

Petru BEJAN *

Crises and Resolutions of Humanisms. From the Vitruvian Man to the Augmented Man

Abstract: In addition to the frequently invoked requirement of a “new” humanism, today’s philosophy includes projects recommended as anti-, meta-, post- and transhumanistic. Can today’s proliferating “humanisms” offer solutions to crises that are threading more and more virulent? Which of these more faithfully reflects the present realities? Are the premises and solutions proposed by everyone realistic? Do they offer optimal resolutions, in line with today’s expectations? This paper draws attention to the main humanistic philosophical scenarios. Of all this, it would be important that man, in the effort to naturally increase his qualities and possibilities, keeps that something of essence level, meaning “humanity” or “humaneness,” in forms – as far as possible – unaltered, strangely and dangerously unhybridized. Otherwise, once opened, the Pandora’s box will release monsters.

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1. Philosophies of the crisis

Almost all the philosophies of the present make offers to remedy or overcome a “crisis”. Who/what is in crisis? Usually, the man, the culture, the civilization. What meaning should we give to the concept just evoked? The meanings are still disputed. Prior to the investment of philosophical interest (late 19th century), it had been familiar with medical language, designating the critical, undecided state in which the sick assesses his chances of healing. The disease, as something external, has discretionary power, functioning as a power of destiny, as long as there is no suitable remedy against it. Therefore, the crisis is a symptom of imbalance, the manifestation of a determinism – abstract and fatal alike. There is also a “dramaturgical” meaning of the term, borrowed from the Greek tragedy, itinerant from Aristotle to Hegel, designating the turning point of a relentless process which, despite its objectivity, “does not simply invade from outside, nor does remain external for people trapped in it.” (Habermas 1983, 122)¹ Karl Löwith brings the tragedy meaning closer to that used in soteriological doctrines. Salvation supposes “crisis,” struggle, and despair, even agony – in the sense evoked by Unamuno (1993).

The agonizing motive penetrates the evolutionary social theories of the last century, inspired by the philosophy of history – as it had been thread in the 18th century – to become for Marx the key to the “critical” investigation

* Professor, PhD, Department of Philosophy, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania; email: pbejan@gmail.com

of the capitalist system. Later, the so-called “philosophies of the crisis” appeared – German neo-romanticism (Fr. Nietzsche, W. Dilthey, G. Simmel, O. Spengler, E. Sprangler, H. Keyserling), philosophy of life (Miguel de Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset), existentialism. It should be noted that in the primary sense the concept of *crisis* is not necessarily exposed to “criticism,” but to “judgment” or “evaluation.” In this context, the happiest occasion arose to exhibit the prophetic tone: we are on the brink of the abyss, “only (*yet*) one God can save us” (Heidegger).

With the display of such “criticisms,” there is a certain feverishness of “abolition” that engages all the languages of culture. The theatrical of some Ionesco and Beckett announces the laments of humanity and of the “last man.” Bérenger, Ionesco’s character, proclaims himself the last survivor in a world of “rhinos.” Among today’s historians, one of the most fervent “destroyers” – Francis Fukuyama – has been announcing the “end of history” since 1989, so that he can then liquidate the “last man.” (Fukuyama, 1997) Is the human in crisis? Or is the theory on which he alleges and justifies his deeds?

2. Searching of “measure”

Far from radically easing the task of thinking, the “self-knowledge” claimed by Socrates proved to be much more difficult. Pursuing such a goal, humanism (as a meditation on the human) and metaphysics (thinking and delivering to a possible base) have entered a faithful conspiracy, developed in specific ways to this day. In the economy of this complicity we find the many “innovations” and shifts of emphasis: the Greek ideal of man – “measure of all things” (Protagoras), coupled with the image of the titan Prometheus (brave, persevering, put on great deeds), the project of the “deified” man of Christianity, dressed in the fragile and austere “leather clothes” offered by the Creator, the Franciscan model of *imitatio Cristi*, of the return to the evangelical *ethos*, illustrated by the poor man, simple and humble, “brother” of Nature. *Cantico del frate sole* (*The Canticle of Brother Sun*) by the monk from Assisi is a beautiful poem addressed to Nature. The order established by the Franciscans is a “horizontal,” fraternal one, in contrast with the Roman imperial tradition and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, legitimized by the authority of the emperor and the pope. The leader is the community servant, the younger brother (“the minister”). His mission is to serve the others and not to impose himself by virtue of any ascendant of power.

Machiavelli’s “prince” – the pattern of the Renaissance politician – voluntarily abandons all these “qualities.” The sovereign is concerned with his power and augmentation, not hesitating to resort to any means (including force, cunning, murder) to perpetuate it. The philosophers of the time

rediscover a maxim of Terentius: “I am human, and I think nothing human is alien to me,” a mixture of virtue and frivolity, reason and folly, temperance, and hedonism. It was said in their own way by Boccaccio, in his *Decameron*, François Rabelais – through the voice of Pantagruel (“love and do what you want!”), Erasmus of Rotterdam in *The Praise of Madness*.

