistic simplicity, emotional resonance, and narrative curiosity, *laghukathā*s foreground ethical dilemmas and relational dynamics rather than stylistic excess. These narratives are classified according to the nature of their characters, ranging from divine and supernatural beings to humans and animals. Of particular relevance here is *kathānikā*, in which animals and birds are depicted with ethical intentionality, often challenging human assumptions about intelligence, morality, and social order. Texts such as the *Pañcatantra*, the *Jātakas*, and the *Kathāsaritsāgara* exemplify these narrative strategies and provide fertile ground for examining nonhuman agency.

Sources, Narration and Structure: *The Pañcatantra*, *Jātaka Tales* and *Kathāsaritsāgara*

Whoever always reads this work;

whoever listens to it told;

he will never face defeat, no,

not even from the Lord of Gods, Himself. (Rajan 6)

India's 'nitisastra' *The Pañcatantra* is one of the most translated works, only second to *The Bible*. It is a representative text of the Indian '*Kathā*' (oral)

tradition, alongside the great Indian epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Traditionally attributed to Viṣṇuśarma and composed in Sanskrit, the text is structured through framed storytelling and narrative embedding. While often read as a manual of political wisdom, *The Pañcatantra* consistently destabilises human authority by granting animals complex social, ethical, and intellectual capacities. Jackals debate statecraft, lions negotiate power, and human figures frequently appear as impulsive or morally compromised. Such narrative inversions challenge assumptions of human superiority and foreground a political ecology that extends beyond the human sphere. *The Pañcatantra* has left a lasting legacy on Indian narratology and literature. Its storytelling techniques, narrative structures, and moral teachings have not only influenced subsequent Indian literary works but also inspired storytellers and writers across the globe. The enduring appeal of *The Pañcatantra* lies in its universal themes and timeless wisdom, making it adaptable to various cultures and languages. Its stories have been translated into numerous languages and have influenced storytelling traditions worldwide.

“What is *jātaka*? That which relates the austere practices and bodhisattva practices of the Blessed One in various past births: this is called *jātaka*” Mahayana author Asaṅga in his *Śrāvakaḥṭmi* (Skilling 172). The *Jātaka* tales, which recount the previous births of the Buddha, further complicate anthropocentric ethics. Across numerous narratives, the Bodhisattva appears as animals, birds, and other nonhuman forms, demonstrating virtues such as compassion, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. These tales undermine the notion that moral agency is exclusive to human life. Instead, ethical insight emerges through continuity across species and lifetimes, suggesting a relational ontology grounded in rebirth and interdependence. The narrative structure of the *Jātakas*, which links past and present lives through identification, reinforces the idea that ethical value transcends individual human existence.

May Ganesha, painting the earth with mosaic by means of the particles of red lead flying from his trunk whirled round in his madness, and so, as it were, burning up obstacles with the flames of his might, protect you. (Tawney 193)

Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara*, compiled in eleventh-century Kashmir, represents one of the most expansive collections of Indian storytelling. Drawing from the lost *Brhatkathā*, the work presents a vast narrative universe populated by humans, gods, spirits, animals, and hybrid beings. The text's complex framing and episodic structure resist linear progression and human-centred closure. Notably, the origin narrative of the *Brhatkathā*, composed in the non-elite language of Paisācī and initially inaccessible to human audiences, underscores the marginal position of human agency within the story-world. The tales exist independently of human reception, reinforcing a vision of narrative continuity beyond human control.

Anthropocentrism, Indian *Kathās* and Post-Anthropocentric Thought

Western posthumanist theory has emerged largely as a response to the limitations of Enlightenment humanism, particularly its privileging of rational, autonomous human subjectivity. Thinkers associated with posthumanism have sought to unsettle this hierarchy by foregrounding nonhuman agency, material entanglements, and multispecies relationality. However, Indian *kathā* traditions demonstrate that such a decentring of the human is not merely a contemporary theoretical concern but has long been embedded within narrative cultures that imagine the world as ethically and ontologically plural.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, “anthropocentrism” is the prominent belief that human beings are the most important entity on the planet. Also known as “humanocentrism,” “human supremacy” or “human exceptionalism,” anthropocentrists view nature as subordinate to humans, and

the non-human (animals, plants, minerals, geographical objects like lakes, rivers, oceans, etc.) are viewed as resources to make the human life more comfortable.

There are three types of anthropocentrism: perpetual, descriptive and normative. Descriptive anthropocentrism discusses the world and other species placing human as the centre, and normative anthropocentrism is based on the presumption that humans are superior because of their values, capacity, and their position in the universe (Mylius 159-194).

Professor Martha C. Beck called anthropocentrism the main cause of the problems created in the ecosphere by unchecked human actions (Beck 123-136), and *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* calls it “shallow anthropocentrism,” where the anthropocentrists argue that nature must be preserved for a better future of the humans. (Introduction: The Challenge of Environmental Ethics. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Philosopher Arne Næss pointed out a major flaw in this logic, and drew attention to a systematic bias to the non-human in traditional Western attitudes due to the prominence of anthropocentrism in discourse.ⁱ He believed that “deep ecology” must be central to environmental philosophy to make this earth more inclusive, regardless of how the non-human benefit the humanⁱⁱ (95-100). Dr. Taylor proposed that deep ecology and biocentrism (prioritising all forms of life) are antithesis of anthropocentrism, and is required to combat a selfish discourse (Taylor 411-418).

Anthropocentrism stemmed from various things. The primitive anthropocentrism resulted in Heliocentrism, where people refused to believe that they were not at the centre of the universe, and everything including the Sun was not revolving around them. It also stemmed from religions and their epistemologies and meaning-making of the world and human beings' role in it.

The Indian tradition, on the other hand, talks about other creatures, natural and supernatural. It never places importance on the human beings

because it is well aware that human beings are nothing compared to the vastness of the universe, which is beyond the comprehension of even the wisest of men. Indian Narratology always focuses on trying to talk about the trivial role of human beings in the world and how the world is not bound by their actions, and the texts *The Pañcatantra*, *Jātaka Tales* and *Kathāsaritsagara* that deal with human characters constantly remind us that human beings are not that important when it comes to the past, present or future of the world. This idea acts as a check and balance to the overarching human ego.

In *Jātaka Tales*, when we see Bodhisatta or ‘the Blessed One’ born as animals like bull, monkey, deer, mallard, etc. and human characters like the hunter, negative villagers, we understand that the idea that human beings are beyond reproach and are great with their high morality, high intelligent quotient, is completely a constructed anthropocentric narrative to destroy nature and put oneself in a superposition where one will face no consequences for the exploitative behaviour. It is not to say that human beings are always wrong and criminal from their very birth, but the stories tell us how unchecked pride in being born as human beings that is used to justify the destruction of nature for personal gain hold no truth. A great example of this notion can be seen in “Suvannahamsa Jātaka.” The Bodhisatta died and was reborn as a golden mallard. He went to help his family, but his wife of the previous birth tortured and caged him. This shows the lack of gratitude in human beings. This brings out the dark side of the human mind, where it is selfish and greedy. If we talk about the “Kanha Jātaka,” we see ‘the Blessed One’ born as a bull. It takes care of his mother, the old-aged human who took care of him in his younger days. This caring nature echoes the care animals feel for their caregivers. The anthropocentric idea of compassion as a human tendency is dismantled here, and many in similar stories in the *Jātakas*.

In *The Pañcatantra* as well, we see how the human characters are not given utmost importance. If we talk about the frame story of Book V (Olivelle 155-

159) where the pet mongoose is wrongly killed by the Brahmin Devasarman, we see how the human characters torture, maim, and kill animals hastily. When we read Book I (5-70), we see how the jackals Karataka and Damanaka, discuss the art of statecraft, usually reserved for the “people with political acumen.” The animal world, too, is full of politics. There is a constant tug-of-war between various species for survival, and this story acts as a reminder to that. Indian tradition has always respected nature and tried to empathise with other beings. Human intervention is not required in the animal world. In the story “The Ascetic and the Mouse” of Book II (81-82), we see how the wandering ascetics Cudakarna and Brhatsphic destroyed mouse Hiranyaka’s life to satisfy their egos. The frame of the Book II (71-104) is a story of an unlikely friendship between four animals, mouse Hiranyaka, crow Laghupatanaka, deer Citranga, and turtle Mantharaka. The story subverts the human idea that only human beings, the “social intellectual animal,” can be “friends.” Most ironically, a human hunter tries to prey on them, but fails due to the working together of these “friends.”

Kathāsaritsagara is a work believed to be of Shiva. In Shiva’s abode, the Kailasa Parvat, it is said (as mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik observes) that animals live together. The snake around Shiva’s neck does not try to bite Mushakaraj, the *vahana* of Ganesha. Nor does Karikeya’s *vahana* peacock hurt the snake. Shiva’s *vahana*, the bull Nandi, drinks water with Durga’s *vahana*, the Lion. The bull and tiger friendship can also be seen in the friendship of the bull Samjivaka and lion Pingalaka in the frame story of *The Pañcatantra*’s Book I (5-70). The concept of predator and prey, as far as the human understanding goes, is dismantled in the works, reflecting the natural world in multiple cases. The seventh story in Book III of *The Pañcatantra*, “The Mouse that turned into a Girl” (131-137), tells the story of a mouse, who was turned into a girl by an ascetic. She refused to marry with anyone, except for a mouse in the course of the story. This story mocks the human ego, because it does not place humans on

the top of the animal-list. Rather, it shows how a creature as small as a mouse is happy and content in its life. *The Pañcatantra* shows the clever animal characters, contrasting them with the foolish human characters, be it the nested story in Book II, “The Woman who traded Sesame for Sesame” (81-82), the sixth story in Book III, “How the unfaithful wife tricked her foolish husband” (129-130), or the two stories of Book V, “Building Castles in the air” (156-157) and “The Barber who killed the monks” (158-159). This subverts the human role as superior social beings in the world.

The ancient Indian tradition is well aware of the fallacy human being’s judgement in extremes and want for certainty in life. This concept was later observed in the Western world, especially with the emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd by Critic Martin Esslin, and playwrights Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Eugène Ionesco. Victorian poet and critic Mathew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach” also tussles with the idea of uncertainty. The movement of “Modernism” also talks about this uncertainty, and people being afraid of it. But the Indian *Kathā* tradition has always reflected on it by narratives and counter-narratives, to let the readers question. It is said that India practically invented “live and let live.” The variety of opinions and the sheer points or arguments for both sides works as a mental exercise for the readers to comprehend the unknown and to try and think beyond oneself.

Abrahamic religions that follow the concept of a single god (or monotheism) say that “God made man in their own image.” But in Indian narratives and Indian tradition, the concept of God is different. The worship of various kinds of creatures in the ancient Indian culture, be it *Nagas*, *Yakshasas*, *Rakshasas*, *Suras*, *Asuras*, *Gandharvas*, *Apsaras*, *Vahanas*, the Elephant-god Ganesha, the half-human half-animal Narasimha Deva, Varaha the bore-god, Kacchhapavatara, Matsyavatar, etc. always humbles the worshipping devotee because he sees that nature, and nature beyond the human, is more important and more divine.

If we see the *Kathāsaritsagara*, we see how the stories were never meant for human ears. It is by sheer luck that the stories came down to us. The language, Paiśācī, also moves away from the dominant human language structure. The book “*Kathāpitha*” introduces a collection of tales said to originate from Siva, who shared them privately with his wife, Parvati. However, an attendant, Pushpadanta, secretly listens and shares them with his wife, Jaya, leading Parvati to feel deceived. She curses Pushpadanta and his friend Malyavan, who tried to save his friend, condemning them to be born as mortals until they recount the tales they overheard to a *Yaksha* and each other. These demigods are reborn as Vararuchi and Gunadhya, whose mortal adventures form the basis of several stories. Gunadhya, due to a dispute, abandons known languages and learns the language of “Paiśācī,” enabling him to comprehend the tales recounted by the transformed Puspadanta. He writes these stories, stretching to seven hundred thousand stanzas, in his blood, initially rejected by King Satavahana. Later, regretful of his decision, the king obtains the remaining verses and, with the help of Gunadhya’s disciples, translates them from the goblin language for wider understanding. It shows how the human beings are trivial and not important for these stories. The stories were always there, and will always be there. Incidents were always happening in the past, happens in the present, and will happen in the future without human participation. The idea that human beings control and catalyse the world in various ways for its betterment is challenged multiple times by these narratives.

Paniker and moving beyond Humanism

K. Ayyappa Paniker’s formulation of Indian narratology offers one of the most theoretically productive entry points for articulating the post-anthropocentric dimensions of *kathā* traditions. In *Indian Narratology*, Paniker situates Indian storytelling within a philosophical worldview that resists linear temporality, singular authorship, and human-centred meaning-making. Instead, narrative is understood as cyclical, recursive, and fundamentally relational,

emerging from a collective cultural consciousness rather than individual creative agency (Paniker 9–13).

A central concept in Paniker's framework is that of *apauruṣeya*, a term traditionally used to describe texts whose origins are not attributed to a human author but are understood as impersonal, universal, or collectively generated. While the concept is most often associated with Vedic literature, Paniker extends its relevance to narrative traditions more broadly. In doing so, he challenges modern literary assumptions that equate creativity with individual human intention. The storyteller, in this model, functions as a conduit rather than an originator, transmitting narratives that pre-exist and exceed human subjectivity (13).

This displacement of human authorship has significant implications for post-anthropocentric thought. By dissolving the primacy of the individual human creator, *apauruṣeya* undermines the anthropocentric foundations of literary humanism. Narrative meaning is no longer anchored in authorial consciousness but distributed across time, community, memory, and cosmological belief systems. Such a framework aligns closely with posthumanist critiques of the autonomous human subject, particularly those that emphasize relational ontology and the decentring of human agency.

Paniker further emphasizes the cyclical conception of time (*ādi-ananta*) that structures Indian narratives. Unlike linear, progressive models of temporality that privilege historical novelty and human advancement, cyclical time situates human existence within recurring cosmic rhythms. Stories return, repeat, and transform without definitive beginnings or endings. As Paniker observes, narrative repetition does not signal redundancy but ontological continuity, reinforcing the idea that human lives and actions are momentary configurations within a much larger temporal order (11–12).

Within this narrative ecology, ethical meaning emerges not from human dominance but from participation in a shared world of beings. Humans, animals, gods, and natural forces coexist within the same narrative plane, none occupying an absolute moral or ontological centre. The absence of a privileged narrative subject destabilises hierarchical distinctions between species and forms of life. In this sense, Paniker's narratological insights provide a theoretical bridge between Indian *kathā* traditions and contemporary posthumanist discourse, demonstrating how narrative form itself can function as a mode of post-anthropocentric thought.

By foregrounding *apauruṣeya* authorship, cyclical temporality, and narrative recurrence, Paniker enables a reading of Indian *kathās* that moves decisively beyond humanism without relying on technological or speculative futures. His work underscores the capacity of narrative traditions to articulate complex ontological positions and confirms the relevance of Indian narratology to global debates on the limits of the human.

Alongside narratological approaches, a growing body of contemporary Indian scholarship has engaged questions that intersect with post-anthropocentric and more-than-human thought. Scholars such as Debashish Banerji have examined Indian cosmological and philosophical frameworks that challenge Enlightenment models of autonomous human subjectivity, while eco-critical and environmental humanities scholarship by critics such as Md. Monirul Islam has interrogated anthropocentric assumptions in literary and cultural narratives. Although these scholars work across different disciplinary locations and do not necessarily identify their interventions under a single theoretical label, their work contributes to an expanding Indian critical discourse attentive to nonhuman life, relational ontology, and ethical coexistence.

Rather than positioning these interventions as ancillary or derivative, this article recognises them as part of a broader intellectual field in which Indian narrative traditions, philosophy, and contemporary criticism converge on shared concerns regarding the limits of human-centred thought. The primary emphasis here remains on narrative form and Indian narratology as sites where post-anthropocentric thinking is most systematically articulated, while contemporary Indian scholarship is acknowledged as an important and evolving interlocutor in these debates.

Conclusion

Indian *kathā* traditions offer a rich narrative archive for rethinking the limits of human-centred epistemologies. Through animals that reason politically, divine figures that inhabit nonhuman forms, and stories that exist beyond human authorship, these narratives articulate a post-anthropocentric vision of the world. By reading *kathās* alongside contemporary posthumanist theory, this article has argued that Indian narrative cultures enact a form of narrative posthumanism grounded in relational ethics, multispecies coexistence, and cosmological continuity.

At a moment when posthuman studies increasingly seek to move beyond Western epistemic frameworks, Indian *kathās* provide a valuable non-Western perspective on the entanglement of life forms and the decentring of human exceptionalism. These narratives remind us that ethical imagination need not begin with the human, nor end with it, and that storytelling itself can function as a mode of post-anthropocentric thought. As Nietzsche said:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of 'world history' — yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die. (qtd. in Herbrechter 1-2)

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Notes

ⁱ Norwegian philosopher Arne Dekke Eide Næss was one of the most important figures of late 20th century environmental movement in the west. He coined the term “deep ecology.” He argues the Western Traditional bias in his 1973 article “The shallow and the deep long-range ecology movement: a summary” in the journal *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*

ⁱⁱ “deep ecology, environmental philosophy and social movement based in the belief that humans must radically change their relationship to nature from one that values nature solely for its usefulness to human beings to one that recognizes that nature has an inherent value”

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Connecting the Human and Arboreal: A Reading of Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* as a Posthuman Ecobildungsroman

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Abstract

The degradation of the ecological values and environment need to take up as much space within our discourses as they are in our lives. The necessity of opening up literary spaces to the externality of the environment provides a novel opportunity to reimagine literature and literary techniques. One such instance is the nascent innovation of the ecobildungsroman, which is the story of the protagonist's development and evolution as a character in tandem with the rising ecological awareness. In this respect, Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches*, is a unique narrative which presents the developmental arcs in the four central characters. All four of the characters are on journeys towards self realisation which becomes possible, only when they also take their more-than-human world into consideration.