Leonardo’s *Vitruvian Man* is, in fact, the central and tutelary figure of Renaissance humanism, depicting the classical ideas of symmetry, proportion, harmony and balance. The human world is the miniature reduplication of the macrocosmic order. Brilliantly synthesizing the change of cultural “paradigm,” the scene of *The Last Judgment*, painted by Michelangelo on the walls of the Sistine Chapel, ostentatiously upsets the heavenly and clerical hierarchies – on one hand, modesty and prejudice about the body – on the other. The “good” ones mix with the “bad” and sinful ones. Sacred geometry, the canonical one, is no longer respected, when the privileges are firmly and clearly distributed.

Taking advantage of the comfort of a thoughtfulness that is gradually freed from the rigors of theological dogmas, philosophers will gradually encourage a certain relaxation of relations with Heaven, announcing the signs of imminent emancipation. We find this intention in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. For Blaise Pascal, man is a “thinking reed,” a mixture of greatness and decay, of fragility and strength; he is “worm” and god alike. In turn, Descartes writes about the double elaboration of the rational being; it is both body and soul, seen as two distinct “substances,” but living together (like the “sailor on his ship”), with an ascending soul. Hobbes and Rousseau will come up with contradictory plans: for the former, man is dominated by uncensored warrior instincts and drive for power (man is a “wolf to man”), while the French considers him “good by nature” but subject to moral corruption and to influences of a bad education².

Marxism forms a first ideological project assumed as “humanistic”. In the “scientific socialism” conceived by Marx, Engels and Lenin, the proletarian – the “civilizing hero” of the new atheist religion – will compromise all standards of humanity, inventing the most terrible methods of removing rivals or “class enemies.” In a radically different philosophical register, Nietzsche proposes the figure of the superman, of Zarathustra, of the obsolete man, who carries out the nihilistic project, voluptuously overturning all values³. The place of a morality of the “slaves,” of the humble and merciful ones, is taken by an aristocratic morality, of “masters,” in which instincts and the will to power rather enforce respect. Weak and powerless is the Christian, the “man of resentment.” On the other hand, Max Scheler sees virtue on the side of the compassionate man, who does not act for vindictive reasons (“tooth for tooth”), but for others, converting the original

aggressive nature of individuals into love for others (“love your neighbor as yourself”).

The “Aryan” man of the Nazis – promoted in the propaganda films directed by Leni Riefenstahl – will be a profane and ideological reinterpretation of Nietzsche’s superman. Racial purity was achieved through eugenics and forced extermination. After the War, the world will experience an inflation of humanistic projects, some inspired by the post-war German critical school (Marcuse’s “one-dimensional” man), French existentialism (the “outraged” or “absurd” man at Camus) or Marxist ideology (the “multilaterally developed” man of socialist society – the puppet man, meant to execute the score dictated by the leaders), without anyone convincingly imposing his own “measure”.

3. Homo humanus, care and the good shepherd

Although it had marked the entire previous speculative tradition, the question of “what is man” returns with increasing insistence in the 18th century. According to Kant, rethinking the “problem” should have ordered the data of a “scientific” metaphysics, based on consensus, pretext and axis of a new philosophy. The Kantian project was fined from the positions of the most determined anti-anthropological attitude of modernity by Heidegger. Kant would have transformed metaphysics into anthropology, a line that will reach its peak with Nietzsche, the creator of the will to power and Zarathustra – when it “ends” with metaphysics in the traditional sense. Man will be investigated primarily with the tools of positive science. Even evolved in possibilities, they did not enlighten us more about man. Metaphysics entered a “crisis” also entails its bi-millennial companion – humanism. Man moves away from the essences – say the skeptics –, his existence in the world acquires the attributes of the inauthentic and the ephemeral, the language and the communication are dispersed in heterogeneous and degrading forms. There are two important projects of the last century, meant to re-discuss the humanistic issue. Let us mention here those sketched by Heidegger and Foucault, the former usually described as a *meta-humanist*, the latter as *anti-humanist*.

Heidegger explains his reservations about earlier humanistic thinking to Jean Beaufret in his *Letter on Humanism*. In what sense does he use the concept in question? What does it mean to be truly a “humanist”? *Homo humanus*, says Heidegger, opposes *homo barbarus*. The first is the educated novel, the free citizen who walked the steps of *enkyklios paideia* (*studium humanitatis*), the cycle of all the venerable sciences of Antiquity. In a “humanistic” approach, decisive are both the will to submit of man, but also the *care* for others, translated by “someone’s willingness to love, to like, in other words “to give the essence.” (Heidegger 1982, 326) Through “care,”

man is brought back to his essence⁴. What else can this mean than that man (*homo*) becomes human (*humanus*)? This means humanism: to meditate and take care of man to be human and not in-human, namely outside his essence.

Heidegger specifies that humanistic interpretations of man as a rational animal, as a “person,” as a bodily being endowed with spirit and soul, are not declared false and rejected. The stakes of Heidegger’s critique of humanism in *Sein und Zeit* had been that “the highest humanistic determinations of the essence of man do not account for the true dignity of man... because he does not value enough the *humanitas* of man.” In general, humanism could be understood as the effort for man to become free through his own “humanness” and thus find his dignity. The German philosopher overturns the hierarchy envisaged by Nietzsche in *The Will to Power*. “Man’s greatness does not consist in the fact that he is master of the Being... Man is the shepherd of the Being. But what would ‘being’ be?” The answer seems to be formulated in an apophatic way: “there is neither God nor any basis in the world. The Being is farther than the whole existence itself and yet it is closer to man than any existence, be it this stone, an animal, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or even God.” (Heidegger 1982, 336)

The collocation summarizing Heidegger’s position states that “Man is not the master of existence. Man is the shepherd of the Being.” (Heidegger 1982, 347) Such is the *humanitas* thinking of *homo humanus*. Heidegger places humanism in the spheres of care or caring, understood as availability to oneself or to others. Such humanism places “human humanity” close to the being. We conceive of a certain “humanism” of a special kind... “Humanism” means now that the essence of man is essential for the truth of the being, but in such a way that, as a result of this fact, it is not the man himself who matters (Heidegger 1982, 350). In such an equation, man admits a derived or secondary role; he consents to the possibility of something higher than himself (the being), but much closer to his essence or “humanity”.

4. From “anthropological sleep” to “human death”

If Heidegger places man in the proximity of the being, assigning him an ancillary role, that of its “shepherd,” in the European philosophy a new direction is outlined, this time critical towards humanism. Nietzsche had spoken of the “death of God,” thus anticipating the “death” of the one who caused it. Alexandre Kojève and Michel Foucault launch, for different reasons, another challenge – of “human death”.

In his interpretations to Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Spirit* from 1933 and 1939, Kojève evokes “the disappearance of man at the end of history.” (Kojève 1979, 434; Sabot 2009, 523-554)⁵ Hegel would had been introduced the theme of “death” in the interpretation of history. For him, the essence

of individual freedom is negativity, which manifests itself in a pure or absolute state as “death.” By embodying freedom, man is predestined to death; what dies is partly found in what is born. In a way the child prolongs the life of the parents who tend to be no more. Introducing this idea, Hegel transforms theology into anthropology. Reformulated later, the statement will be invoked as a prelude to an anti-humanism (theoretical but also militant), inspired by structuralism, which will ideologically support the student movements of 1968, including the positions of philosophers such as Louis Althusser, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Luc Ferry, and Alain Renaut. Death is invoked in two ways – one related to a humanistic thinking of finitude, and another, related to the historical and critical problematization of the anthropological motive.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault denounces what he calls *anthropological sleep* (Foucault 1996, 399). Anthropology, as human analytics, would have played a decisive role in the constitution of modern thinking. He identifies with Nietzsche the first effort to “uproot” the soil of Anthropology. Nietzsche found the point at which man and God belong to each other, at which the death of God is synonymous with the disappearance of man, and at which the promise of the superman signifies, first and foremost, the imminence of death of the one in agony. In order that “superman” appears, it is necessary to announce the end of man.

Foucault insists on the historicity of man; this would not always have been a concern of knowledge. Man is a recent invention, being predestined to the inevitable end:

Strangely, man – whose knowledge seems, to some naïve, the oldest research since Socrates – is undoubtedly nothing more than a rupture in the order of things, in any case, a configuration drawn by the new disposition which he has acquired within knowledge. From here all the chimeras of the new humanisms were born, all the facilities of an “anthropology” understood as a general reflection, half positive, half philosophical on man. However, how much consolation and what a profound reconciliation to think that man is but a recent invention, a figure who has not yet turned two centuries, a mere crease in our knowledge, and that he will disappear once he has found a new shape. (Foucault 1996, 41)

Foucault responds with a discreet and silent “philosophical laugh” to those who still invoke “the rule and emancipation of man” as the supreme argument,

to all those who still want to talk about man... to all those who still ask questions about the essence of man, to all those who want to start from man in order to access the truth... who do not want to think without immediately thinking that the one who thinks is the man, for all these forms of deviated and distorted reflection (Foucault 1996, 400-401)

But the one who dies in Foucault's thinking is not man as a species, man as humanity or man as a person, but "man as a messianic representation, the manufactured man, built by speculative metaphysics and taken over by later totalitarian ideologies, the privileged man-object of knowledge... the Hegelian-Marxist *subject* and the favorite *object* of the human sciences." (Ghiu 1996, 456-457). In fact, man's death is the liberation of man from his missionary, providential mask... The modern episteme, established in the 17th century, is related to the dissolution of discourse and the constitution of man as subject and object of knowledge and power. The reappearance of language in modernity turns the "man" to lose his central position... Man's death represents only his de-dialectization, the sunset of *homo dialecticus*.