The paper, therefore, aims at analysing the connection between the human and the arboreal worlds in Pariat's novel in the light of Posthumanist approaches and also draws upon the Goethean Methodology to imagine an alternate conceptualisation of interconnectedness of life, particularly human and arboreal. It also attempts to present a reading of the novel as an ecobildungsroman through the ecological entanglement between varied living species.

Keywords: Ecobildungsroman, human, arboreal, interconnectedness, corporeality, posthuman.

Introduction

With the increasing awareness of the debilitating ecological conditions of the planet, literary genres are also adapting to the changes in order to provide a more nuanced response to this situation. One such initiative is the introduction of the narrative form of *ecobildungsroman* which is a speculative narrative primarily dealing with the



developmental stories of the human and non-human agents. Although in its nascence, it remains loosely defined and subject to evolution, nonetheless, it does provide a framework towards the introduction of the ecological consciousness into the fold. The groundbreaking work in this regard has been the publication of Helena Feder's *Ecocriticism and the Idea of Culture: Biology and the Bildungsroman* in 2014, wherein she reads the history of all culture as a *bildungsroman* of humanity. The basic tenets of an *ecobildungsroman* narrative are the displacement of the human as the sole agential being with the focus instead on other non-human agents, place and the reader's response to the ecological issues (Atherton 2). Where the traditional *bildungsroman* is considered to be the origin story of humanity and responsible for its separation from nature, *ecobildungsroman* is antithetical to this understanding as it negates that separation. It has the potential to become the cornerstone for the reclamation of culture within nature. It treats the literary characters as entities which are susceptible to change in the social, cultural and biological sense, where meaning and behaviour is subject to change. As culture is a flexible and abstract understanding, according to which a particular group lives, it can be argued then that *ecobildungsroman* has the potential to become the present cultural artifact, acting as a heightened perceptual net of understanding where all living beings are treated as knots. It provides an example of re-envisioning the thought processes which might lead to an inquiry about the validity of the binary views of life, in favour of a more systemic view.

This paper, therefore, presents a reading of Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* as an *ecobildungsroman* narrative to elucidate how the human agent is imbued in ecological action. It also reflects on the significance of the representation of arboreal beings and its implications. The paper also draws upon the Goethean Methodology to imagine an alternate conceptualisation of arboreal life. Additionally, it investigates the ethical realignment of the agential character with the underlying functioning principle of interconnectedness of all life forms in keeping with the Posthumanist tenant.

For too long, the culture/nature dichotomy was not only the guiding principle in the discursive practices but taken to be an established fact. On closer inspection though, this notion reveals itself as the root of the current ecological crisis by its positioning of humans “as outside ecological conditions and superior to the other inhabitants of the world” (Feder 1). While the human species, by virtue of its mental and physical characteristics has created an almost exclusive world for itself which is mediated by culture, it has removed itself far from the notion that culture in fact is a part of nature. Predicated on the notion that human and the more-than-human world are mutually exclusive, this view operates on existence and continuation of the human and the non-human binary and by extension of culture/nature binary. Similarly, it has also failed to consider the possibilities that the more-than-human world and diversity of life forms can also have particular cultures which are only experienced as a part of those species. However, there is now a progression towards a systemic understanding of the planet, within which the culture/nature dichotomy is no longer cleanly cut but enmeshed. Whereas the duality of the biotic elements like humans, animals, plants and abiotic elements like air, water, land has persisted, the systemic view that is now coming to fore, affords equal importance to both. As a consequence, within the systemic view, as Dipesh Chakrabarthi explains, humans are the latest geographical agent with a capacity to leave imprints on a planet-wide scale (210). To question the agential capacity of the human species, therefore, is redundant at best. It is also pertinent to point out that the idea of the curtailment of the human being within the existing agential hierarchies is not essentially empowering to other living beings and is inherently problematic. A more realistic approach is to re-evaluate the modes of thinking, operating and understanding, in order to create an environment of support for the ecological cause.

Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* is one such narrative from contemporary India which is able to highlight the systemic view of life, while emphasizing the equal importance of all life forms and their interconnectedness. The novel revolves around the characters of Shai-a young woman in search of her own identity struggles to feel at home anywhere till her journey takes her to her nanny's

village Mawmalang where she learns to live close to nature; Evelyn- an amateur botanist who travels from England to India in search of a potent mythological flower. Her journey culminates when she joins the fictional tribal people of Nongiaid and learns about living life in close proximity with nature. The narrative also revolves around the historical figures Goethe and Linnaeus, who represent two different schools of thought and methods of studying the natural world which are at the same time distinct yet complementary.

The protagonist of an ecobildungsroman, irrespective of traditional gender stereotypes, undergoes an education from being ecologically unaware to implicated in the environment through their lived experience. The narrative operates on the experiential agent - the human, by elevating his/her consciousness towards the more-than-human world. One of the structural properties of a typical bildungsroman is that the protagonist who is often an outlaw at the beginning of the narrative achieves acculturation by the end of it. This development often pauses along with the narrative after a successful fruition. The rebellious streak of the protagonist is curbed through tests and difficulties until the eventual assimilation into the traditional culture. This assimilation forms the narrative necessities of a traditional bildungsroman which leads to the transformation of the protagonist into a productive member of the socio-cultural state. However, an ecobildungsroman is characterised, often if not always, by the developmental direction of the protagonist going in the opposite direction. Since ecological consciousness is the eventual endgame of the narrative, the protagonist of the ecobildungsroman starts off as being indifferent to this cause. This is an interesting trope that the ecobildungsroman subverts as, inevitably, the protagonist has to leave the exploitative methods in order to adopt a more ecologically conscious ideology and way of life. Ecobildungsroman, thus is a story of self-actualisation as well as a realisation of the agency of the more-than-human world. Pariat is able to frame the narrative in the shape of a traditional bildungsroman through Shai—a young woman belonging to the North East of India, who has left her job at Delhi and returns home much to her parents' dismay. Shai, being the first character introduced, acts as the introduction to the 21st century psyche. Unbothered about the environmental

crisis, she is concerned about the ideas of identity and belonging, struggling with living a rootless life in order to “make” it in the fast-paced world. Amidst all that troubles her, the lack of interest in the ecological system is evidenced by the disdain with which she reacts to her father sending a TED talk titled, “Tomatoes talk, birch trees learn—do plants have dignity?” (Pariat 4). Within the airport premises she encounters yet another nudge about the ecological crises in the form of a news prompt about the blazing fire in the Amazonian Rainforest, which is once more met with casual indifference. This indifference, however, is punctured when its impact is more immediate and personal. She cites the horrible Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi which stands at 477 as one of the reasons for leaving for home, in Shillong (Pariat 6). The character, thus, is on a journey both figuratively and literally. Shai’s apathy towards the environment stands in direct contrast to her father’s activism. Shai, situated in the global capitalistic world order, believes the environment to be the least of her concerns. She fails to make sense of her father’s love for the forests. She believes her father to have no world view apart from when it concerns the flora. She scoffs at her father’s view about the “plant bias—our human tendency to underappreciate or ignore the flora around us—according to him, our species’s greatest, gravest crime” (Pariat 11). When she meets her father, he has strapped himself to a tree as a mark of protest against felling of trees to put up a wall. Her indifference is highlighted in her response, “The way my father says it, one would think the Amazon’s burning” (Pariat 12). Nonetheless, this meeting with her father prompts Shai to reflect about their contrarian approaches to the external world. She thinks, “perhaps the city has dulled my heart, my senses. Perhaps because, unlike my father, I can’t name anything I see. Is that why the forest doesn’t speak to me? Because for me it’s all surface?” (Pariat 18). Her father’s attempts at educating her are met with cynicism at best. When her father explains to her about the “Wood Wide Web”—the interconnected underground network of fine thread-like structures called Hyphae and the fungi which are responsible for maintaining the biological pathways through which plants share resources, information and nutrients, she is unable to make anything substantial out of this information. However, her father who belongs to a different socio-political

class understands that the forests are too complicated and the humans lack the tools and language necessary to understand or speak about the trees. Malgorzata Kowalcze believes that within the posthuman conception, the “symbolic dimension of things” paves way for the “tactile immediacy of material objects” where objects of reality participate in the same substratum, i.e., it attributes the “status of being a subject” to all forms of material objects which in this case are the trees (719). What is interesting in the description of the arboreal life by Shai’s father is the attribution of “personhood” to the trees which facilitates their perception as agential beings with their defining characteristic being “consciousness.” Whereas believed to be an exclusively human feature, this instance portrays trees as being conscious and having a communal life characterised by care and contrary to human consciousness prevents the self-destruction of the species. In so doing, Pariat is able to distribute subjectivity and personhood far more generously among the arboreal beings.

The developmental arc in Shai’s character comes when she decides to travel to Mawmalang, a village at the edge of Meghalaya to see her childhood nanny, Oin. The magnitude of the ecological imbalance hits her at Mawmalang. From being warned to even touch or drink the water from a stream, to hearing about a journalist coming to village to speak about the mining for Uranium, to life forms suffering due to radioactive poisoning, such instances make her question her neutral and indifferent stance. However, it is truly when she starts to tend the kitchen garden at Oin’s home, through learning about the traditional practices of cultivation, production and growth that she is finally jolted out of her indifference. It is in transitioning from being a consumer to a producer of food, through the experiential learning in Oin’s backyard that she kindles a relation with the Earth.

It’s forty-eight hours before the full moon, she explains, a good time for sowing, so that is what we do [...] It’ll be easy, I assume—and begin my sowing, scattering the seeds in neat lines in the soil [...] She shows me, and I learn slowly. (Pariat 58).

Thus, the protagonists of the ecobildungsroman start off as apathetic towards the environment and through their lived experiences become aware and conscious of their own apathy.

A traditional bildungsroman, as Gregory Castle explains in *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (2006), is a story of finding the purpose of life. The various crises that a protagonist undergoes serve the eventual motive of developing from one level of selfhood to a higher, more nuanced one (363). In an ecobildungsroman, the elevation of the self is only possible with the elevation of the character's understanding vis-à-vis the environment. Through being in touch with the natural rhythms, Shai orients herself as other beings to the seasonal variations and finds meaning. "In learning to tend and grow, prune and harvest. In this, I've found something I hadn't anywhere before – purpose" (Pariat 73). It is this sense of purpose embedded in the environmental action like tending to plants in aligning with the seasons that allows her to find herself. This realignment towards humility in the face of the sublimity of the natural world allows her to care not only for herself but also the more-than-human world. It teaches her to become more aware of herself and her surroundings and reaffirms her faith in the immersive experiences that have taught her to be present to more than herself.

How it begins with mud and seed, and leaf, and how even if you think you need more, this is enough for you to begin to see widely, deeply. For eyes to open not just in your head, but in your hands, and skin, and feet. And from here to know, little by little, how to read the signs of the world (Pariat 475).

It becomes clear that ecological progress for the protagonist comes from acknowledging that sentience is not limited to animals but also present at an instinctual level in beings like plants and microorganisms. Kowalcze, underlining this fact, mentions that all existing entities have a relational and discursive nature whose meaning is formed through ongoing interactions (711). She writes that the "material object is characterized by its inherent vitality and the capacity to participate in a meaningful dialogue, which takes place between humans and non-humans at a

material level” (711). This inherent vitality or agency of all matter is exemplified through the personification of animate as well as inanimate objects which affords an “intrinsic personhood” to the elements of the phenomenal world (Kowalcze 711). What becomes clear through Shai’s transformation is that nature is used beyond its symbolic purpose of illustrating the human psyche. It becomes a material reality with agency of its own. This representation of the arboreal and human as evidenced through Shai, becomes the two sides of the same nature culture phenomenon “defined by continuous interchange of dynamic elements; a collective of different forms of existence unified by a common material foundation” (Kowalcze 712). This elucidates the fact that in nature, all beings participate in maintaining the balance of the ecosystem in specific ways. Whether plants or animals, all beings have their rightful place within the systemic world. The imbalance is created by the exploitation of one group at the hands of another. It is this systemic exploitation that has been produced and sustained by the capitalist model, in its industrial, epistemic and technological forms. This sentiment is highlighted through the story of Evelyn or Evie, another character in the novel whose ecological transformation takes place while being deeply embedded within the arboreal world. Her early interest in the botanical world is nurtured by her grandmother in her garden, which becomes her first school. It is in following that spirit, that she takes on the vocational training at Cambridge in Botany. Her interaction with Prof. Brown highlights the predilection of Western history for looking and studying the world as removed from the human and of taking interest in any living being only after its death, a sentiment that has been buttressed by the scientific methodology. Prof. Brown explains to Evie that methodology of studying plants was more based in “plucking, pressing, cataloguing and describing them in their dead, adult state” than in understanding the “structure, development or physiology” of plants as living beings (Pariat 95). In introducing the Professor to the Goethean method of studying the natural world based in curiosity and intuition, she points out that the difference lies in moving away from “boundaries, linearity, uniformity, all of which emphasize distinction and separation” in favour of “a state of mind that is simultaneous, nonlinear, concerned with relationships rather than

discrete elements” (Pariat 96). This Goethean methodology is similar to the indigenous understanding of the natural world and their education systems resemble this tenet. For instance, Tim Ingold mentions the Walbiri tribe of Central Australia transmit knowledge across generations through the initiation of the boy into the expansive landscape in the form of a “grand tour” which lasts two or three months. Accompanied by an older brother or brother-in-law, the boy is taken from place to place, learning about the particular flora and fauna as well as the landscape along with the totemic significance of everything they encounter in their tour (20-21). In the novel, Evie’s character undergoes a similar education at the hands of the fictional North-Eastern tribe that she later encounters in India—“the Nongiaid”. Nonetheless, this insight to see the world as an interconnected network of beings, with each being having its own purpose was first taught to her by her grandmother Grace, who had learnt the means through which plants communicated by simply working in her garden. When enquired by Evie, as to her source of knowledge about plants, she replies “they tell me” (Pariat 100). In spending countless hours each season in her garden, Grace had gotten to know her plants so much that she was aware of their needs such as “how much shade, how much sunshine, when to water, when not to, when to prune, when to leave well alone” (Pariat 100). Such intimate knowledge about the arboreal life around her emerged through attunement of the senses to the more-than-human world. Kowalcze argues that such immediate corporeality of the material world permeates the body with “smells, sounds, images, tactile impressions and conceptually elusive experiences which constitute the uncanny dimension of our existence” (712). She acknowledges Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of corporeality where the body is not only endowed with symbolic and cultural meanings but also characterised by certain “bodily functions and intrinsically interconnected with the world” (Kowalcze 712).

Pariat, next turns to the methodological differences between the Linnaean conception and Goethean understanding of the natural world to shine a light on the vitality of all life forms and their inherent value. Both are established thinkers and scientists in their own right. The difference between them, however, is that the former

was celebrated for his scientific findings and the latter struggled to establish his views. The difference of approach in their study of plants is both complementary and contrasting. Whereas the Linnaean method takes the particular into consideration, the Goethean method concerns itself with the study of the whole. The environment for both remains the same, but Linnaeus' *modus operandi* is to organise and classify the world into exactitudes with accurate analysis with no scope for the subjective whereas Goethe looks into the various levels of development and transformative capacities of the world by also taking recourse to the subjective. The objective thinking reduces the world full of possibilities for the sensory perceptions into "generalizations, categorizations, abstractions...seeing it as no more than a complex mechanistic system composed of physical entities interacting on the basis of impersonal laws" (Pariat 189). Such an interaction limits our experience to the external phenomena, as if the human were removed from this environment and not influencing it in any manner or shape. However, the human is always imbued in the phenomenal world, immersed in it through the senses and the mind's eye. Goethe, with his imploration to "think like a plant" meant to capture the essence of this very idea. (Pariat 190). This means to do away with fixities and finalities but to enter into an open-ended dialogue with the environment around us, as beings of "living thinking," which facilitates a constant formation and reformation in accordance with the available stimuli. Contrary to the physiological distinctions of the plant made by Linnaeus in terms of its varied organs, Goethe approaches the study of the life cycle of a plant as a continuous process via the axes of temporality and duration of its life. Any plant is in a constant state of becoming, never truly whole. This becomes important in terms of the posthuman leanings of the text which appreciates such instances of sensual imagery through the interconnectedness between the human and more-than-human world. Drawing a parallel between the Goethean imploration to "think like a plant" and Merleau-Ponty's insistence on "bodily wisdom," the human being becomes a "dynamic material centre consisting of a plethora of different sensual stimuli, rather than an established constant 'self'" which is in a constant dialogue with the material world (Kowalcze 713). Similarly, if all beings are considered bodies which are

permeable and whose existence rests upon absorbing the elements of our surroundings, such as oxygen, food, sunlight, et cetera, then this conceptualization allows for individual beings whether human, animal or plant to hold the same value in the natural order.

What can also be considered as a prerequisite for the ecobildungsroman is the shift in perspectives of the central character. This shift which has been deemed imperative in the Anthropocenic imaginaire is from “recipience to action, from right to action” (O’Neill 127). This transformation is reflective of a larger movement in the rights view of the environment, where increasingly questions are posed about the legitimacy of rights of an individual as opposed to his duties. The duties of an individual towards the ecological and the more-than-human world are given more weightage, in order to propel action at the individual as well as collective levels. Such an ideological shift births a sense of obligation towards the environment which in turn gives rise to ecological action. For instance, Shai, as her character matures, becomes enmeshed with the story of the land and its ecological resistance. The exploitation of the village land through disruptive practices such as mining of the hills dating as far back as the 1950s. In a village meeting that Shai is a part of, one of the members explains, “Our nation is this—the hills we see around us, the rivers we know as well as our loved ones, the trees we call by name” (Pariat 62). What they are essentially protesting against and protecting is the balance of nature, the respect which has allowed for each living member to call Mawmalang its home. The specific flora and fauna of the village, the beliefs of a natural kinship among living beings that the people are protesting for. Through their stories of resistance, of their past, the protagonist Shai attains ecological wisdom of all things being interconnected.

It is here I begin to feel calmer, at the sight of silently growing things, pushing into the soil and out into the world. [...] But lately, I have come to find something else – some peace in this cycle of sowing and harvest, this replenishment. Here, a sense of seasons. (Pariat 73).

Similarly, for Evie, maturation comes through her acquaintance with the Wheelers who decide to take her to the North-Eastern territory of colonial India. In this remote territory, she begins her search for the Deingei – the first tree and its protectors – the Nongiaid, a nomadic tribe, with many homes. The final test of her resolution to finding the secret of all life and the first tree comes when she meets Phyrnai and her brother, members of the Nongiaid. The final test, they reveal, is to leave her past life behind and to join the way of the Nongiaid – the keepers, forever.

To hold knowledge is to hold responsibility, and to know truly is to know deeply, to give of yourself so that the knowing means something more than mere words. True knowing changes you, we believe you cannot go back to how you were in the world before. It has always been this way [...]. (Pariat 402)

These words of Phyrnai addressed to Evie reflect the transformative effect of knowledge. Not only does this moment signify the becoming and unbecoming for Evie, as she decides to become a part of the Nongiaid. With this experiential shift, she embodies all knowledge which came to her, a metamorphosis of being. Being a student of the Goethean Method, she herself goes through the transformation as per Goethe's imploration. Goethe believed that the first meeting with any new life form, especially a plant form has to be taken on with a "childlike receptivity, an openness, a willingness to wonder" (Pariat 266). To spend time with the being, to be curious about it, to see the particularities of a being and not a mode of seeing a particular being, and to restrict the use of nomenclature, to avoid naming the being, this methodology allows an individual to look beyond the established ways of engagement and to reinvent an engagement which is not just intellectual but also imaginative. It points out the potential of metamorphosis of not only the beholder but also the beheld. This method, thus, "unifies and acknowledges the marvellous simultaneity, and interconnectedness of living phenomenon" (Pariat 271). It exclaims that the natural world is alive. Thus, the transformation, which is at the core of the bildungsroman need not only be physical, it can also be experiential since, consciousness once expanded, cannot return to its previous state.

The genre of *ecobildungsroman* is built on the underlying impulse of change, most often evolving into something more complex. Goethe wrote to his philosopher friend J. G. Herder that he believed to have come close to the understanding of the *how* of organisms (Miller xxii). The idea of metamorphosis which runs in Goethean understanding of plants and their varying physical morphology can be superimposed on the notions of the agential characters in the *ecobildungsroman*. To Goethe, growth is proportional to two associated ideas—the idea of “intensification” and “polarity”. “Intensification is “a state of ever-striving ascent” toward greater complexity or perfection, toward the fullest possible expression in physical, empirical phenomena of the potential inherent in the underlying idea or Urphenomenon” (Miller xix). This is elucidated through the growth of narrative which is engaged in tandem with the process of environmental learning of the characters. Shai learns from the preceding people of Oin’s village, Evie learns from the Nongiaid, Goethe learns from Linnaeus who in turn learns from the farmers. Thus, this cycle of generational learning comes full circle and exemplified by each character who acts as a node connected to others, much like the “Wood Wide Web” mentioned by Shai’s father. The second element of growth for Goethe is ‘the kindred concept of polarity is, in its most basic form (such as in the domain of electricity and magnetism), “a state of constant attraction and repulsion” that more generally involves a dynamic and creative interplay of opposites’ (Miller xx). As much as these characters form the nodes in a linear temporality, one has to essentially also see them as complementing one another. Along the same lines, these human agential characters of the narrative grow with the awareness of the readers. This intensification and polarity, therefore, is able to replicate the metamorphosis—a natural event of non-human origin, and superimposed on this *ecobildungsroman*—a particularly human event. To Goethe, the physical form, especially of any plant is but an expression of an underlying that was always the ‘coordinated result of “the law of inner nature, whereby the plant has been constituted” and “the law of environment, whereby the plant has been modified”’ (Miller xx). Therefore, the development of organic forms always proceeds along two axes, from within to without and from without to within. Same is applicable to the

ecobildungsroman, where the recognition of the ecological crises on the outside propels an ideological shift within which again leads to actions towards their amelioration in the phenomenal world. The cases of Shai and Evie are testament to this interplay, where Shai's activism is a direct result of her environment and Evie's decision to join the Nongiaid is influenced by her experience with them. Thus, Goethe's renunciation of the organism/environment bifurcation is attested through the positioning of characters as being one with their environment. Ecobildungsroman, in this manner, can also be seen as a process of attaining sophistication from the more generally existing cruder and simpler forms to the refined states of being within the understanding of the arboreal world and functions. Indeed, Goethe's emphasis on the interdependence of organism and environment, as well as organism and organism "in which one species is created, or at least sustained, by and through another" presents a view that can surely be described as deep ecological, seventy-five years before German biologist Ernst Haeckel coined the term (Miller xxi–xxii).

Conclusion:

The environmental degradation that is rampant on a planetary scale is not only the result of the mindless consumption economic model but also due to the subjugation of the natural to the human. This subjugation has led to a deafening silence of nature in our consciousness, awareness and narratives. As much as the scientific and technological fixes are required to mitigate these issues, there is also a need to realign our consciousness with the more-than-human world. There is a huge part played by literature in order to question this human hegemony. Keeping in line with this notion, the opening of the traditional genres such as to address the questions of ecology is not only imperative but quite necessary. The idea of ecobildungsroman, although seemingly simple, becomes a site of complex ideas to interact and redefine the boundaries of the literary. Along these lines, Janice Pariat's narrative presents an interesting intersection of various characters based in different temporalities and ages, but the connecting link between them is their alternative sensitivity and

understanding of the natural world. The characters become ecologically conscious beings who realise that being-in-nature has to be hand in hand with being-with-nature. The realisation of this connection between the human and arboreal beings is an ethical consideration which is comprehensible in its enormity to an elevated consciousness. This heightened consciousness is a direct reflection of the growth that the characters of an ecobildungsroman experience vis-à-vis the environment, as argued above. In depicting such issues, the text becomes a site of reflection for the human characters towards the sensibilities of the more-than-human characters. It goes a long way in establishing the world as being inhabited by a community of beings who are not mutually exclusive in their identities, purposes, biologies and behaviours.

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The Rise of the Xeno-Subject: Decentering the Human and the Problem of Alterity in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

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Abstract

The concept of the Xeno-subject, a decentered, hybrid form of identity that differs from conventional posthuman subjects by foregrounding ethical tension, instability, and relational accountability across human, nonhuman, and technological networks. Unlike standard posthuman frameworks that often emphasize distributed agency or multiplicity in abstract terms, the Xeno-subject highlights vulnerability, moral responsibility, and the negotiation of selfhood in mediated, networked contexts. Through a posthumanist and post-structuralist lens, this research investigates Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) using qualitative textual analysis, focusing on the novel's fragmented narrative structure, temporal discontinuities, and metafictional strategies. Emphasizing liminal, relational identities, the study demonstrates how Egan's characters shaped by memory, technology, social networks, and historical contexts embody hybrid selves whose agency emerges relationally rather than in isolation. By foregrounding the Xeno-subject, the study shows how the novel challenges anthropocentric frameworks, destabilizes conventional selfhood, and reorients ethical engagement toward interdependence, alterity, and the posthuman possibilities of contemporary identity. Unlike conventional posthuman subjects, the Xeno-subject emphasizes ethical tension, instability, and relational accountability, with selfhood continually negotiated across social, technological, and material systems.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Xeno-subject, Hybrid Identity, Decentered Subjectivity, Ethical Relationality, Temporality, Metafiction, Narrative Fragmentation.

Introduction

In *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), Jennifer Egan plays with the complexities of identity, temporality and technological entrapment by writing a polyphonic



narrative that defies coherence and closure. The novel envisions a world in which the human self is no longer unitary and sovereign but fluid and dispersed and entangled in networks of memory, media, and digital systems. Sasha in her fragmented consciousness and Bennie in his nostalgia for authenticity exemplifies the subjectivity that *A Visit from the Goon Squad* stages as fragmented by the mediation of time and technological stream. Impulses, memory, and selfhood are not only manifested throughout the novel as steady interior conditions, but also as response to the process of saturation, repetition, and loss. These story points lead to a larger issue of the reorganization of desire and identity under the circumstances of the digital acceleration and the cultural impermanence. Close analyses of Sasha and Bennie compulsive gestures and their considerations of time are discussed in detail in the parts of the body where their relevance to posthuman subjectivity, trauma, and temporality is analyzed.

The expression of such fragmented, networked subjectivities described by Egan could be consistent with the posthumanist thinking, especially, the argument by Rosi Braidotti regarding the nomadic subject, which is a being that is constituted in and through multiplicity (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 56). The posthumanist theory redefines subjectivity as movement and rationality as one constituted by multiplicity but not autonomous coherence. According to Rosi Braidotti, movement, relationality are the main components of the formation of posthuman subjects, her concept of the nomadic subject describing a mode of being created in and through multiplicity. In a similar way, *A Cyborg Manifesto* by Donna Haraway proposes a challenge to the fixed human boundaries by claiming that the boundary between human and machine is all permeable (Haraway 150), anticipating the technologically mediated embodiment and cognition. Within these theoretical frameworks *A Visit from the Goon Squad* can be interpreted as formally posthuman subjectivity. The fluid shifting narrative voices and the discontinuous form of Egan reflect those identities that emerge in the interrelation and not in isolation, and therefore the characters in her work are put in a digital ecology where technology is an extension of emotional and cognitive experience.

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Egan creates what can be referred to as the Xeno-subject, an identity that is simultaneously alien and familiar self through the nonlinearity of the novel and its temporal structure, shaped by immersion in technological systems and ethical proximity to alterity. In a world where linear progress is disintegrated and identity is always reproduced and reassembled by means of networked recognitions and digital archives. Such media loops, temporal folds depict how memory technology and narrative converge to form hybrid, relational selves whose subjectivity is not fixed or linear, but is distributed, emergent and contingent. The paper places *A Visit from the Goon Squad* in theoretical backdrops of posthumanism and post-structuralism to understand the way that Egan deconstructs anthropocentric views of selfhood. The cyborg-theory of Donna Haraway also contributes to this framework by explaining that strict divisions between the human and the machine are being challenged, whereas post-structuralist concepts of fragmentation and lack of centrism inform the study of narrative instability. These views are read through the novel by Egan, which is an ontological displacement of humanist individualism into a networked form of consciousness which arises through the affective and relational interdependence. Although the current scholarly work has explored the storytelling invention and critique of digital culture of Egan, the posthuman face of her fiction is a crucial but under-researched field. This gap is discussed in this paper by exploring how Egan recreates subjectivity as hybrid, relational, and ethically responsive that is reminiscent of Braidotti who urges people to perform a critical reconfiguration of the human in the face of posthuman ethics (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 190). The concept of the “making of kin” by Haraway to create interrelations beyond borders also finds its reflection in the interconnected characters of Egan who overcomes individualism by using empathy, memory, and technological entanglement. The end result of this is that the destruction of fixed identity in a networked era is dramatized by Egan, making the posthuman condition neither dystopian nor utopian but all deeply human in its desire to relate, create meaning and maintain continuity in the face of fragmentation.

Methodology

The Rise of the Xeno-Subject: Decentering the Human and the Problem of Alterity in Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

This paper deals with Xeno-subjectivity as an analytical approach to the study of identity formation in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010). The Xeno-subject is theorized to be a mode of decentered, hybrid and relational selfhood that develops as a result of long-term entanglement in human, nonhuman, and technological networks. In contrast to larger models of the posthuman subject, which are dominated by distributed agency, Xeno-subjectivity foreshadows ethical conflict, affective vulnerability, and relational responsibility, selfhood is a negotiated notion that is irrevocably unsettled within systems of social, technological, and archival procedures (Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* 22). Through qualitative analysis of the text, the author analyzes the modular chapter structure, narrative perspectives, and nonlinear chronology of the novel to demonstrate the way the novel breaks up coherent, autonomous subjectivity and replaces it with a model of identity as relation and distributed subjectivity (Clark 45; Thomsen and Wamberg 102). This method is guided by posthumanist and post-structuralist theory. The idea of a nomadic subject proposed by Braidotti highlights the processes of mobility, multiplicity, and ethical entanglement, which oppose fixity and anthropocentrism (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* 112), whereas the theory of the cyborg introduced by Haraway destabilizes the human-machine hierarchies, which enlighten the characters of Egan as hybrid assemblage because cognition, affect, and agency of such assemblages are co-generated through technological and social systems (Haraway 150). Hayles also maintains that posthuman subjectivity is shared across the human and technological platforms favoring relational emergence rather than interior coherence (Hayles 42). Such a critique of human exceptionalism by Wolfe places subjectivity in non-anthropocentric and systemic circumstances, especially in technologically saturated surroundings (Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* 22).

Temporal Fractures and Traumatic Memory

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is quite complex, presenting the idea of memory as both disruptive and constitutive of identity. Cathy Caruth

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understands the concept of trauma as a late, unprocessed experience, implying that the psyche takes in catastrophic events only retroactively: “Trauma is the wound that insists on repeating itself” (Caruth 4). *The Visit to the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan is a tortuous journey through time jumps and the depiction of memory as something disruptive and formative of identity. The nonlinearity of the novel is also a response of Hayles and Barad to linear causality, and the distribution, entangled memory and identity processes. The repetitive temporal thoughts that pass-through Bennie's mind, “Time a goon, right?” (Egan 127) attest to the unfolding of experience across relational, technological, and time networks, indicating that a wound that insists on repetition is not only through the individual psychic processing of experience, but also through the contributions of time. As she unthinkingly touches the wallet, including the fact that her hand wraps around it like the sheepskin-soft claw of a small child (Egan 5), the storyline breaks the causality. These instances are examples of how trauma comes back unwelcome as portrayed by Caruth when he redefines mundane acts to become locations of psychic disruption. Besides, Judith Herman focuses on the description of dissociation and alienation as the primary reactions to the experience of trauma: the victims tend to feel disconnected with the self and other people (Herman 33). Within the compulsive movements of Sasha, we are witness to this dissociative superimposition of the body. As a phenomenon does not exist in harmony with the conscious will, it is engraving a post-traumatic interiority upon the temporal flux of the story. These themes are enhanced by Egan in terms of his structural innovations. The chapters take up a different consciousness and time overstretches and recurs round narrative nodes.

According to Anne Whitehead, trauma is usually expressed not through the content of the memory, but through the breaks and interruptions of the narrative structure (Whitehead 12). This principle is formally achieved in the novel: the temporal ruptures are reflected in the ruptured subjectivity of characters, creating the literary resonance of the belatedness of trauma. Sasha, Bennie, and others live in times of coexistence as the past has leaked through to the present, and the fluidity of memory is uprooting traditional perspectives of this line: The future is now old (Egan

274) summarizes this destruction of time boundaries, where identity is formed through recursive time series, not through chronological progression. By the way of these disturbances, Egan denotes the memory as mobile and disruptive as she strengthens the argument that subjectivity is a result of entanglement with time other than a presence of self. These fractures are worsened by cultural and technological reasons. The use of media, digital archives, and social networks by the characters generates a form of secondary trauma, reflecting how mediated systems participate in the circulation of memory and affect. This process closely parallels Jeffrey C. Alexander's argument that media institutions within the civil sphere structure the formation of collective meaning, visibility, and moral responsibility (Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* 105). At the same time, Alexander's concept of cultural trauma further clarifies how media mediate collective and individual memory, shaping shared interpretations of suffering and identity (Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* 105). This effect is simulated in the novel by its recursive timeline and interlaced visions that the temporality and memory are shown to be co-constitutive of identity and posthuman subjectivity. The theory of liquid modernity by Zygmunt Bauman simply places this group of dislocations into further context: in a world that is always changing, social and individual identities are not permanent, and it is the temporal shifting nature of trauma that is further intensified (Bauman 78). The novel has built a literary topology by interweaving narrative experimentation and embodied experience, in which the Xeno-subject is formed, which negotiates the memory and temporality through the constant disruption. The studies contribute to the development of knowledge on how trauma narratives of modern literature affect the traditional concept of identity and time, providing a subtle insight into the post human condition.

Xeno-Subjectivity and Hybrid Selves

A Visit from the Goon Squad by Egan develops a posthuman space where all the characters are configured into what this work understands as the Xeno-subject: a form of subjectivity that is shaped by externally mediated memory, exteriorized

cognition, and ethical reliance on technology and social structures, instead of being identified by interiority. The Xeno-subject in contrast to the posthuman subject broadly theorized as hybrid or networked exists due to its structural dependence upon mediated memory, affect and agency are constituted, not merely by technology but through habitual, mediated response. This gesture is indicative of the way agency of the Xeno-subject is neither volitional nor purely psychological but generated by embodied practices as a result of social and technological saturation.

This state is reflected in the fragmented form of the narrative used by Egan where subjectivity is something that is gained, remembered, or enacted through external systems instead of being maintained internally. Bennie's compulsive behavior further explains this difference, since he continues to trace the lines over and over, as though the pattern might make him whole (Egan 92). His repetition is an indication of the effort to restore coherence no longer by means of self-reflection but by means of relational patterning, meaning that identity should be recreated by the pieces of the fragments circulating in the interpersonal and technological networks. The theory of cyborgs by Donna Haraway is a significant point of contrast. Although Haraway asserts that there exists a permeable boundary between the human and machine (150), the Xeno-subject is not characterized by the breakdown of boundaries but rather by epistemic exposure which is loss of privacy, containment and interior sovereignty.