Some commentators have tried to "excuse" him from the label often associated with him, that of anti-humanist. Both "man's death" and the critique of humanism must be placed in the appropriate speculative context. Certainly, Foucault was not a humanistic sympathizer, but on the contrary. He says this explicitly in an interview with Madeleine Chapsal:

Our current task is to free ourselves definitively from humanism and, in this sense, our work is a political one... where all regimes, East and West, peddle their dubious goods under the banner of humanism... Everything tends to make the very idea of man useless. The most oppressive legacy left to us by the 19th century – and which we must get rid of as urgently as possible – is humanism. (Foucault 1996, 456)

If, in a sense, "man died," humanism passes as profoundly outdated and inadequate, so it must be overcome.

5. The humanism of freedom and truth

How are the projects of the two critically read? In an important book for the analysis of the problem, George Uscătescu (1987) states that the "process" pursued in the last century to humanism takes place against the background of this state of "crisis" or "confusion," in which coexist, passively or conflictual, experiences like the Christian existentialist Marxist humanism of work, another vitalist, one called "intellectual," another scientific and technical, etc. Uscătescu's arguments are supported by frequent references to Heidegger (whose faithful interpreter and disciple he was) and to Foucault. Both of those mentioned talk about the crossroads that philosophy and, with it, humanism would have reached.

However, Heidegger's handling is clearer. Metaphysics comes to "compose" the essence of man, he noted, expressing his intention to remove it from the state of "forgetfulness" in which it would have settled for centuries. On one hand, this amnesia would mean that metaphysics has moved away from its own essence – which is the thinking and utterance of the being –, on the

other hand, that man has become alienated from authenticity, far from the being. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger believed that the ancient Greeks knew the truth, and therefore it was necessary to update the frames of their thinking, bringing “wasteful sons” to their own truth. It matters which path we choose. The prophet of nihilism proposed a renunciation of the “classical” man, of that “rational animal” – theorized by metaphysics and science – in favor of one who “must become to be what he is.” The concept of man admitted so far can no longer maintain the original solidarity between “the being of being” and the “being of man,” so Zarathustra (the incarnation of man above and beyond himself) becomes a chance to cross a “bridge.” If he intends to save the earth, man must give up the spirit of revenge, the desire for power, and domination of the world.

George Uscătescu subscribes to Heidegger’s exigency to abstract man from the struggle for domination and to place him on the horizon of a “new humanism,” a humanism of concrete man, stripped of the obsolete rhetoric of ideologies. The scandal of humanisms could be ameliorated or even overcome not by an exaggerated attention invested in artificial speculative quarrels, but by the seriousness with which we intend to rethink man. “To overcome this crisis means to place the real man at the center of humanist unrest, and by the real man to reach the only viable humanism that can be reconciled with its entire and possible formal proliferation: the humanism of freedom and the humanism of truth”.

6. Extended ontology – man, animal, machines

Describing the “place” of the being (“farther than the whole being and yet closer to man than any being”), Heidegger had extended the register of possible beings, referring to entities such as stone, animal, work of art, machine, angel, or even God (Heidegger 1982, 336). Therefore, the World is much more generously circumscribed. “Anthropocentric narcissism” is undermined by a perspective that gives way to diversity of perspectives. Inorganic nature, animality, but also man-made machines are part of this diversity. Humans and animals are part of the same community, the same ecosystem (Goffi 2004, 72).

Ethologists will strive to demonstrate the existence of similar behaviors in humans and animals. Even if they are exiled to the periphery of “human” interests, animals are not radically different. Dominique Lestel in *Les Origines animales de la culture* suggests that the notions of culture and subject are not unique to man; animals can be conceived as cultural subjects: “the animal has become a subject not because our popular and emotional projections, but because they make us see it this way, but because the most modern scientific approaches do not give us another choice.” (Lestel 2001, 10)