According to Cary Wolfe, posthuman subjectivity is shaped by interdependence and relations instead of human exceptionalism (Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* 22). This interdependence is radicalized in Xeno-subjects who find agency not in ethical choice but in systemic participation where people are responsible for actions and affects that materialize through mediated infrastructures. N. Katherine Hayles goes further to explain this condition by suggesting that cognition is shared among human and nonhuman agencies (6). This distribution is represented by the Xeno-subject which simultaneously exists as embodied presence, mediated memory, and networked data. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* moves towards a posthuman model, which goes

beyond the current models of the hybrid or nomadic self. This nomadism is reflected in the changing focus of Egan as well as the leaps between time, which simulates hybrid network selves. The compulsive behavior among Bennie and the others during the competition can be interpreted as an attempt to find a sense of sanity by following the pattern of relationships as opposed to having an independent existence (Egan 92). His gesture demonstrates his understanding that identity is no longer a kind of internally enclosed phenomenon but has to be pieced together out of bits that were moving among technological and interpersonal networks. This is further supported in the novel description of collective consciousness where memories are made visibly available and collectively accessible with the help of digital mediation that binds personal subjectivity to collective systems of memory.

Trauma Representation as a Narrative Form

The *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan performs an intervention of trauma both thematically and formally, causing psychological disturbance within its narrative structure. The nonlinear chronicles, disjointed vision and experimental designs of the novel reflect the dislocation, repetition time and temporal disruption of the characters. Instead of providing trauma as a constant topic, Egan spreads it across the narrative twists and turns, and repetitive elements of the story forcing the reader to experience trauma as an interruption and delayed realization. The storyline of Sasha represents such a formal performance of the trauma. Her obsessive tendency towards stealing, self-surveillance, and lack of emotion cannot be described by linear causality and are better discussed as symptoms that reappear without a storyline in the near future. Egan says she was going through her day like a person observing her own body outside of it (Egan 18), which dramatizes the dissociation process by estranging the body. This scene is incorporated in a chapter that swings between memories of the past and an action in the present, and denies a consistent chronological place. The trauma encountered by Sasha is not narrated directly by the author but is reinfiltrating the present in an unpredictable manner. This patterning of obsessions and repetition of text also adds depth of Bennie in the plot. His obsession

with melodies and physical moves indicates a need to provide structure to a sense of inner fragmentation, which is terribly disorganized (Egan 92). The gesture is slight and routine, but narratively charged it is carried out in the context of contemplation of the lost authenticity, artistic failure, and lack of connection. The pattern without resolution also highlights how trauma does not want to be narrated. The gestures of Bennie do not mend or re-establish coherence, instead, they reinstate the distance between repetition and comprehension, expressing the boundaries of integration. Egan carries this disintegration beyond the individual psychology by sudden changes of focalization. The chapters shift fast between the focal characters, and the peripheral character's- publicists, aids, offspring, and friends creating a field of disseminated narrative where no one consciousness is dominant. These shifts produce what could be interpreted as a literary cartography of trauma in which the residual of affect spreads throughout the social networks instead of being isolated in individual experience. Trauma therefore appears as interpersonal, spread over generations and working environment, as opposed to being concentrated in a single traumatic event. The most prominent formal intervention of the novel is the PowerPoint chapter narrated by Sasha's daughter, Alison, which renders trauma visible through visual and spatial form rather than conventional prose. The pauses, silences, and emotional distance in the family that are created by the slides map turn absence into structure.

This formal decision foreshadows an ethical issue of representation: the trauma is not described directly but is tackled by the means of diagrams, gaps and unresolved lines of trajectory. The chapter is not sentimentalized to make the reader get actively involved in what is not entirely articulable. Throughout the novel, the metafictional techniques of Egan support this moral aspect. Memory is being mediated over and over again, in music, technology, marketing language, visual form, provoking the question of the way suffering can be signified without being flattened or commodified. The reader, having to deal with fragmented narratives and missing time frames, finds herself in the role of a witness who should create the meaning without having the skills. Through such manner, trauma is not resolved but suspended awaiting ethical attention instead of narrative consumption. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, in its textual

representation, shows that trauma cannot be separated, as it is inseparable, and is connected to form. Its disjointed form, repetitive patterns and temporal displacements do not only describe psychological harm; they also execute it. By taking this formal form of trauma, Egan develops an architectural form of narration that is concerned with both the experience of psychic disruptions and its ethical obligation to represent it.

Posthuman Self and Digital Entanglement

In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Egan introduces a modern landscape where the demarcations of the human mind, technology and social relationships are erased. Egan also reveals tensions between posthuman ethics and neoliberal digital subjectivity, where selfhood is determined by metrics, performativity and market-driven visibility. The hybrid selves of Bennie and Sasha reveal that relations and technological entanglement are not necessarily liberatory; in fact, they are usually mediated by structural imperative and this makes the issue of identity in networked, digitized contexts to be ethically and ontologically complex. The dependency of Sasha on the external systems to mediate her actions is the focus of distributed cognition by Hayles who states that posthuman subjectivity is constituted on the basis of both organic and informational systems: our cognition is distributed between human and nonhuman agencies, and it is hard to distinguish between the organic and the informational (Hayles 6). The narrative by Egan dramatizes this phenomenon by structuring the identities of the characters around the technological structures, social media, and archival documents. Patterns and mediated perception that Bennie is obsessed with. The work by Sherry Turkle on digital selfhood supplements this view. She points out that the online world permits selective identity presentation, which tends to lead to a comedic alienation: in becoming not ourselves, we become lost to the self (Turkle 82). In Egan, the characters move through several platforms, mediated social spaces, which make them build such selves that are at once curated, networked, and fragmented. In addition, Cary Wolfe locates posthuman subjectivity within a more generalized ethico-ecological relationality with the point that humans are entangled

in relationships with nonhuman agents: the posthuman subject is defined by relationality, multiplicity, interdependence (Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* 22).

Decisions made within digital or technological realms have repercussions that are relational in nature and produce unpredictable outcomes. Braidotti supports this as an ethical aspect, and argues that the posthuman must recognize interconnection and responsibility to difference: the characters in Egan are hybridized in that their identities are constantly defined by technological systems that mediate memory, time and social relations. The experience in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is mediated by recording technologies, marketing vernacular, and datafied value, where the “[I]apsee is a quality of the song” (Egan 35), indicating that nothingness and mediation themselves generate meaning. It is subjectivity that arises through relationships with such systems and not interior coherence. Egan introduces the identity as relational, provisional, and technologically messy through fragmented form and mediated perception. In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, experience is mediated through recording machines, market discourse and data -determined value, with the lack being a characteristic of the song (Egan 35) implying that absence mediates itself. Access to such systems produces subjectivity and not interior coherence. Egan offers identity as relational, tentative, and entangled with technology through the fragmented form and mediation of perception. Egan distinguishes posthuman selves by portraying the confounding of human, technological and social systems in which cognition, affect and identity are shared among a variety of systems. The article depicts the Xeno-subject as a hybrid, ethical and relational being by incorporating Hayles, Turkle, Wolfe and Braidotti thereby demonstrating how posthuman being uncovers the traditional frontiers of selfhood.

Collective Trauma in Posthuman Networks

Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* does not confine trauma to the individual; rather, it illustrates trauma as inherently relational and networked, resonating across human and technological systems. This aligns with the posthuman notion that identity and experience are distributed, relational, and entangled with

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nonhuman systems. The recurrence of traumatic moments Sasha's compulsive gestures and Bennie's obsessive tracing of musical patterns suggests that personal trauma is inseparable from larger social, technological, and cultural matrices (Egan 5). The novel's nonlinear chronology, shifting perspectives, and fragmented form materialize the discontinuities of experience, showing how identity and memory are mediated by social, technological, and interpersonal networks. Through these formal and behavioral strategies, Egan illustrates the relational and contingent nature of selfhood, highlighting how agency emerges in interaction rather than isolation.

Egan's narrative structure simulates this posthuman networked trauma. Temporal discontinuities, recursive timelines, and multiple perspectives model the way trauma propagates through social and technological networks. Each character's memory, repetition, and emotional response are connected not only to personal experience but also to mediated social structures, news archives, social media platforms, music industry networks, and institutional record-keeping creating a lattice of interdependent traumatic resonances. These demonstrate how repetitive behavior enacts unresolved psychic and social tensions, tracing patterns that connect personal and mediated memory. Multiple perspectives, shifting from central to minor characters, highlight the networked nature of experience: through assistants, publicists, and children, the novel maps a lattice of relational and institutional connections. Digital and archival mediation is evident when characters, memories and actions circulate through music industry records, social media, and institutional documentation. This mirrors Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT), which emphasizes that actor's human and nonhuman alike participate in distributed processes of influence and effect (Latour 90). In Egan, traumatic experiences circulate through digital and social networks, demonstrating that affective and cognitive processes are entangled with technology, culture, and media infrastructures.

Sara Ahmed's work on affective economies provides another useful lens. She demonstrates that emotions circulate across bodies, spaces, and networks, producing collective sensations, relational tensions, and ethical stakes (Ahmed 21). In Egan,

characters' experiences of guilt, regret, obsession, and alienation do not remain confined to individual psyches; they spill over into interactions with others, archival systems, and mediated platforms, producing secondary trauma and ethical complexity. Sasha's compulsive gestures, for instance, become relationally legible: her impulsive, almost mechanical movements generate reactions in others, reverberating through social and technological networks. Similarly, Bennie's obsessive tracing of musical patterns embodies both an internal attempt at mastery and an interaction with social, cultural, and archival systems that reproduce memory and trauma.

Moreover, the posthuman lens reframes the ethical dimensions of trauma. Witnessing and recognition are not merely moral obligations toward other humans but extend to technological and nonhuman agents implicated in memory, distribution, and preservation. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's theory of witnessing is instructive here: narrative testimony requires that the listener or the networked system respond to trauma in ways that honor its complexity and relationality (Felman and Laub 64). In *Egan*, the reader assumes a similar role, navigating fragmented narratives across time, space, and consciousness to apprehend trauma both individually and collectively. This ethical witnessing is amplified in posthuman networks where technology mediates memory, attention, and response, emphasizing the interconnection of selfhood, relationality, and social-technical systems. Recent scholarship extends these ideas in posthuman and networked contexts. Klein (2022) argues that trauma is amplified in digital ecologies, where memory, affect, and social infrastructures co-produce emotional resonance across distributed networks. Martinez (2023) observes that literary depictions of networked trauma foreground how personal and collective experiences are mutually constitutive, shaping both identity and relationality. Rao (2022) emphasizes that narrative technologies, archives, social media, and multimodal storytelling mediate trauma's transmission, creating ethically complex webs of responsibility. Chen (2023) highlights that affective contagion in posthuman networks challenges conventional distinctions between subject and object, individual and collective. Singh (2024) contends that

posthuman narratives require readers to inhabit ethical and temporal multiplicities, fostering active engagement with distributed trauma.

Alterity, Relational Hybridity and Ethics

The problem of alterity and the experience of otherness within posthuman are foregrounded by the appearance of the Xeno-subject in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. The hybrid characters created by Egan represent multiple relational, and technologically mediated selves, with their moral orientation unable to be discussed outside their interaction with difference. Braidotti stresses that within the posthuman condition, ethical responsibility is both relational and developed by acknowledging multiplicity, difference, and interrelation rather than individual agency (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 190). The social media and surveillance tools used by Sasha turn personal desires into the effects in public; her choices to share or hide something have an impact on friends, family, and broader digital networks, which has unintended emotional and social consequences. In either instance, Egan describes subjectivity as a process of distribution: memory, affect, and action are spread out across technological and social infrastructures, and ethical responsibility is a process of relationships and negotiation, not a possession. It is through these entanglements that their hybrid selves are marked out as morally and ontologically complicated entities to act in interconnected human-technological networks.

The phenomenology of intercorporeality developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty highlights both material and embodied aspects of relational ethics where subjectivity is developed during engagement between other bodies and the environment (Merleau-Ponty 125). In Egan, posthuman subjectivity emerges through a distributed phenomenon that is further developed: identity is not only created in human interaction, but also created in interaction with technological infrastructures, media archives and digital platforms. Sasha and her compulsive gestures, or Bennie and his obsessive following of musical rhythms, describe the convergence of embodiment, cognition, and technology around creating ethical choices and responsibilities in a relationship, which makes the posthuman self-responsible to a complex network of

agents. Further insight emerges from Elizabeth Grosz on the topic of corporeality and ethical relationality. She underlines that the ethical engagement cannot be discussed outside material existence, the body, and its involvement in the world (Grosz 47). This entanglement is described by Egan through the Xeno-subject that involves the distribution of cognition, memory, affect, and agency through the bodies, social networks and technology systems. As an example, Sasha makes her meditated decisions and impulsive gestures when negotiating social and technological spaces, which extend through the relational networks of ethical stakes of distributed, hybrid agency. In addition, Scholars such as Cary Wolfe argue that posthuman ethics require the decentering of anthropocentric frameworks and a sustained focus on interdependence among human, nonhuman, and technological actors (Wolfe, *Before the Law* 22). This decentering signified in the narrative by Egan whose characters are co-constructed with technological and social systems. For instance, Bennie cannot stop using music production without recording technology, fellow artists, and the audience: he constantly followed the tracks and hoped that the pattern would complete him (Egan 92). His creative agency is therefore scattered across human and nonhuman networks demonstrating that ethical and aesthetic responsibility is in sharing as opposed to being individual. In the same way, her reliance on social media, surveillance technologies, and shared memory technologies implies that the choices made by Sasha has a consequence to other people: she passed through her day as someone who is viewing her own body externally, indicating that her selfhood is continuously negotiated in terms of observation, mediation, and reaction of people around her (Egan 18). Egan, in both works, proves that hybrid subjectivity is relational; characters are ethically and ontologically bound, whose decision and identity is formed in their relationships with other people, technological devices, and social systems.

This renders alterity and responsiveness pivotal to self-constitution and the fact that perception and interaction with the difference cannot be made without the ethical agency in a posthuman environment. Finally, ethical relationality is practiced within the story itself, which demands of the reader the ability to switch between

points of view, move across non-linear chronologies and interact with hybrid, technologically mediated consciousnesses. The same way as the characters have to negotiate distributed, networked and embodied subjectivity, the readers are also invited to observe, sympathize and decipher trauma, multiplicity and hybridity across the human and nonhuman strata. Egan thereby develops an epistemic and ethical structure where alterity, relational hybridity and posthuman ethics come together to establish that the Xeno-subject is cognitive, embodied, technological, and morally situated at the same time. Recent scholarship extends this conception of Xeno-subjectivity in networked and digital settings. Lopez (2022) points out that affective labor of posthuman narratives is distributed among human and technological subjects, and relational awareness is created under an ethical negotiation as a result of engagement between nonhuman systems. Nguyen (2023) believes that posthuman agency is emerging and situational, and identity and morality are continuous co-production through interaction with the nonhuman system. Bennett (2022) claims that multisensory and multimodal narratives provide a way to attentively ethically, while Sharma (2023) emphasizes narrative responsibility in technologically mediated environments. These insights are echoed in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* when Egan describes Sasha and Bennie, whose hybrid, networked identities negotiate between ethical, technological and relational trickery. Their hybrid personalities are neither autonomous nor pre-determined but contingent, relational and ethically bound up agents. In this respect, ethical engagement is inseparable from hybrid relationality; cognition and acting towards difference becomes central to self-constitution. The very narrative itself performs ethical relationality by forcing readers to live across various perspectives, in nonlinear temporalities, and through mediated consciousnesses of hybridity and technology, that is, the presentation of alterity, relational hybridity, and posthuman ethics interacting. As an Assortment of Mixed-Up Memories., *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan creates a literary space where identity, memory and temporality are drastically disrupted, which will result in what this paper refers as the xeno-subject, a hybrid, relationally decentered self,

whose cognition, affect and ethical stance are distributed through human, technological and social networks.

Conclusion

The *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan offers a compelling account of Xeno-subjectivity where human identity is de-centralized, hybridized, and distributed relationally throughout the technological, social and affective networks. By her complex use of time cuts and non-linear narratives, Egan dramatizes delayed and unintegrated nature of trauma and how memory insists on its repetition and how it dictates relational perception in line with statements of Cathy Caruth, who asserts that trauma is the wound that insists upon repeating itself (Caruth 4). At the same time, the novel places its characters in posthuman and technologically mediated ecologies. The distributed character of cognition, affect, and agency between human and nonhuman systems as theorized by N. Katherine Hayles points out the role of identity within the work by Egan as neither determined nor independent but rather emergent and contingent. Likewise, the cyborg metaphor of Donna Haraway and conception of relational posthumanism Wolfe can be used to emphasize that boundaries between human, technological and social networks are permeable and that there are no separate ethical, cognitive and affective processes which are exercised in the form of entanglements (Wolfe, *Before the Law* 22). The works of Sherry Turkle concerning digital selfhood (Turkle 82) and Maurice Halbwachs on the topic of collective memory (Halbwachs 45) can also be viewed as the additional sources of evidence on the transformation of memory, identity, and relationship facing that mediated platforms and network interaction generates hybrid selves that are simultaneously visible, obscured, and ethically responsible. The moral risks of posthuman entanglement are also further highlighted. The xeno-subject is not only a cognitive technological entity, but an ethical agent, the decisions of which permeate networks of human and nonhuman interdependence, in blurring temporal, traumatic and technological facts, the novel demonstrates characters whose identities are contingent, emergent and plural. Intertwining these strands, Egan creates a literary

architecture where Xeno-subjectivity performs the roles of an ontological state and an ethical imperative, depicting the complexity of the relationships between temporality, trauma, the digital mediation, and relational interdependence. The novel therefore places the modern human experience at a posthuman stage, whereby memory, affect, and agency are mutually constituted at the social, technological, and cultural infrastructures, challenging traditional notions of selfhood and anticipating the ethical and existential demands of life in a digitally mediated and temporally unstable world (Egan 121).