Deleuze and Guattari talk in *Mille Plateaux* about “*les devenirs-animaux*” in man, announcing the possibility of new phenomenological applications. What are these? A kind of activity on the self, a kind of “asceticism”. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 290) The effort is not aimed at researching the subject itself, but the intention to overcome the subject, somehow looking at it from “outside”. Man does not become an animal, but there is always something “animal” or “demonic” in him. Describing the “wandering of schizophrenic” in *Anti-Oedipus*, the same authors use the metaphor of the machine. Capitalism gives way to the uninterrupted flow of machines of all kinds: single, social, territorial, desirous, despotic. Lenz – one of Büchner’s characters – places himself

before the distinction between man and nature, before all the landmarks that condition this distinction. He does not live nature as nature, but as a process of production. For him, there is no longer man or nature, but only a process that turns one to the other and that engages the machines. Everywhere only producing and desirable machines, schizophrenic machines, the whole generic life, the self and the non-self, the exterior and the interior mean nothing. (Deleuze and Guattari 2008, 6)

In *L’Inhumain*, Jean-François Lyotard describes the current world as one that, after abandoning the great narratives that structured humanity by proposing firm goals of emancipation (Christianity, Enlightenment, Marxism), must face a hopeless end with a human face, an inhuman end, similar to a “process of complexity” – called negentropy or “development of the technical-scientific system.” (Lyotard 1988) Hence the identity crisis, the existential crisis, the disease, the fatigue, the depression. The self, the subject, the man are in crisis. In the same paper, Lyotard wonders if a thought can linger without a body and if it could be a vehicle, a new “body” for a non-human subjectivity, whether we talk about animals, plants, or computers. In this way, the boundaries between artificial and natural could be suppressed.

7. Posthumanism, transhumanism and Pandora’s box

The classical humanist paradigm seems to have been put under the sign of Prometheus, the titan from ancient mythology, symbolizing force, reason, will of action. In the last decades, another eon is looming, closer to the figure of Epimetheus, the brother of the first. The names of the two seem to be premonitory: etymologically, Prometheus would mean “fore-thinker” or “the one who first thinks and then acts;” Epimetheus’ name refers to “afterthinker” or “the one who first acts and only then thinks.” Sent by Zeus to share heavenly gifts around the world, Epimetheus would have

wasted them on animals, leaving nothing of value to humans. On the other hand, Prometheus, the “humanist” *avant la lettre*, would have offered them fire and intelligence, stolen from gods. According to Greek mythology, Epimetheus – the inaugural “posthumanist,” friend of animals – would have opened the “Pandora’s box,” received as a wedding gift, dispelling all evil in the world.

The 1970s called for a revision of the notion of man, acknowledging that, in fact, Western tradition recognizes and encourages a favorite profile: male, white, Western, heterosexual, strong, beautiful, capable, healthy. The classical polarities between nature and culture, male and female, black and white, homosexual and heterosexual are deconstructed and dissolved. These polarities are not irreconcilable, nor are they definitively separated. Post-humanism was born from the feminist reflection of the 90s, also being theoretically maintained by the study of differences, especially gender, supporting its reflection on an assumption of a hybrid ontology and systematic review of what had previously been recognized as “human.” Rejecting previous “anthropological universes,” posthumanism tries to open to multiple perspectives in which man is no longer the tutelary and exclusive reference (Macho 2017, 13-26).

Heterogeneous from a speculative point of view, posthumanism is in the full process of conceptual elucidation, being sometimes confused with transhumanism, other times separate from it. In fact, what is it? Ethical theory about man? Secular and atheist religion? Ideology of technical and scientific progress? Intellectual movement with welcome intentions, aiming to overcome the current human condition? Regardless of perception, the influence of the posthumanistic project is more and more obvious; books, profile magazines are published, large-scale events are organized, recognized specialists and personalities in the field are trained.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the recent World Congress of Philosophy in Beijing, in 2018, had as its theme: *Learning to be human*. Therefore, we learn how to become human or how to prove ourselves... human. Many are ready to argue a philosophical particularity, looking for premises and support in speculative writings. Renaissance humanists are read and revised, among them Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, are recited and interpreted. Representatives of this current rightly wonder if classical humanism is still able to meet the challenges of today’s world (Ferrando 2013, 26-32).



Posthumanism does not completely abandon the presuppositions of classical humanism. Although it investigates the realms of science and technology, it does not recognize them as the exclusive landmarks of reflection, but extends its research to determine “technologies of existence” (replica of “technologies of the self,” inspired by Foucault [2004, 56-60]) designed to better or improve our lives. Adhesions and reticences to the posthumanistic current are shared in a balanced way; it is “the movement that essentializes humanity’s most daring, courageous, imaginative, and idealistic aspirations” (Ronald Bailey), but also “the most dangerous idea in the world” (Francis Fukuyama). Some believe that today’s humanity is already transhuman because technology and medical progress have significantly changed the way we are (Casas 2017).

What are the distinctive ideas of posthumanistic thinkers? In short, they deconstruct any ontological hierarchy, asking for the decentralizing of man from the role of the main subject of discourse. In such framework, man is not approached as an autonomous court, but located in a vast system of relationships. Limiting and discriminating perceptions are denounced: sexism, racism, speciesism (considering the human species as having certain advantages and privileges). Existence is tangled, symbiotic, hybrid, mixed, fluid; nothing is totally autonomous or independent.

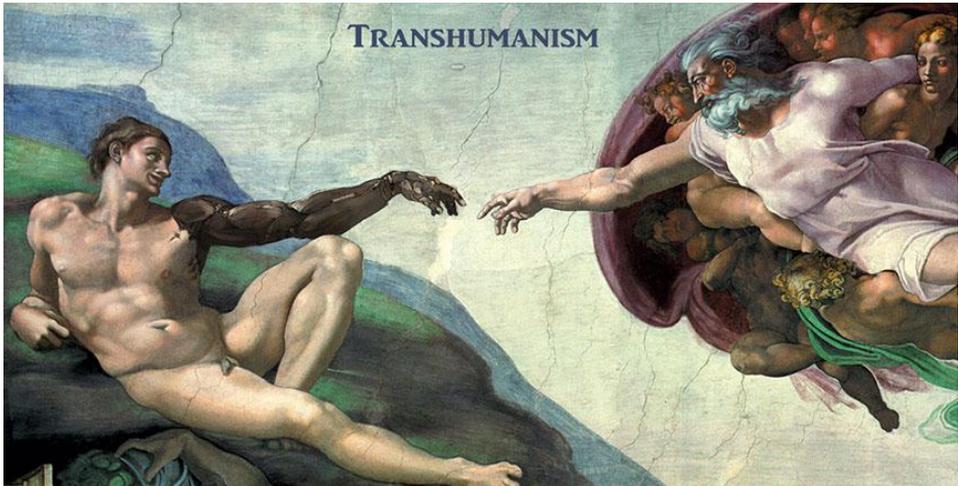
Posthumanism also reconsiders our relations with technology. It is no longer seen as an inevitable evil, a source of anxiety, discomfort, and alienation. Borrowing a Heideggerian thought, the technique is not “a simple means,” but “a way of revealing” of being⁶. The promising results offered by biotechnology, nanotechnology, cybernetics, and robotics are approached. The explicit purpose? To use these resources effectively to increase human performance, to place him in the orbit of his own “perfectibility” (physical, intellectual, mental, and emotional), giving him, as much as possible, the miraculous elixir of “eternal life” or the hope of “youth everlasting and life without end.” Among the requirements to be assumed: the principle of hybridization; the virtual condition of the being and its revision; the plurality of perspectives, the transitory nature of belonging, the interest in technique, the willingness to make future projections, the ontological recognition of otherness, the destruction of models, categories and hierarchical definitions, overcoming essentialism (Marchesini 2017, 30).

In *The Posthuman Manifesto*, Robert Pepperell emphasizes several aspects of the posthuman “specificity”: technological progress is directed toward the transformation of the human race; machines will no longer be just machines; people and computers will interact; consciousness is the function of an organism, not an organ; human bodies have no borders; humans have a finite ability to understand and control nature; the thought is nonunilinear, but can evolve simultaneously in different ways; uncertainty, discontinuity,

and unpredictability will replace the ideas of certainty, continuity and predictability – found in the humanist conceptual threshold.

8. Hybrid ontologies

The man of the future, of post- and trans-humanism is the Cyborg. Ontologically hybrid, *the cyborg* (from *cyb*/machine and *org*/organism) becomes the prototype of the augmented man, of the man-machine couple, synthesis of nature and artifact, combining the qualities of the living being (man – animal) and the machine. The cyborg is the transhumanistic replica of the Vitruvian Man. What are the ontological differences between the two? The man of the humanistic tradition is Promethean, autarchic, central, and centripetal, he improves his essence, he cares about his “purity,” he reproduces himself into the world, he produces the technique and considers it an instrument of domination, using it to transform the world; the other (a postmodern Epimetheus) is hybrid, composite, decentralized, mobile, a product of state-of-the-art technology, open and hospitable, looking for opportunities for profitable connections, conjunctions, and contaminations with the figures of otherness (Marchesini 2017, 50).



If transhumanists seem seduced by the “machine” of man or his “cyborgization,” anthropologists denounce and reject both the transformation of man into an object and the “humanization” or anthropomorphizing of the computer, both movements causing identity disorders (Le Breton 2009, 416 *sq.*). Gunter Anders talks about a “Promethean shame” that could test the natural man, undone, without a technological prosthesis grafted to his own body (Anders 2001, 37). The cyborg’s dream is “a mixture of the old imaginary machist, that of the superman, with a postmodern imaginary, which

makes digital and information the only valid realities... Phantom of omnipotence that asserts, instead, the derision of the bodily condition that marks humanity” (Le Breton 2009, 419). The cyborg makes the transition from machine-man to machine-body. He can also mark the triumph of the artifact, of the artificial over nature, imposing a technological superman, defined not by the indisputable bodily qualities, not by health and strength, but by the advantages of intelligence and the vital support of innovative prostheses. The technology can compensate for hereditary biological deficits or accidental infirmities, recovering the full profile or offering another, augmented at will.