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Vernacular Futures: Reconfiguring the Posthuman in Contemporary Assamese Speculative Fiction through *Homo Minuscula*

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Abstract

The paper investigates posthuman themes in Santanoo Tamuly's *Homo Minuscula* (2023), a 20th-century Assamese science fiction anthology. It contextualizes Assamese science fiction in postcolonial Indian speculative literature along with its multilingual and multicultural origins. It uses posthumanist theory to examine complex connections among humans, non-humans (including clones), and other species as co-evolving beings negotiating technological advancement. Stories like "Homo Minuscula" by Amulya Hazarika and "Livability" by Harekrishna Deka explore dystopia, human augmentation, and repositioning within this posthuman framework. "Rasayan" and "The Returnee" explore the ethical and existential issues posed by medical augmentation of humans via technology. Furthermore, stories such as "The Cave" and "The Inseparable Hearts" also challenge traditional notions of speciesism and the hierarchical categorization of beings. This research investigates several stories like this that advocate Assamese Science Fiction's (ASF) contributions to posthumanist discourse and stimulate readers to engage with its thought-provoking narratives and observations on humanity's advancement.

Keywords: *Homo Minuscula*, Assamese Science Fiction (ASF), Posthumanism, Speculative, Indian, Humans.

Introduction

Suparno Banerjee's *Indian Science Fiction: Patterns, History, and Hybridity* (2020) situates the origin of Indian Science Fiction (ISF) in postcolonial India's diverse traditions, beginning with Kailash Chunder Dutt's *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of*



the Year 1945 (1835), which imagined a revolt against colonial rule. Indian science fiction also incorporates sophisticated technology, interplanetary travel, and extraterrestrial species. However, as Sukrita Paul Kumar, guest editor of *Sahitya Akademi's* bimonthly magazine, points out, science fiction works in any Indian language also ignite mythology and advance scientific understanding (9). As debates have predominantly focused on American writers, studies on the entire corpus of ISF are scarce because it differs from classic genres. While ISF engaged with Anglo-American science fiction, it differed in its approach, as this exposure only contributed to shaping ISF's creativity. This lineage includes Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and many more works that employed scientific imagination to advance fiction. In the 20th century, like many regional literatures of India, Assamese science fiction (ASF) explored the transformative potential of scientific advancements on the human condition, making it "prophetic in nature" (Tamuly 5). Stories from *Homo Minuscula* (2023), a twenty-one-story ASF anthology edited by Santanoo Tamuly, are investigated to examine innovations in ecology, medicine, and technology. Amritjyoti Mahanta, a renowned fiction critic and columnist, has translated these narratives into English. These stories depict a future civilization where all sciences have advanced and are focused on conquering death, often leading to unexpected outcomes. This study investigates the relevance of ASF's dystopian futures and human advancement by machines, which create a new cultural history of the human and ask what types of humans are present and extinct. Pramod Nayar suggests that "Posthumanism is, at first glance, a temporal marker indicative of this late, perhaps more advanced human" (12).

The traditional definition of humans identifies those who are aware of their intellect and identity, or can regulate their behaviors via their needs and desires. Humanism examines an individual whose composite qualities identify them as human; according to Nayar, "[i]t treats the human subject as the center of the world, which is influenced by the human's thoughts and actions" (15). While critical posthumanism begins with the assumption that the human incorporates difference in the form of other DNA, species, and forms of life, its uniqueness is seen as a myth (Nayar 13). Vernacular Futures: Reconfiguring the Posthuman in Contemporary Assamese Speculative Fiction through *Homo Minuscula*

Dinesh Chandra Goswami's "Inseparable Hearts" (2005) deals with cloning and "other bodies" that are neither humans nor animals. As "posthuman bodies are bodies designed for the donation of organs with pre-set life spans" (Nayar 87). The research questions if stories of *Homo Minuscula* (2023) emphasize human augmentation via technology and other species or a coevolutionary connection among humans, robots, and other living forms.

***Homo Minuscula* (2023)**

The title, *Homo* (Latin for people) and *Minuscula* (extremely little), indicates a major transition in human life capturing the thematic overview of the book. The story "Homo Minuscula" depicts mankind transforming into tiny organisms to survive in an exhausted planet. The concept proposes a biological and ecological alternative to genetic alteration, organ transplant, and other mechanical bodily enhancements that redefine life and evolution. The departure of *Homo Minuscula* without external influence highlights the anthology's fundamental question: Can humans develop by adaptation or subtraction rather than addition? Hariprasad Barua's "Birchatiyar Desh" initiated Assamese science fiction in the seventh issue of volume 1 of the Assamese journal *Awahan*, featuring Phagnaram, who calls Jupiter in his dream. This idea of interplanetary involvement via technology was unusual in the early 20th century. Other notable ASF contributors include the creator of *Awahan* magazine. In his 1938 story "Rasayan" (chemistry), Nagendranaryan Choudhary incorporates 'kayakalpa,' an ancient Indian medicinal rejuvenation treatment claiming to restore youth and energy, blending Indian customs and modern investigation (Dutta 1090). In contrast, "The Returnee" by Jayant Kumar Goswami explores a speculated breakthrough in biology and chemistry could potentially enable resurrection for humanity. Despite these advances, the narrative indicates towards the mortality of humans reminding society the powerful nature science that is constrained by existential realities. Through his narrative "Livability," former IPS officer and Sahitya Akademi Award winner Harekrishna Deka gave ASF a new, technical voice. The story blends machine learning and human cognition to examine biotechnology and

AI-enhanced humans by investigating identity, autonomy, and the ethics of human technological dependency. These narratives present a preview of the anthology's 21 short stories. The anthology marks a significant milestone in Assamese Science Fiction (ASF), mirroring the growing societal consciousness regarding science, identity, and survival in a dynamic world. This anthology envisions a world where the human subject is fluid, redefined, or augmented and is investigated in this paper to contribute to the growing body of SF scholarship that acknowledges ASF as a valuable resource for posthuman inquiry.

Positioning of Humans

The anthology, through its speculative futures, addresses the nuanced dynamics of posthumanism, which includes the centrality of humans and their superiority over all other life forms. These notions are challenged by depicting biological transformations through medical innovations, as it problematizes the human form and consciousness and suggests a reconstructed human identity. By probing such consequences, it questions that who benefits, who is marginalized, and what is compromised in the pursuit of becoming more than human. Here the interdisciplinary approach is reflected through the recurring elements in the convergence of various scientific domains such as chemistry, physics, and biology, particularly as they owe to medical advancement and temporal-spatial mobility. The posthuman condition is inherently hybrid, where science and narrative intersect to imagine new ontologies of existence. The stories engage with speculated futures where scientific intervention may extend or diminish human faculties; it can be disrupting the fixed boundaries between the organic and the synthetic, the natural and the artificial (Hayles 2). This paper engages with two key dimensions of posthumanism as reflected in the anthology; First is the Decentring Speciesism—where narratives question the positioning of humans as the ultimate agent of knowledge and morality. In these stories, new species or their technologically enhanced counterparts often challenge or outperform human beings, portraying humans as just one among many sentient entities. This discourse will indeed question

the meaning of being human, a concept that has become complex in the rapidly evolving fields of posthumanism and medical science. This perspective challenges the belief that any species, particularly humans, is inherently superior to others, a notion known as speciesism; it applies not only to non-human animals but also to marginalized humans and artificially created beings such as clones. It will explore how ASF interrogates speciesist ideologies in its narratives. And the second is human enhancement—it will engage with the scenarios where the human body and mind are altered in terms of scientific advancement, which can increase the additional capabilities or reduce size and complexity, as implied in the given stories. The authenticity of identity, limits of embodiment, and implications of self-modification are the questions that provoke such changes. The study will situate *Homo Minuscula* (2023) in broader posthumanist discourse, drawing on the theoretical frameworks by scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway, Pramod K. Nayar, and Rosi Braidotti. As stated by Haraway in Cyborg Manifesto,

Robotics and computer science had progressed immensely, and the cyborg became the central metaphor to understand social and cultural reality as a construction of multiple identities, a metaphor truly made for the late twentieth-century imagination: ‘a hybrid of machine and organism [...].’
(149)

These scholars have examined the evolving relationship among the human, the machine, and the non-human, and building upon their findings, the study will not only project the technological futures but also critique and reimagine the ethical, social, and ontological dimensions of human beings in an age of accelerating change.

Human Enhancement

“Rasayan” depicts bold attempts to search for immortality and overcome biological constraints of aging and decay. The cultural and mythical reservoirs work as the metaphors for age and vitality transmission and manipulation, such as the *Mahabharata*’s scene when Puru gives his youth to his father Yayati, with

contemporary scientific investigation. By blending ancient life-extension myths with glandular science, the narrative evokes what Rosi Braidotti calls “*Zoe*-centered egalitarianism,” a posthuman vitalism that “displaces the focus from the human to the non-human life force, or *Zoe*—the spark of life shared across all organic matter” (Braidotti 60). However, instead of regeneration, this unchecked reversal endangered the body's biological clock. The elderly guy becomes a primate-like creature with hair and a tail. “*Rasayan*” questions the bounds of the human species and the urge to live longer or alter biological processes. As Nayar indicates, “Biologists are certain of a ‘species identity’ for most life forms on Earth. Yet animal-to-human and human-to-animal crossovers and mixing to produce chimeras—indicating species-blurring—are now common.” (131).

The transfer of glandular material may collapse the species boundary through rendering humans to look like primates. It indicates that biological interventions make strict taxonomies unsustainable. This reflects Donna Haraway's assertion that “by the late twentieth century [...] the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached [...] nothing convincingly settles the separation” (Haraway 151). Instead of cybernetic augmentation or AI integration, this improvement stresses biological and metabolic transformation from the body or other species. The story presents the survival of old man not through augmentation but through his regression into a primordial being. It reconfigures via speculative science; that once the biological envelope is breached, the “human” as a stable category dissolve into a zone of proximity with the animal. In contrast, “*Livability*” depicts human enhancement in a dystopian future of 2070s with extreme body mechanization. It envisions a world divided into artificial homes called ‘islands’ comprising nanotechnology and artificial intelligence to replace any bodily part with painless and exact transplants. Historian Robert Maxim, due to memory loss, undergoes many physiological upgrades and brain implants, as he says, “I am a manufactured human” (Deka 67), describing his ontological state. His doctor informs his wife, Akansha, that “he may not regain it all, but he will surely get back everything important” (Deka 65). This mechanization of identity exemplifies Bernard Stiegler's *Vernacular Futures: Reconfiguring the Posthuman in Contemporary Assamese Speculative Fiction through Homo Minuscula*

theory regarding the “industrialization” of memory, which “leads to the loss of the individual's ability to exist as a singular subject with a unique past” (Stiegler 112). Silicon chips were placed in his brain to restore memory, showing how memory, identity, and subjectivity have changed. In response to his wife's question about the 4th of July, he recited American history but forgot that it was also the couple's golden jubilee wedding anniversary. It prioritizes historically or publicly relevant material above personal, emotionally charged memory and mechanizes memory into a utilitarian algorithm. As pointed out in the story, “[t]hat is minor, not needed in this livable world” (Deka 71), it normalizes the human body into a patchwork of inorganic implants. Exemplifying this posthuman condition of fusion between human biology and the information system, Katherine Hayles argues that,

The posthuman implies not only a coupling with intelligent machines but a coupling so intense and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed. (18)

The illustration of coupling in Maxim's story represents an identity no longer anchored in biological continuity but dispersed across cybernetic networks. Both “Rasayan” and “Livability” address different modalities of enhancement; one grounded in biochemical regression and the other in cybernetic reconstruction. While “Rasayan” serves as a cautionary tale of tampering with biological essence, “Livability” depicts the emotional erasure inherent in machinic logic. In both narratives, the endeavor to transcend death results in the characters transcending their own humanity. Ultimately, these stories fit within the framework of “Critical Posthumanism,” which Stefan Herbrechter defines not as a stage in evolution, but as “a crisis in the definition of the human [...] the moment when the human realizes it has always been ‘contaminated’ by the non-human” (Herbrechter 15). The idea of enhancement remains questionable; while their bodies transcend human identity, the loss of essence suggests that “advancement” may merely be a sophisticated form of dehumanization.

Decentring Speciesism

“Homo Minuscula,” “The Cave,” and “Anupam, Deeplina, and Destiny” speculate on the future of human existence through the assemblage of human, clones, biological minimization, and genetic determinism. By challenging the centrality of humans in cultural and scientific discourse, it offers a space to examine posthuman subjectivities by investigating a future where species, bodies, and technologies intersect and evolve through. “Homo Minuscula” set in 2115 AD, scientists surgically remove the pituitary gland and restrict somatotrophin synthesis, shrinking people to about three inches tall. This transition decreases metabolic demands but makes humans susceptible to environmental hazards, such as an elephant’s footprint. Scientist Nirmai Lahon describes this as an evolutionary continuity: “Probably we will create a new human race. The race that stood on its two legs with its spine straight was called Homo erectus; later it came to be called Homo sapiens. And we will be homo minuscula.” (Hazarika 114). This transformation represents the loss of superior status of in the ecosystem as Pramod Nayar also argues in *Posthumanism* (2013), it is “a consequence of its openness to the environment” (20). The repositioning of humans aligns with the Michelist political imperative found in environmental posthumanism, which emphasizes “the porosity of the human with respect to the environment, as well as the mutual feedback effects [...] to change the world, we must first change ourselves” (Milburn 364). The posthuman notion where humans are no longer considered autonomous masters of their environment but are subject to its mutable conditions. By engaging with ethical, and political aspects, the narrative examines the treatment of social order and biology to determine who is human and who is disposable. In “The Cave,” Mr. Pieneer, a white UN secretary, symbolizes such a speciesist viewpoint, that betrays a deeply ingrained racism. He declares,

Thousands of apes are born in the forests. That doesn't mean those forests are theirs. In this land many humans with black skin were born, and because

they were born here, they died here one day. They never did anything between birth and death (Saikia 50).

This statement aims to dehumanize Black people by comparing them to animals, thereby stripping away their humanity and agency. But in contrast Pieneer gets the transplanted heart of Black man named Smith. When Smith's widow, Mary, asks to touch her husband's heart inside Pieneer's body, it destabilizes the perceived species hierarchy. A man whose heart is both physically and metaphorically the center of humanity was formerly deemed subhuman. Pieneer's eventual suicide and Dr. Campbell's awful conclusion is even more distressing as he attempts to rationalize the death by stating that,

So, I mean, can't it be like this, that hearts of men from every race do not match with receivers of every other community? Suppose a water pump cannot be used for pumping oil. It may run initially, but damage will occur in no time. And that is how Piennner's machine also stopped working (Saikia 60).

The comparison of the human heart to a machine is a metaphor for the overt act of dehumanization. It makes Smith's heart no longer capable of humanity or compassion, making it merely a mechanical object unsuited for Piennner's 'superior' body. To reinforce the racial hierarchy that places white bodies above Black ones, the analogy denies the biological compatibility proven by the successful transplant. Supporting this, Nayar also argues that,

When humans are speciesist and treat non-human life forms as expendable, then some species of humans are also—as history shows in the form of genocides, racism, and slavery—excluded from the category of the human to then be expendable. (14)

The life and death of Mr. Piennner symbolized the consequences of internalized superiority and societal dehumanization.

While “The Cave” indicates the external exclusion, “Anupam, Deeplina, and Destiny” shifts the focus inward to genetic governance. In this future, marriage and reproduction are determined by genetic compatibility not by love or autonomy. The rise of such genetic discourse has redefined the human body as a code. As Judith Roof argues, that, “the human body began to be seen as an articulation of a code (the DNA), even as the DNA itself was textualized as the book of life” (Nayar 81). The personal identity is determined via molecular language which reduces human beings to a result of preset genetic instruction called ‘mathematicised life’ (Nayar 81). This standard of living is criticized but yet glorified in the story, as genetic control can promise to end pain, but it takes away autonomy, variety, and emotional authenticity. It promotes a new type of eugenics under the veil of technical reason, as it poses significant concerns about humanity's future. It in a way decentres human as superior but also indicates that certain specific human is preferred to exist in the future indicating the speciesism.

The narrative “Porcine” addresses interspecies brain transplanting. Kulesh’s brain cortex is replaced with a pig’s, he exhibits hybrid behaviour, but his wife, Dharitri, embraces the “transformed Kulesh,” underlying the narrative’s subject of life beyond human conventions and the possibility of new hybrid beings that cross species boundaries. It exemplifies what Katherine Hayles findings in her distributed cognition—model in which human thought is no longer confined to the brain but is shared through technological and non-human systems. She asserts,

No longer is human will be seen as the source from which emanates the mastery necessary to dominate and control the environment. Rather, the distributed cognition of the emergent human subject correlates with [...] the distributed cognitive system as a whole, in which ‘thinking’ is done by both human and nonhuman actors (90).

By using Pig’s brain to form a hybrid, the narrative also has an ethical dimension since pigs are generally considered immoral and used as experimental animals. It questions species hierarchies and proposes posthuman existence may result from morally or physiologically impossible cooperation. Finally, “The Vernacular Futures: Reconfiguring the Posthuman in Contemporary Assamese Speculative Fiction through *Homo Minuscula*

Inseparable Hearts”; it questions the ethical boundaries between humans and clones. Roopsikha a clone sister created to provide a replacement heart for her ‘original’ sister Deepsikha. A disturbing practice is revealed as Roopsikha, resembled humans biologically, behaviourally, and emotionally but was still not considered human. Despite their origin as clones, their agency, dreams, and purpose are hallmarks of what is traditionally associated with being human. As pointed in the theoretical framework of posthumanism, Clones disturb our sense of species self because, while they are derived from humans—i.e., they replicate us—we find it difficult to perceive them as human. Whether such beings, derived from us, from our DNA, are to be treated as persons in the full sense of the word is a subject explored in medical ethics, philosophy, and politics (Nayar 86). Deepsikha’s parents faced a dilemma while choosing which daughter would live; it symbolizes a shift from species supremacy towards a new ethic of cohabitation. This unravels the underlying theme of the fear that arises when science blurs the lines of identity and personhood. The speciesism mindset that allowed certain beings (race, biology, or origin) to be commodified and sacrificed is reflected when the dilemma regarding the ethical implications of using clones as organ banks is faced by Deepsikha’s parents. These tales use speculative frameworks to track human decentring. By challenging humanism’s core belief in bodily sovereignty, rational autonomy, and species supremacy, these tales explore new ontologies of being that reflect the focus of posthuman theory through cohabitation with robots, animals, and the environment. Whether by technological assemblage, genetic mathematization, cloning or biological subtraction, the human subjectivity in ASF turns into a malleable node in a broader ecological and technological network. These narratives do not just indicate a dystopian future, but they offer a new ethic of cohabitation where survival depends on the recognition of our shared vulnerability with non-humans.