Humanity, say transhumanists, has passed to a new stage; it integrates post-Darwinist evolutionism, accepting the possibility of artificial interventions, with the aim of a continuous reconstruction or self-reinvention. The means seem to be recovered from a Pandora’s box: cosmetic surgery, genetic engineering, clones, artificial insemination, selection and grafting of embryos... Self-realization or self-reconciliation replaces genetic inheritance. Membership is optional; the parents remain only with a decorative role in the destiny economy of the offspring. We are talking about a “hedonism of appearance as vector of individuation”.

The body is not a fatality, an immutable fact; “we can turn the body into what we want it to be.” (Ardene 2001, 427) The technique offers the possibility to have the desired body, to correct the body, reconciling it with the soul, creating the image we want. We can build or reshape the personality we want, rather than accepting the constraints of the past and an inherited genetic code. To “dwell” in one’s own body, to have the desired body, to reconcile man with one’s own body becomes a true-identity bet. Transhumanistic aesthetics relies on the offerings of emerging technologies, somatic aesthetics (in Richard Shusterman’s version), left in a slightly revised “humanistic” stage, it proposes the stylization of the self through a “body modeling” of another kind (meditation, yoga exercises, diet, gymnastics, fitness, jogging, bodybuilding...), but hostile to mutilating or painful reconstructive interventions (Shusterman 2008).

Taken to the extreme, the transhumanistic theme of the body’s “obsolescence” (aging, weakening, exhaustion) suggests the possibility of transporting information from one’s mind into a foreign body, like a computer. Thus, the natural body literally “dies” or becomes optional, as long as it can take the desired shape, even in our absence. In another direction, Gunter von Hagen, a physician by profession, plastinates (shapes) on request dead bodies, corpses, remodeling them in the desired positions, so that they can begin, after death... a new, endless life. The body is no longer the scene of the person, the identity is obtained according to the whims of the moment, the posthuman man seems to have lost any trace of “humaneness” or “hu-

manity”. Goodbye body, Le Breton (2009, 421) will cry out. In cyberspace or the virtual environment, the body becomes a dispensable element. Connected to the internet, the bodies disappear behind the protective screens. This is how a bodyless humanity is shaping up.

9. Exceeded measure

In a text that became famous for the virulence of its critics, the Austrian Hans Sedlmayr identified since 1948 the signs of a “lost measure” regarding the way of being of man and his representations (Sedlmayr 2001, 133). Discrediting the man is one of the symptoms of modernity; this would have sharpened with the metaphorical associations with the animal world; man is a beast, a brute, a prey, a “sick animal” (Nietzsche, Spengler).

Identifying the symptoms of a progressive decay in the order of values, Sedlmayr signals several simultaneous “deaths.” Art is moving away from measure; man is moving away from art; art is moving away from art, man is moving away from... man. “Art tends to move away from man, human and measure.” (Sedlmayr 2001, 138) Humanism is also dead. The Austrian invokes V.J. Ivanov and N. Berdiaev, who would have seen in modern life forms a profound “antihumanism.” Author of a book published in Berlin in 1922, *On the Crisis of Humanism*, V.J. Ivanov uses the term “musical transhumanism” regarding the rupture produced in music by an Alexander Scriabin, Russian pianist and composer (1872-1915) (Ivanov 1922). Its rupture with the whole musical past is the rupture of a contemporary genius with the humanism of music... “This canon break, not only aesthetically but also ethically, is a musical transhumanism, which must appear to every faithful humanist as... a terrible scream of madness, which shakes the soul, a sign of anger and destruction.” If the translations are accurate, it would be one of the first invocations of the concept of “transhumanism” in European culture, anticipating the later use of the term.

In painting, Sedlmayr argues, the same devastating effect will produce Marinetti’s futurism, but also Picasso’s cubism. In futurism, man disappears as the superior theme of art. For futuristic art, man no longer exists, man is made of rags (Sedlmayr 2001, 141), he collapses into the world of objects that surround him; there is a process of obvious “dehumanization.” There is no longer respect for man and his “normality.” “The human form, like any natural form, sinks permanently and disappears... The man of the modern times comes to deny his own image.” In turn, Picasso. “It defeats the human, the too-human in itself – by destroying the previous subjective center. The creative spirit of the Spaniard “flies out of the human house like the crow in the Ark and wanders, nibbling on the remains of corpses of the

drowned universe, the rags of the former veil of Isis, the destroyed things... and *humanism dies*'.