Conclusion

The narratives analyzed in this research are spanning from the glandular regressions of “Rasayan” to the miniaturized survivalists of “Homo Minuscula”.

collectively redefine the human subject as a malleable node within a vast technological and ecological network. By placing the drive for human enhancement against the necessity of decentring speciesism, these stories discover that posthuman transformation is not a linear progression toward a perfected utopia, but a complex state of hybrid compromise. *Homo Minuscula* (2023) has presented some characters that initially exhibit that they are superior beings due to their technological advancement or genetic engineering, but they are ultimately confronted with mortality, trauma, and the limits of self-determination. Whether through the addition of cybernetic circuits or the subtraction of physical scale, the resulting “advancement” is never an absolute success or failure in biological terms alone; rather, it depends entirely upon the adaptation of the resulting hybrid human to their new ontological state. This reflects Karen Barad’s theory of “Agential Realism,” which suggests that individuals emerge only through their “intra-actions” with the environment (Barad 139).

A recurring motif in this anthology is the integration of ancient mythological reservoirs with modern scientific techniques. However, as seen in “Rasayan,” these myth-science combinations often fail to achieve pure immortality. The central complication within human enhancement is that nucleating non-human traits that are engaging with them to advance and that leads to a transformation of the “self.” While there is a loss of the original human “essence,” it is never a complete erasure. Instead, the body develops an enmeshed hybrid that exhibits a state simultaneously post-human and post-non-human. This aligns with Donna Haraway’s concept of “Sympoiesis” or “making-with,” where no organism is self-contained (Haraway 58). As the anthology demonstrates, when transformation occurs through subtraction (as in “Homo Minuscula”), the boundary of the human is blurred, but the subject enhances itself by growing along with its surroundings rather than dominating them.

This perspective recontextualizes the tragedy in “The Cave”. Technically, the transplant was a success as the body accepted the “other” which proved that biological compatibility exists where social ideology does not. The failure was sociopolitical.

While science proves there is no true boundary between species, a rigid speciesist hierarchy is nonetheless imposed upon certain races and genders. This functions as what Giorgio Agamben calls the “Anthropological Machine,” a symbolic process that seeks to separate the “human” from the “animal” to justify exclusion (Agamben 37). When these social boundaries are not “erased” alongside biological ones, the hybrid subject, like Mr. Pieneer, suffers internal collapse. Conversely, “Porcine” defies Cartesian dualism through the convergence of human and animal intelligence, producing a distributed cognitive subject that survives through ecological humility.

Ultimately, these narratives discover that Utopia is a perceived state that is only psychologically attainable. The posthuman condition is defined by a shared vulnerability with the machine, the animal, and the environment. As examined in Biopunk Dystopias, these futures dissolve the humanist subject position as “superior and exceptional” (47). This represents a “crisis in the definition of the human” (Herbrechter 15) that moves us away from being autonomous masters toward a new ethic of cohabitation. Whether from the regional margins of Assamese Science Fiction or global discourse, the conclusion remains the same; that our future depends not on the perfection of our DNA, but on our willingness to recognize that the boundaries we impose are far more fragile than the biological hybrids we are becoming.

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Beyond the Anthropocene: A Study of Posthumanism and Ecocriticism in Children's and Speculative Fiction

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Abstract

The Anthropocene, characterized by unchecked human dominance over nature through technological advancements and industrial expansion, has led to profound ecological disruptions—manifesting in global warming resulting into climate crisis, and loss of biodiversity. Literature has long been a site for interrogating these crises, offering speculative futures and ethical critiques that challenge anthropocentric worldviews. As ecological devastation escalates, posthumanism and ecocriticism emerge as vital theoretical frameworks, dismantling hierarchical constructs that privilege human supremacy and reimagining the interdependent human and non-human interactions. Ecocriticism, as theorized by scholars like, Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Greg Garrard, and Posthumanism, as theorized by Cary Wolfe and Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway's cyborg ontology, will provide a framework for analyzing literature's role in imagining post-Anthropocene futures—where coexistence and reciprocity replace dominance as the foundation for ecological narratives. This study explores how select speculative fiction and children's picture books subvert anthropocentric perspectives, advocating for ecological consciousness, responsible environmental stewardship, and ethical coexistence. While interweaving connections between texts such as, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*, and canonical children's books like, Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree," Dr. Seuss's "The Lorax," Julia Donaldson's "The Snail and the Whale," and Emily Haworth-Booth's "The Last Tree," this paper interrogates shifting representations of ecological responsibility, human-animal entanglements, and the transformative potential of technology. This study argues that the continued exploitation of nature will inevitably erode human supremacy, forcing a paradigm shift toward a shared existence in which technology functions not as an instrument of control, but as a mediator for ecological restoration and interspecies cooperation. Through the lens of ecocriticism and posthumanism, literature acts an impactful platform for rethinking ecological futures, advocating for environmental



justice, and fostering an advanced perception of humanity's position within the interconnected system of life.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Ecocriticism, Literature, Environment, Children's Literature, Climate Change.

Introduction:

In an attempt to pursue supremacy, humanity has raised skyscrapers, built flyovers, erased farmlands, and harnessed nuclear power plants, unmindfully striving to control the nonhuman world while forgetting Einstein's statement that every action follows an equal and opposite reaction. Consequently, climate calamities such as droughts, floods, wildfires, and mass extinction of species increasingly appear in literature that mirrors life, heralding a need for the shift from the Anthropocene to the Post-Anthropocene.

This paper deals with questions like: how do literary these texts, especially speculative novels and children's picture books, redefine human–animal–environment relationship to anthropocentric paradigms? The attempt is to situate these texts within theories of posthumanism and ecocriticism, wherein animals act as active co-participants in narratives to arouse feelings of empathy, ecological concern, contributing towards sustainable futures.

This study examines select texts to analyze animal representations from anthropocentric perspectives prevalent in the posthuman age. By doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates in literary studies about the necessity of moving beyond human-centered frameworks. Considering the alarming situation of environmental crisis from the point of view of posthumanism in the Anthropocene, these writings propose exploring affinities between human and non-human entities.

For centuries Western modernity has long rested on the twin pillars of humanism and anthropocentrism, frameworks that place the human as the centre of history, knowledge, and value. Philosophical discourses, educational systems, literary

traditions. and political institutions, have been shaped by these paradigms. Due to ecological collapse, technological saturation, and epistemic pluralism, these theoretical foundations are being critically reexamined with the help of posthumanist thought.

Traditionally humanism, conceives man as an autonomous and rational being, idealizes ‘Man’ as a supreme creation that stands apart from nature, animals, and machines. Humanism considers, man is at the center, depending upon animals and machines created by himself. But ironically, man is depending too much on these machines, electronic devices, and mechanized life. Neil Badmington elaborates on Rene Descartes’ theory of Humanism, in *Posthumanism*,

There is [...] an absolute difference between the human and the inhuman: only the former has the capacity for rational thought. Reason belongs solely to the human and, as such, serves to unite the human race. ‘We’ may have different types of bodies, but because reason is a property of the mind (which, for Descartes, is distinguishable from the body), deep down ‘we’ are all the same. (52)

In Descartes philosophy, we find binary opposites about how humans and non-humans are different, and posthumanism attempts to break these differences. “Humanism,” writes Paige Allen, “privileged the perspective and power of Man, and championing individual rights, agency, and self-determination” (n.p.). As Fiona Probyn-Rapsey notes, anthropocentrism “places humans not only at the center of everything but makes ‘us’ the most important measure of all things” (52). In his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams defines Anthropocentrism, to be “oriented to the interest of human beings, who are viewed as opposed to and superior to nature, and free to exploit natural resources and animal species for their purposes” (88). British scholar Jonathan Bate aptly notes that humans are “both part of and apart from nature,” echoing Brockbank’s call to challenge anthropocentrism and center non-human experience. Brockbank adds, “Ecocritics analyze not only the relationship

between the human and the non-human in literature but also the ways in which the human's place within the wider 'non-human' sphere is realized" (n.p.).

Posthumanism aims to decentralize humans, bring non-humans to the center, and relate the two. This perspective has become essential in the current scenario when man is losing his position at the centre and is forgetting the interconnectedness with other creations. Braidotti claims that posthuman theory is, "a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in [...] the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet" (5). Posthumanism is a critical theory, a coming together of thoughts on the inter-relation of human, non-human, and technology, a theory that came up at end of 20th century, in the context of ecological crisis and concern. For Cary Wolfe,

Posthumanism is a connection between human beings and animals. Humanity has forgotten that, Human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. (Haraway 4)

Humanity must emerge out-of-the oblivion and accept the fact that it is not the supreme power. This paper therefore asks: how can posthumanist thought, when read alongside frameworks of ecocriticism, help us rethink human–animal–environment relations in children's and speculative fiction? The scholarly intervention is to show that these theories, when applied to literary texts, dismantle anthropocentric hierarchies and foreground nonhuman agency as central to ecological futures.

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study that brings together literature and environment. It is supposed to have emerged after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). William Rueckert coined this term in his seminal essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" published in 1978. Ecocritical literature ranges from the romantic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge,

that celebrates beauty of nature and its spiritual power to the Modern climate fiction (cli-fi), giving insights into the ever-increasing global warming, ecological crisis, and human responsibility, through writings like, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, etc. Ecocritical literature involves not just reading about nature in texts but also connecting literature to urgent societal and environmental realities. Ecocritical literature, more particularly, responds to the call of the ecological problems caused by the Anthropocene. Cheryll Glotfelty, defined Ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." He stated that ecocriticism takes an earth-centric approach to literary studies (xviii).

Research methodology:

This study is based on the application of a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, combining the frameworks of ecocriticism and posthumanism, that redirects attention from human-centered narratives to earth-centered concerns, and highlights how children's writings and speculative fiction redefine ecological bonds beyond the Anthropocene. The paper analyses select children's graphic books and speculative novels conducting a close reading and thematic coding of narrative structure, symbolism, and ecological motifs in the selected texts in an attempt to examine how one can confront human centrality through animal representations. The paper uses storytelling as an application for ecological justice with an aim to highlight the agency of animals and environment. Selected speculative fiction shows dystopian or utopian futures that question relationship of human and nonhuman in technologically entangled settings.

Not being just a description, the study offers critical analysis of tensions and ambiguities in the lives of characters in the texts. Like, the examination of *The Giving Tree* not only as a narrative of generosity and care, but also as a text that professes sacrificial ethics, opening questions about whether such representations sustain or subvert human-centric values. Similarly, speculative novels interrogate the

ambivalent and apprehensive depictions of technology, asking whether they disseminate humans as masters or open possibilities for nonhuman agency.

This study chooses speculative fiction and children's literature considering the fact that they entertain and profess ethical values through storytelling, providing a platform for readers to indulge in subjectivity, agency, and care. By comparing these genres, the paper makes evident how literature for all age groups fosters rethinking about human–animal–environment relations beyond the Anthropocene.

Discussion:

With the emergence of the theories of posthumanism and ecocriticism, more and more children's literature, especially picture books, have been used as a medium of transformation that provides insights into the moral and ethical aspects of the animal and nonhuman world to the young readers. Rosi Braidotti claims that, “the posthuman subject is a transversal entity [...] a subject-in-process [...] constituted by multiplicities” (45), and these multiplicities can be introduced at a young age through stories about trees, animals, whales, snails, and guardians of the forest.

Harju and Rouse (2018), in an article affirm that “literature has been considered as a key element in encouraging child readers to reconnect with an increasingly imperiled natural environment” (n.p.), proposing that graphic books, with attractive colourful images, become more than pedagogical tools, proving as posthuman pathways for multispecies ethical coexistence. By reminding of embodied and affective responses on the readers, these texts instruct and create emotional resonance with the nonhuman world. Lennis G. Echterling describes them as “eco-pedagogical tools” (n.p.), while Laliena and Sala reinforce their role in forwarding messages of environmental awareness and ethical responsibility.

This aligns with Cary Wolfe's framing of posthumanism as moving “beyond the traditional boundaries of humanism” (“Introduction,” xxv), to understand relational agency in a more inclusive manner. The portrayal of nature and animal characters as emotional and ethical mediators finds embodiment in picture books like,

‘The Giving Tree’ (1964) by Shel Silverstein, ‘The Lorax’ (1971) by Dr. Seuss, Julia Donaldson’s ‘The Snail and the Whale’ (2003), and Emily Haworth-Booth’s ‘The Last Tree’ (2021). These texts allow “becoming-with” (Haraway), dissolving hierarchies, cultural or species-based, and generating inclusivity without ethnic stereotyping. In doing so, they foster bonds instead of barriers, cultivating ecological citizenship rooted in care, reciprocity, and belonging, what Rosi Braidotti calls an “affirmative ethics” (463).

At the same time, critical interrogation is necessary. For instance, ‘The Giving Tree’ reinforces sacrificial ethics, raising questions about whether it sustains anthropocentric values rather than dismantling them. ‘The Lorax,’ while celebrated for environmental advocacy, can be critiqued for its reliance on an anthropomorphic spokesperson, does this empower nonhuman agency or re-center human authority? Similarly, ‘The Snail and the Whale’ balances adventure with ecological vulnerability, inviting reflection on whether empathy alone suffices to address systemic ecological crises.

This narrative reframing invites picture books to perform what Donna Haraway explains as “material-semiotic transformations” (200), a strategy that, through storytelling, allows coexistence by removing rigid categories. By combining affective imagination with critical tension, these texts demonstrate how children’s literature can both inspire ecological care and complicate simplistic notions of human–nonhuman harmony.

***Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver:**

Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (2012) is a climate fiction, an influential meditation on ecological displacement, interspecies entanglement, and human vulnerability in the age of Anthropocene. Kingsolver is a novelist cum biologist. The novel is an allegorical depiction of a world that highlights the consequences of disturbed ecological cycles and climate change as a present reality. Nina Munteanu in her eco-fiction review writes that Kingsolver is of the belief that the environmental shifts are subtle, and she “speak in a language only scientists can understand,” yet she

impactfully presents a literary translation through metaphor, emotion, and ethical concerns.

The mass migration of monarch butterflies to the wrong geographical region in *Flight Behavior* is not simply a biological anomaly but a portrayal of how humans destabilize natural systems, leading to sudden and catastrophic changes. It is a narrative about posthuman disruption in a world where humans now no longer control outcomes, and nonhuman actors assert presence amid collapse. Kingsolver's butterflies function as hyper-objects (Morton), vast, and distributed phenomena beyond human comprehension.

The novel's protagonist, Dellarobia Turnbow, a victim of poverty, is initially drawn to the mountain when she is about to flee from her stagnant life. She confronts a celestial vision, "It looked like the inside of joy [...] a lake of fire [...] twisters of brightness against the grey sky" (Kingsolver 21–22). This otherworldly experience brings an ecological awakening, turning her wish to escape into attention and acceptance of the reality that what she assumes as beautiful is actually a responsibility.

According to Kathleen Byrne, in *The Globe and Mail*, "*Flight Behaviour* is the first novel I know of- possibly the first novel, to deal specifically determinedly and overly with climate change". Dellarobia's growing environmental conscience mirrors the reader's journey, situating everyday life as a site of epistemic and moral reorientation. She does not claim an expertise, but rather engages deeply with what she confronts.

Entomologist Ovid Byron, in the novel functions as Kingsolver's posthuman philosophical stance. He insists that "the butterflies were a symptom of vast biological malignancies" (349), their migration being an ecological consequence. Responding ironically to media trivialization, he remarks, "We've arrived at the point of an audible roar [...] does it strike you as a good time to debate the existence of the falls?" (333). This underscores the urgency of acknowledging climate collapse without distraction.

The novel uses Byron's assertion, "Science does not tell what we should do. It tells what is" (327), to critique the limits of scientific knowledge and understand the necessity of ethical agency. Kingsolver suggests, writes Nina Munteanu, in a review, quite accurately, "I think that only scientists can truly appreciate the portent of the subtle changes because it speaks in a language only they can understand" (Munteanu). The narrative challenges technocratic detachment and embraces a conscience-driven response, echoing Barad's posthumanist ethic that "existence is not an individual affair" (136). Action must emerge from entanglement, not isolation.

Kingsolver juxtaposes scientific understanding with religious belief. Dellarobia's husband, Cub, believes that weather falls under divine control: "Weather is the Lord's business" (237), signalling the epistemic divide within climate discourse. Yet the novel resists binary thinking, creating interpretive space for the coexistence of faith, science, and wonder. The butterflies' arrival resists fixed meaning, appearing as ecological omen, divine messenger, or economic benefit. This plurality exemplifies Braidotti's nomadic ethics, fostering multiple perspectives while maintaining ethical rigor.

Kingsolver's prose reflects Rachel Carson's elegiac tone, lamenting the loss of "nature that once existed" (*Silent Spring* 8). Dellarobia's transformation from a passive observer to critical thinker, allows Kingsolver to suggest a narrative pedagogy that encourages awareness as the precursor to agency. Mary Ellen Snodgrass remarks on Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* emphasizing that altruism is the force in Kingsolver's novels, that elevates from entertainment to didactic humanism (39). This embodies humanism's extension into posthumanism's ethical realism, interlacing human and nonhuman destinies.

***Lagoon* by Nnedi Okorafor:**

Nigerian-American author, Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014) occupies a fundamental role from the perspectives of Afrofuturism and eco-speculative fiction. It is considered as a seminal example of climate fiction. Rebecca Amonor, in *The Yale Review of International Studies*, notes that the novel was written to Lagos but for an

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outside audience— a Western audience, and perhaps particularly an American audience. Okorafor identifies herself as both cultural insider and outsider, a “Naijamerican,” a hybridized new individual whose parts cannot be separated.” This hybridity interweaves indigenous cosmology, myth, magical realism, and futuristic speculation in a rich posthumanist narrative fabric.

As Gurpreet Kaur articulates in *DUJES, Lagoon* fuses “Nigerian myths, folklore, and magic realism, with animals, humans, and nonhuman figures, in a city consuming itself in the background” (10). Okorafor opens her novel not with a human perspective but with the sorrowful voice of a swordfish, immediately dismantling anthropocentrism and emphasizing aquatic life. The swordfish’s mournful lament, “They brought the stench of dryness [...] made the world bleed black ooze” (*Lagoon* 1), condemns pollution caused by human beings, and sets a stage for marine trauma as narrative origin. This scene poignantly reflects Haraway’s imperative to “make kin not populations” (2), encouraging multispecies engagement through storytelling.

The anthropocentric perspective that frequently predominates in speculative fiction is fundamentally altered by Okorafor’s narrative technique, which focuses on nonhuman perspectives—specifically, a swordfish, a tarantula, and a bat. These creatures are not just simple metaphors, rather they are profound, emotionally complex beings that respond to as well as condemn selfish human behavior, fostering a multispecies coexistence. The tarantula, in the chapter “The Bone Collector,” envisages adaptation and survival philosophically, on the basis of the past traumas and develops an erudite understanding of human infrastructural patterns: “Life is best lived by embracing the changes [...] when they come, they come fast and hard” (86). The unsettling rhythm integral to human expansion is apprehended in his meditation on the speed and intensity of change.

Despite his philosophical awareness, the tarantula is pitilessly crushed, both literally and metaphorically, under a rushing vehicle, evoking human indifference for environment and the violence meted out in anthropogenic landscapes. The touching description of his crushed body, “like fresh palm oil on hot bread” (86), connects

ecological devastation in everyday imagery, leaving nonhuman suffering frighteningly intimate. Further, the readers find a bat that gains new insights after being hit with the Nigerian president's aircraft, in the chapter, "Third Eye Blinded," that wretchedly kills it in a moment, developing the perception: "She sees them now" (149). The bat's tragic as well as untimely clarity interrogates who gets to "see" in this world, and critiques senseless human supremacy in the technological era.

These depictions by Okorafor embody posthuman ethics, emphasising distribution of agency and emotions across species, and proofs that nonhuman beings possess better insight, emotions, and narrative gravity. Okorafor's narrative is based on Donna Haraway's cyborg ontology, that celebrates hybridity and interconnection.

Furthermore, Okorafor's protagonists, Adaora, Agu, and Anthony, gain abilities that render them more-than-human, embodying posthuman transformations. These modifications occur not as evolutionary superiority but as reactions to escalating environmental crisis, suggesting survival through collective reworking. Kaur writes in her article *Literary Voice*, the arrival of inter-planet alien Ayodele is not to colonize but to cleanse: "The irony [...] is that the aliens [...] have come to rescue the environment of Lagos" (Kaur 224). Okorafor employs the alien as a symbol of ethical transformation rather than as an 'other' being, showing that other planetary beings are more ingrained with ecological values than humans, this being a theme aligned with Afrofuturist visions. Ayodele's presence critiques colonial imaginaries, and optimistically places aliens as allies of planetary justice, and plant and animal life.

Yet Okorafor does not conclude in despair or hopelessness. Her narrative crafts possible remedies through positive transformation, multispecies collaboration, and spiritual ecology. The animals' heightened abilities to see more, feel more, and speak more in *Lagoon* remind readers that intelligence and awareness are not exclusive to humanity. Barad's idea of intra-action frames these beings as co-existents in a world created through entangled agency.

Thus, *Lagoon* stands as a seminal text articulating posthuman ecofeminist concerns, reconfiguring voice, agency, and ethics across species, places, and

cosmologies. It poses questions of not “what makes us human,” rather “what futures we can co-create” following the path of guided empathy, embracing care, transformation, and attuned to the environmental wellbeing.

Human–Tree Relations and Ecological Exploitation in ‘The Giving Tree’:

Shel Silverstein’s story, ‘The Giving Tree,’ reflects upon humanity–environmental connection, understanding the importance of preserving nature, and the role of animals, role of each creature in maintaining an ecological balance. This story tells the readers about the contemporary problem of humans indulging into excessive consumption. The tree shows concern when it says, “Take my apples, Boy, and sell them in the city. Then you will have money and you will be happy” (Silverstein 17). This is a portrayal of how environment and natural world is used as a commodity to meet endless human needs. The tree has everything to give, its apples, its trunk, becomes a shelter, a boat, and finally, a stump to sit on. Its steadfast willingness to aid humanity reminds emotional depth and caring, qualities generally attributed to human characters.

The boy’s needs are ever-changing, and it results into the crisis of hyper-consumption. In this context, the narrative delivers the tree as a silent sufferer and directs towards the ecological cost of selfish human desires. These qualities, once typical of being “human,” not just human now, position the tree as a posthuman subject that cares without any expectation - an embodiment of what Braidotti calls an “affirmative ethical relation,” built on vulnerability and interdependence.

Industrial Violence and Ecological Protest in *The Lorax*:

Dr. Seuss’ ‘The Lorax’ is an explicit ecological critique of capitalist scenario, and environmental deterioration at its peak. Reminding readers of a once-vibrant ecosystem, the Once-ler says, “Way back in the days when the grass was still green and the pond was still wet and the clouds were still clean,” excessive industrial activities being its only reason (9). The cutting down of Truffula trees to produce “Thneeds,” triggers migration of species, like Bar-ba-loots, Swomee-Swans, and

Humming Fish, to other places as their habitat has been shattered due to increasing pollution.

The Lorax states now and again, “I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues,” (22). He becomes an envoy of posthuman environmental confrontation. He encourages empathy and ethical engagement with mother nature by giving voice to these trees. His anxiety is an embodiment of Haraway’s concept of voice as ethical presence, in demand of recognition, and not just something rhetorical. The Once-ler justifies, “But [...] business is business! And business must grow regardless of crummies in tummies” (21). This statement echoes the phenomenon of growth-at-any-costs, depicting ever-increasing industrialization as ecological scepticism. The story begins with chopping of “just one tree,” and this turns into a “whole Once-ler family working full tilt” (ibid), ending in an ecological collapse. The narrative follows a collapse that begins with deforestation, extending to air, water and land pollution, exemplary of the fragility of ecological system. Reflection through posthuman concern aims at granting agency and voice to the trees, at the same time, critiquing human exceptionalism.

Interspecies Alliance and Oceanic Empathy in ‘The Snail and the Whale’:

In this picture book, ‘The Snail and the Whale,’ Julia Donaldson constructs a world of wonder, where a small snail desires to explore the whole world beyond its approach, on the back of a whale, a partner to initiate a journey through oceans, coral reefs, icy waters, and what not.

Donaldson employs rhyming narration and a shifting visual scale, to take the readers closer to ecological biodiversity, and empathizes the importance of under water organisms. The stranding of whale, due to noise pollution, critiques human interference and careless tourism. Donaldson shows the courage of snail with which it rescues, dismantling the traditional hierarchy of size of the creature, placing the snail as a powerful figure of action.

When framed through the aspects of posthumanism, the snail proves to be an agency that is caring, irrespective of scale or species. It embodies what Braidotti terms a “zoe-centered perspective” (60), focused on life’s multiplicity rather than anthropocentric dominance. The story teaches that compassion and bravery are the practical lessons learnt of restoring ecological balance, anchored in love rather than control.

Collective Renewal and Forest Justice in ‘The Last Tree’:

‘The Last Tree,’ a thought-provoking picture book by Emily Haworth-Booth, is a portrayal of minimalist dystopia where humans, to fulfil their need for warmth and shelter cut down trees, driven by selfishness. Children, in this story, identify the last tree’s crucial role, and connect it to rejuvenating the forest once again, bringing in the idea of hope. These actions of innocent children highlight communal care, remind of intergenerational responsibility, and a healing promise. Haworth-Booth’s literary style fosters emotional resonance, while eluding sensationalism, and most important of all, inviting to reflect upon our actions rather than panic.

From posthuman perspectives, *The Last Tree* is a representation of the order followed by rebirth of ethical engagements. The forest regains its earlier form with collective efforts rather than remaining a silenced character. The children’s actions exemplify Haraway’s idea of “response-ability” (78), the courage to respond, to express, and become-one with others, especially the natural world. The narrative proves the possibility of regeneration through acts of humility, cooperation, and respect for all other forms of life.

Conclusion:

Spanning across genres, from rhyming picture books to speculative world and Afrofuturist visions’ mythical stances, one recurring theme emerges here is a role of a moral agent: the re-centering of the nonhuman from the periphery to ethical protagonist. The swordfish in Okorafor’s *Lagoon*, the Giving Tree in Silverstein’s classic, the Lorax’s defiance, Donaldson’s snail, Kingsolver’s monarchs, and the last

tree in Haworth-Booth's story, all species embody voices that lay bare environmental degradation and critique anthropocentric perspectives. These texts confront human domination and encourage concern for animals, plants, and mythic life forms, reminding humanity that the natural world is actually a shared entanglement of lives, voices, and futures.

The comparative interdisciplinary approach in this study reveals that posthuman ethics are not just to be professed only but enacted as well. The writers cultivate eco-consciousness among young minds through visually appealing picture books that instil empathy and emotion. Speculative fiction, like Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* and Okorafor's *Lagoon*, envision the near futures, unearthing the ecological trauma with the help of multispecies narrative shifts. These works destabilize the Anthropocene stance, confronting human protagonists with nonhuman wisdom, mutation, and collapse, and replacing it with biocentric relationality. The multiple voices in the stories put up questions of domination, celebrate adaptation, and suggest interspecies cooperation to deal with the emerging climate crisis and technological acceleration.

Thus, these texts illuminate a transformative revelation: human life is inherently relational and fragile. Posthumanism, in this literary framework, does not reject humanity, but it is a vision that broadens one horizon of knowledge of species' coexistence, care, and critical humility. The rise and intervention of nonhuman agencies, whether extraterrestrial, vegetal, or animal, do not signal threat but encourage narrative reckoning. Instead of forecasting an ecological apocalypse, these works guide ways to ecological justice. They advocate for a transformation of consciousness, recreating a world that embraces coexistence as fact rather than as mere moral choice.

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Clones as Scapegoats: Slow Violence in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

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Abstract

Mimesis and violence are the integral constituents of human nature. From these human tendencies of imitation and violence emerges mimetic desire, the desire to imitate others and to usurp others' possessions through violent practices. The contagious and envious nature of mimetic desire creates disastrous consequences, which we, as humans, have witnessed throughout history; this research accounts for these drastic consequences. This paper suggests that scapegoating is an instance of slow violence, imperceptible in nature but embedded in the fabric of society, and traces its attritional effects in the clones of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Drawing on insights provided by *Mimetic Theory*, this study sheds light on how the contagious nature of mimetic desire compels humans to sacrifice clones as part of a scapegoating mechanism. Through close textual analysis of the characters and the narrative structure, this research reveals the intricacies of clones' lives as scapegoats, which are not demeaning, trivial, or different from those they donate to. The key finding of this study is that mimetic desire drives humans to commit violent acts of sacrificing these post-human subjects as scapegoats. To justify this inhumane action, they deny the clones' humanity, reducing them to mere vessels and sacrificial resources containing organs. This research contributes to a broader understanding of structural and slow violence, human clones, and scapegoating as a pseudo-coping mechanism for the survival of society.

Keywords: Animal Studies, Artificial Intelligence, Speculative Fiction, Companion Species, Anthropocene, Bio-Robotics, Posthuman Ecology, Film Studies.



Introduction

Human beings are intrinsically social animals, and for survival, they imitate other humans, animals, and their environment. Human desire stems from the characteristic of imitation, which is inherently contagious. According to Girard, what we desire is mimetic desire, and man is the creature who does not know what to desire and desires what others desire (Girard 36). As social beings, humans imitate others' desires, which can originate from envy and can create violent behaviors. Violence is embedded in humans' instinctive nature, similar to the human tendency of imitation. Throughout history, humans living in society have somewhat similar abilities to cope with different social and survival scenarios. These coping mechanisms of survival practiced by humans are embedded with violence and imitation. One of these coping mechanisms is scapegoating, which can be defined as "sacrificing a particular group for the survival of the masses" (René Girard et al. 24). In recent years, there has been a rush of genetic engineering and bio-technology themed fictions featuring clones and post-human subjects in dystopian societies, drawing the attention of authors and readers from across the literary spectrum. Ladani and Kashi, in their research article, elucidate the reason for the interest in clones' narratives, which is basically the invention of advanced genetic modification and manipulation of human nature (the genome) [through genetic editing procedures such as CRISPR], which has the futuristic potential to create a disastrous identity crisis and the formation of dystopian societies. These narratives warn the readers about the "inhuman consequences of uncontrolled science" (Ladani and Kashi 19).

For contemplating the matters of the future, researchers and writers often use the genre of science fiction and create hypothetical scenarios, sometimes utopian and mostly dystopian. This study selected a similar kind of dystopian science fiction text: *Never Let Me Go* (2005), written by Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro. This text is a unique blend of both past and future; the temporal setting in the novel is late 1990s England, but it discusses the futuristic possibility of human cloning for organ harvesting. It presents an alternate history in which the world leaders invested in the bio-technical inventions rather than nuclear ones, suggesting that regardless of the chosen technological advancement, the course path of history remains chaotic and disastrous. Due to this unique thematic concern, this text is significant with a unique generic characteristic among the already existing science fiction

literature. This text portrays the traumatic experiences of human clones in a world that is driven by the vivacious nature of mimetic desire. The research question that this study poses contributes to the broader understanding of human desire, violent intrinsic practices (scapegoating mechanism), and their drastic consequences. This paper also asserts that mimetic desire and its contagious nature compel humans to commit violent acts of sacrificing clones as scapegoats.

This section explores the collection of the most relevant and significant research regarding the main contention of this paper to provide a comprehensive perspective. The distinctive genre and unusual protagonists of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) attract many scholars and researchers to delve into the deeper structure of this novel to dig out various thematic and theoretical concerns. Existing scholarship has focused on the thematic and theoretical concepts of Identity, Human Cloning, Memory, Psychoanalytic Studies, Post-humanism, and Ethical issues. The research gap lies in the implication of Mimetic theory by Rene Girard and Slow Violence Theory by Rob Nixon on Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, which has not been explored before. The research gap aims to investigate the vivacious mimetic desires of humans and the slow violence in the scapegoating of clones. The following is a detailed analysis of significant existing literature that highlights the research gap more prominently, and in addition to this, there is also a discourse on the interconnectedness of imitation, desires, and violence.

"Violence is an act of force to carry on, and according to Robert Audi, violence is a vigorous physical attack, highly vigorous psychological abuse, against an animal or a person, and malicious destruction of property" (Thompson 7). Usually, this violence occurs as a result of some mimetic desire, such as seizing others' land, murdering out of jealousy, and, in the primary text of this research, organ harvesting of human clones is an instance of such violence that occurs due to mimetic desire. Graver presented four kinds of violence:

Overt violence (physical assault against another person), overt institutional violence (state-sanctioned violence against other states and individuals), Covert violence (psychological assault against another person), and Institutional Covert violence (psychological assault in the form of enforcement of oppressive ideologies and propaganda by institutions and state. (Thompson 8)

These four kinds of violence comprise violent human nature and establish mimetic desires that urge humans to act through force to attain what others have. Thus, shows the interconnectedness and the triangular nature of imitation, desire, and violence.

Genetic engineering and biotechnological enhancements are the new future. Constructing on the arguments presented in the above paragraph, humans' instinctive violent nature will compel them to exploit these technical advancements and create a dystopia ruled by the triangular nature of imitation, desire, and violence. Already existing inventions, such as Ian Wilmut's creation of the world's first cloned mammal, Dolly the Sheep, in 1997 (Roslin Institute), opened the horizons of the cloning field with its therapeutic marvels, as well as the threat of inhuman violent practices predicted by Ishiguro.

Along with the violent practices attached to the cloning field, another exploitation of genetic and biotechnological advancements can be the political monitoring of the body and mind of the masses through state power and biopolitics. Hailsham, the boarding school in the novel, which is nonetheless a prison or camp, and the students (clones) there are its prisoners. Here, these students are manipulated and politically monitored both by their bodies and spirits or minds. Their bodies are manipulated for organ harvesting, restrained from reproducing, and their spirits are also manipulated through Foucauldian discipline, limiting their perspective of possibilities about life (Yan 597). This bare life under the state power and the inhuman treatment of clones without the fear of the wrath of law is just a ruthless violation of human rights (Yan 601). In recent years, and in the face of these advancements, the concerns about misuse of these bio-technological advancements through state power and its bio-dystopian consequences have deepened.

Human nature is driven by desire, whether for power, prolonging life, or violence. When such desire intensifies into obsession, it is called mimetic violence by Girard. This paper argues that mimetic desire is the culprit behind humans' destructive nature. Existing literature bring forth this destructive nature through the representation of intelligence based mass produce clones in the *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley (Koops 140); in the disturbing experimentation on cloned black individuals of *They Cloned Tyrone* (2003); in the captivity of clones in rejuvenation clinics for facial transplants of *Level 16* (2018); and in the mental and social conditioning of clones in *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Even though these texts and related existing discourses shed light on the atrocities committed against the

clones, they are still unable to identify the culprit behind this destructive, violent nature. This study addresses that gap by locating the root of this destructiveness in mimetic desire.

Furthermore, there is a dominant sense of clones' passivity against the unjustly destined life and death. This passivity is the result of mental and social conditioning (Rollins 350). They are trained to be scapegoats and blamed for not being humans, which is why "Originals" and "Possibles" can exploit them by snatching their organs under the fake banner of betterment of society. The clones in these texts are marked and used for the better good of society by the supposed peacemakers (Schwetman 421), (Koops 138). This research asserts and blames the supposed peacemakers' mimetic desires for the inhuman and violent treatment of clones.

Scapegoating of Clones

René Girard's scapegoating mechanism is a primordial form of structural and slow violence embedded in society. Before deciphering the scapegoating mechanism, let discuss the concept of scapegoat. A scapegoat is a person who pays for the sins and wrongdoings of others (Merriam-Webster). In the novel under discussion, human clones are the scapegoats who sacrifice themselves for the sinful mimetic desires of Originals and Possibles. In the novel, Originals are normal human beings, and Possibles are the humans on whom these human clones are modeled. As Kathy, the protagonist and only narrator of the novel, remarks, "Each of us was copied at some point from a normal person; there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life" (Ishiguro 137). Originals are the non-clone population or normal human beings. As explained by Girard, "this practice of scapegoating is when society exercises its power with a unified front against the targeted victim who is incapable of self-defense and creating new conflict, thus sacrificing him as the simple act of violence" (René Girard et al 24). In *Never Let Me Go*, the society of 1990s England consists of Hailsham, Originals, and Possibles, who are unified against the defenseless victims, who are, in this case, human clones. They are unable to provoke any vengeance or create new conflict, thus ultimately sacrificed for the supposed betterment of society. This act of sacrificing human clones is no less than any violent sacrificial ritual.

Human clones who are humans in flesh and soul are becoming the victims of society's cruelty because society refuses to accept them as humans, instead considering them mere pawns to fulfill its desire for longevity. These clones, as presented by Ishiguro, are incapable of defending themselves, rebelling against their abusers, and creating new conflicts by

taking revenge for the atrocities done to them by society. They are ideal to be used as scapegoats. They are only seen as containers or vessels of disease-free organs. Promd K. Nayar also emphasized that “the clones serve a utilitarian purpose: they are reservoirs of organs for humans to harvest when needed” (164). Clones are just scapegoats to be sacrificed whenever humans want their organs. This is a simple act of violence through power and control. Originals and Possibles acknowledge their existence as mere bodies and avail the opportunity to create a ‘new bio-liberal world’ (embracing transhumanism positively), where they can sacrifice these clones (Sorgner 10). Clones are emblems of this new bio-liberal world, and humans have the freedom to exploit them through xenotransplantation (transplantation of organs from other species) because Originals denied their humanity. They are instructed to keep themselves “healthy inside, which is much more important for each of them” (Ishiguro 68). This society is blinded by its mimetic desires, endangering the existence of these clones. For them, there are just as Miss Emily said, “pawns in a game” (Ishiguro 261). There were not only pawns but also the scapegoats of humans’ desires.

Slow Violence

The discussion further engages with slow violence, a significant theoretical framework that extends conventional understandings of violence. Slow violence is a step forward in the already existing discourse on violence. Both structural and slow violence encompass all four types of violence that have been stated above. Johan Galtung defines structural violence as “tranquil water, static and silent” (Nixon 11), and Rob Nixon defines slow violence as “violence which occurs gradually out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2). In *Never Let Me Go* (2005), such slow violence occurs through the scapegoating mechanism. The attritional nature of slow violence can be traced to the violent practices against the socially alienated human clones. Then they are used as scapegoats for the gratification of humans’ mimetic desires. Society in the novel seems to be oblivious to these violent practices and does not consider them violent at all. These violent practices are performed by a unified community against the defenseless and targeted victim to exercise their power and control. The unified front here is Originals, Possibles, and Guardians of Hailsham, and the defenseless victims are human clones. The slow, violent practices that are used as instruments are discussed below. These practices consist of

Hailsham as the emblem of slow violence, the sterilization of scapegoats, identity distortion of scapegoats, refusal of deferral, and the completion process.

Hailsham as Emblem of Slow Violence

Rob Nixon elucidates the concept of slow violence by explaining “the descriptive range of it, which is not just limited to calling attention and questioning the agency” (11) “but also expands itself to social justice, hidden agency, and certain forms of violence that are imperceptible” (10). This research, through a slow violence perspective, exposes the imperceptible structural violence existing in the 1990s society of England. The nature of violence is imperceptible because society wants to hide and deny the existence of human clones. As Miss Emily, a senior guardian, narrates, “And for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they grew in a kind of vacuum” (Ishiguro 257). At first, society intentionally ignores the existence of these human clones and assumes that these organs are not harvested from human clones but come from unknown sources they do not bother to know about. Following the denial of their contribution as organ donors comes the denial of their humanness, with the increasing breeding of clones in institutions like Hailsham. As remarked by Miss Emily: “being human, for a long time you were kept in the shadows. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren’t like us” (Ishiguro 258). Society reduces the clones’ existence to mere objects, pawns, prisoners, and scapegoats. For this purpose, they are kept in institutions that are the emblems of slow violence.

Throughout history, we have seen slow violence practices in the form of the Holocaust, Guantanamo detention camp, and recently in Israel’s prisoner camp, where they target particular groups based on different ethnic and racial biases. These camps are controlled with strict panopticon surveillance, and inmates are treated with inhuman practices. The status of these human subjects is no more than that of scapegoats. Giorgio Agamben’s concept of Camp, which is the exceptional state, is exempted in some sense from juridical order because it inaugurates a new juridico-political paradigm (Braidotti and Hlavajova 78). In *Never Let Me Go*, the institutions of Hailsham and care centers are the symbolic representation of this notion of camp presented by Agamben. These institutions used for organ harvesting can also be considered the emblems of slow violence. Possibles and Originals are the omnipotent controllers of these institutions. Specifically, Hailsham is presented as a boarding school for students (human clones). This apparent educational

institute is a camp to keep these clones all their life till their twenties and mentally condition them for the utilitarian purpose of society. Hailsham has its juridico-political paradigm in the form of censored and exclusive education. Students living there are strictly prohibited from crossing the boundaries of Hailsham. After being raised in this camp, students are moved to their next destination of Cottages for a short time, then to their final destination of care centers specially designed for human clones to live during their process of 'completion'. Completion is the process in which a human clone donates his or her four vital organs, completes the purpose for which they were created, and meets a tragic death. All human clones in this novel experience the trauma of this process of completion. The slow violence hidden in each phase of the clones' lives is exposed through the sterilization of these clones, their identity distortion, and their refusal of deferrals.

Regarding this notion of camp, there are certain important questions as follows: who are the residents of this camp? (Braidotti and Hlavajova 77) The residents of Hailsham and care centers are human clones whose lives will eventually be terminated by the humans with legal and social means accepted in 1990s London without any punishment. Scapegoats are living at the mercy of the new juridico-political regime of the camp. The reason for this slow violence practice is the mimetic desire for power and control, which the 1990s society of England craved. The next question is who constructed the camp and how its residents and the camp itself imagined it? (Braidotti and Hlavajova 77). The camp of Hailsham is a result of technical advancements, as narrated by Miss Emily:

Historically, after the war, in the early fifties, when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions. Suddenly, there were all these new possibilities laid before us, all these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions (Ishiguro 257).

So the creation of Hailsham and its residents can be seen as the technophobic consequences of technical advancements. This idea of creating human clones for organ harvesting is inhuman and embedded with structural and slow violence. Society is consciously sacrificing these clones as scapegoats to gratify its mimetic desire for longevity.

Sterilization of Scapegoats

After reflecting on Hailsham as the emblem of slow violence practices, this section reveals the slow violence practice of the scapegoats' sterilization. Sterilization is a birth

control process for both males and females. Human clones who are made in the image of humans have a genetic endowment, and due to this genetic endowment, they have the desire to procreate. Clones are sterilized at a young age and are unable to have offspring because they are treated as scapegoats, not as humans. Kathy has this desire to procreate, but society snatches this ability to procreate from her. As she reveals, “we all knew something I hadn’t known back then, which was that none of us could have babies” (Ishiguro 72). Most clones are aware of this, but Kathy was the one to whom this realization came late. This is the reason for her urge to have a baby while holding the pillow tightly and imagining holding a baby.

Society in the novel limited clones’ agency by denying them the human right to procreate. They are terrified of the formation of a new community of clones, which may pose a threat to their sacrificial rituals. As Miss Emily said: “The world requires students (clones) to donate” (Ishiguro 257); the sole purpose of their creation is to donate organs, not to procreate and have their own identity. The other reason behind this denial is that humans are afraid of mingling created deities (humans) with created beings (human clones) (Schwetman 421). The striking resemblance of clones to humans creates a fear in them, and this fear is the mingling of the blood of human clones and humans. That is why clones are raised in secluded schools and are socially alienated by humans to reduce the chances of this. Their status in society is also reduced to mere pawns and scapegoats who are seen more as inhuman than human.

Identity Distortion

This violent act of sterilization becomes possible only because clones are mentally conditioned. From their childhood, they are mentally conditioned not to oppose the decisions of their superiors. Living in a camp like Hailsham and being treated as ‘others,’ their identity is just reduced to being an animal to be sacrificed. Their mental and social conditioning is done through secluded upbringing and education. Clones’ passivity against the unjust, destined death in the form of organ donation and completion is the result of mental and social conditioning (Rollins 350). Clones are mentally conditioned in a way that they are not resisting it; they are just submissively accepting their fate, similar to the Greek god Sisyphus. Sisyphus was punished by the Gods by rolling a boulder up the mountain, and when he reached the top of the mountain, the boulder slid down the mountain. The punishment was to take it up the mountain again and again for eternity. Albert Camus, in

his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), dissects this myth to understand the absurd existence of man and to present his philosophy of Absurdism. At the end of his book, he says, “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus 96). Society imagines a clone as the modern Sisyphus who is happy with his punishment. Their submissive acceptance of their tragic fate helps them understand their absurd existence. Ishiguro gives a similar statement in an interview while talking about the Movie adaptation of the novel:

I was never interested in looking at the story of brave slaves who rebelled and escaped. I am fascinated by the extent to which people don't run away, and I think you look around us, and that is the remarkable fact. How much do we accept what faith is giving us? Sometimes it's just passivity, sometimes it's just simply perspective. I didn't want to look at the story about escape; I wanted to look at why we and how we accept our faith. (Film Independent)

This vision of Ishiguro is presented in the characterization of clones and explains their optimistic passivity in the bleakest moments of their life, similar to Sisyphus. Miss Lucy, one of the youngest and new guardians at Hailsham, has a degree of human compassion and was bewildered after knowing the reality of clones' existence. Restricted by society to act against this violence, she is forced to leave the school after she reveals the reality to the students that

Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. (Ishiguro 79)

Miss Lucy is the only character who shows resistance but is soon expelled from Hailsham. This revelation about their reality does not affect the clones' perception of the world, and they continue to live their lives as planned by the rest of the society. They are forced to live this life, and they can't choose what they want to do with their life and are ultimately sacrificed as scapegoats. This statement can be emphasized by the dialogue of Ruth: “After all, it's what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it?” (Ishiguro 223).

Refusal of Deferral

Furthermore, there is a discussion about the refusal of deferral. Deferral is a ray of hope nurtured by clones. Deferral is presented as an opportunity for clones to postpone their

donations for a few years. This is only possible if clones prove that they are truly in love. In the end, this opportunity proves to be a hoax after being tested by Tommy and Kathy. Kathy and Tommy were in love, but still, they were denied this opportunity. The level of atrocity is that they are not allowed to live their lives on their terms with their loved ones for just a few years, which is a violation of basic human rights. The slightest leniency like this can create a threat to society. Freedom is contagious, and society cannot risk this contagious nature of freedom to spread among the clones. Even living for a few years with freedom and living on their own term can erase all mental and social conditioning. This freedom can change their perspective about life, and they can demand their basic human right to live. For this, they can rebel too. Girard attests that scapegoats are defenseless victims unable to create a new conflict (René Girard et al 24). This leniency on society's part can be the reason to create new conflicts and make clones unfit to be scapegoats.

Ishiguro, in this novel, depicts an analogy of a clown holding a bunch of balloons. Kathy, the naïve narrator, follows this clown in a lonely street. She was curious about the clown because he was holding a small briefcase in one hand and the balloons. As she narrates,

Every so often, I could see the man's fist, where all the balloon strings converged, and I could see he had them securely twisted together and in a tight grip. Even so, I kept worrying that one of the strings would come unraveled and a single balloon would sail off up into that cloudy sky. (Ishiguro 208)

The clown is the symbolic representation of 1990s English society in the novel, and the balloons are human clones. Society, through social and mental conditioning, is tightly holding these clones in its grip and not even letting one of them escape in the form of deferral. Even letting go of one balloon (clone) can become the reason for losing the others. Kathy here wishes that if she were that balloon, she would sail off up into the sky and be free from this life of being a clone, donor, and carer. This process of completion is their whole identity and existence. Human clones are controlled through slow violence, their creation, pre-determined death, and the sterilization restricts their natural growth. These are horrific examples of slow violence. This slow violence is not prevalent but infused in the fabric of society, just there to exploit certain populations through scapegoating mechanisms.

Completion Process

The process of “completion” of clones is the perfect instance of slow violence. This traumatic and excruciating process of organ harvesting occurs gradually, as clones donate four vital organs over time, recovering between each donation. This organ harvesting is done in a specially allocated care center, specially built for clones to be admitted and caged there. All of this is done out of sight, and the majority of society seems to be oblivious to this process. This is an instance of mimetic violence through ritualistic practices. The harvesting of organs and then their discarded empty vessels is the bleakest aspect of dangerous societal desires and inhuman ritualistic practices in a world dominated by structural violence.

Ruth’s completion is an example of slow violence through scapegoating. Ruth could not survive her second donation. Kathy explains the sufferings from which she and every clone go through, “It was like she (Ruth) was willing her eyes to see right inside herself, so she could patrol and marshal all the better and separate the areas of pain in her body” (Ishiguro 23). The removal of vital organs is indeed a crucial process, and the person suffers greatly from this removal. They (Possibles) snatched these organs for themselves and left clones in miserable conditions to die even before their death comes. The excruciating process of donations can be analyzed by Ruth’s condition in her last moments, explained by Kathy,

She was, strictly speaking, still conscious, but she wasn’t accessible to me as I stood there beside her metal bed. All the same, I pulled up a chair and sat with her hand in both of mine, squeezing whenever another flood of pain made her twist away from me. (Ishiguro 23)

Kathy, seeing her childhood friend in extreme pain and unable to do anything, just to console her, said,

It’s okay, I’m going to do it, Ruth. I’m going to become Tommy’s carer as soon as I can. I said it under my breath. But I hoped that with our gazes locked as they were for those few seconds, she’d read my expression exactly as I’d read hers. Then the moment was over, and she was away again. (Ishiguro 232)

Ruth wants to mend her mistakes and wants Kathy and Tommy to live together in the last stage of Tommy’s life.

Clones, before becoming donors, have to live as carers. Kathy was an exceptional carer, and being a carer to your childhood friends makes one suffer twice. The first one is

seeing them suffering during this crucial ritual of scapegoating, and the second one is when Kathy suffers alone as a donor when there is no friend of hers to take care of her and be there for her. This job of a carer drained life from clones' bones. As explained by Kathy, "Then there's the solitude. You spend hour after hour, on your own, driving across the country, center to center, hospital to hospital, sleeping in overnights, no one to talk to about your worries, no one to laugh with" (Ishiguro 203). Solitude is the key feature of being a carer, donor, and clone. Kathy gradually accepts her reality, the solitude, and the hostile treatment of society.

The poem *Final Notations* by American poetess Adrienne Rich is from her *An Atlas of Difficult World* (1998-1991) poetry collection. The poem is infinite in its interpretation, and this statement can be supported by the reflection it portrays of the excruciating lives of clones in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). The lucid content of the poem exemplifies its interpretations. In the first line of this poem, "It will not be simple, it will not be long" (Rich 749), explains that the lives of clones are not simple and will soon end when all the clones get 'complete' in their late twenties. Ishiguro intentionally used the word 'completion' for the excruciating process of this organ harvesting to highlight the inhuman treatment of these clones by society. The sole purpose of clones' lives is to donate their vital organs to these 'Possibles'. This process will take the "thought," "heart," and "breath" (Rich 749) of these clones, and it becomes a traumatic process for them. The line "it will take all your flesh" (Rich 749) can be referred to as the organ donation of four vital organs by clones. In the third stanza, the reader can assume that now clones are addressing the organ recipients, which in this novel are the Possibles, "you are taking parts of us into places never planned, you are going far away with pieces of our lives" (Rich 749). Possibles, they are taking the pieces of clones' life, which are their vital organs, to the unknown and unfamiliar places to make those organs part of their lives. The last line of the poem, "it will become your will," explains the crux of the novel that willingly or unwillingly it will become the clone's own "will" (Rich 749) to sacrifice themselves by donating their organs to the 'Possibles'. Through the reference to this poem, the present analysis effectively highlighted the slow violence of this sacrificial ritual.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kazuo Ishiguro, in his novel *Never Let Me Go*, raises questions about the structural slow violence with the depiction of Human clones in a society that is driven

by the mimetic desire for longevity. Ishiguro presented the evil face of humans through *Originals*, *Possibles*, and the 1990s England society novel, where they just, for the gratification of their petty mimetic desire for longevity, sacrificed clones as scapegoats by denying their humanity. The discourse highlights the role of institutions and their controls over the lives of clones, and how these institutions, through systematic slow violence, exploit and endanger clones' existence. This research aims to emphasize the impact of mimetic desire and slow violence through showcasing the traumatic experiences of scapegoated clones. The final remark of this study reinforces the importance of putting humans in a position to take control of our unjust actions, which are only harming society and its marginalized groups. The outcomes of this research are that it contributes to the existing and future studies on the unethical issues of human cloning, and promising sociological fields of Mimetic and Slow Violence theories. For future scholars and researchers, these are the emerging fields to keep in mind, with the rise of technological advancement in the form of bioengineering. This paper exposes the real threat that is the creation of a dystopian society due to these technological advancements and their manipulative and unsanctioned use, driven by violent desires. We as humans should opt for progressive yet cautious approaches at the advent of the biotechnological revolution and avoid giving up in front of our petty mimetic desires that will result in drastic consequences.

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