The process of “dehumanization” has been going on gradually since the end of the 18th century “and is directed not only against the humanist image of man, in the narrow sense, but against man in general... Since the 18th century there is a certain “transhumanism,” and its evolution towards “antihumanism” is clear in the artistic phenomenon. The interest in Hellenic, Etruscan, ancient Egyptian or Nordic art, the art of primitives, the rediscovery of barbarians, lunatics, malformed... are signs of the transition to another way of making art. Berdiaev and Ortega y Gasset are assistants. The first, in *The Meaning of History*, speaks of the “dissolution of the human face.” Ortega will invoke the “dehumanization” of art, the detachment of art from the human. “Modern painting shows no respect for man.” (B. Champigneulle). The *face* also disappears as a pretext for representation: everything goes against man and his universe. There is growing dissatisfaction with what is too human in man and in art. The artist tends to get rid of the “anthropomorphic handcuffs,” moving his attention down to the inorganic (Sedlmayr 2001, 148). Man’s relations with God, with himself, with others, with time and nature are disturbed.

10. Death of the body

How is the body represented in the art of the last century? Mostly destructured, deformed, fragmented, chromatically speckled, sometimes amplified in size, made of scraps, darned, and patched like a sad “clown” (Le Breton 2009), covered with a “Harlequin coat” (Serres 2003, 205). The humanity deficit of man is represented mainly by the association of the body with either the monster or the machine.

Precursors of these trends? For Example, a La Mettrie, with his *Homme machine* (1747) or, on the other hand, Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein ou le Prométhée moderne* (1817). The latter inaugurates the machine-humanity and technological body project. In a work dedicated to the representation of the body, Paul Ardenne invokes the reality of an “era of monsters,” which over-exploits the evil imaginary. Art is coupled with the size of the abnormality. What is the monster? Deviation from nature, from the norm, from the natural. The monstrous body is both different and deficient (Ardenne 2001, 380). A world of hybrid or evil figures (cyclops, satyrs, gorgonians, centaurs, hydras, jellyfish, mermaids, unicorns, vampires, zombies), assiduously populate the visual space.

Paul Ardenne associates the posthuman with a time of mutants (Ardenne 2001, 425). Numerous examples are provided by the exhibition entitled *Post Human*, curated by Jeffrey Deitch (Lausanne, 1992). The body as a work of

art will have its illustrations in *Body Art*, the artistic current in which the body becomes the favorite realm of all experiments.

The transition to the posthuman era is described in the works of Jake and Dinos Chapman. Their *Superman* uses the image of Stephen Hawking, the genius physicist, alluding to the profile of the superior man, who uses technology to work and communicate. On the other hand, Neil Harbisson is recommended to be the first cyborg artist. Born with an inability to see color, he wears a prosthetic device that allows him to “hear” the colors of the spectrum, including those beyond the visual range of an average person.



Jake and Dinos Chapman illustrate what the posthuman man, as hybrid being, anthropomorphic mutant, monster conceived in genetic laboratories out of control, could look like.



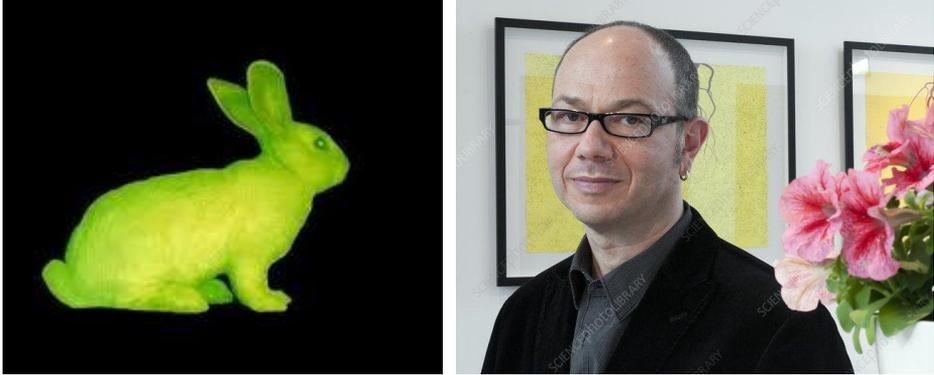
Stelarc's works bring into discussion the possibilities of corporal hybridization, synthesis of the human and the artificial. *Amplified Body, Laser Eyes & Third Hand* (1985) proposes an anatomical and sensory extension of the body beyond its own possibilities. The human-machine interface is extremely sophisticated. In *Ear on Arm* (2006), the artist grafts an ear on his forearm to have a third ear, connected to the internet. However, the prostheses attached to his body do not improve his physical performance. The contribution of technology can be seen as a game of intelligence, unmotivated whim, new-oriented and at-any-cost performance (O'Reilly 2010, 136-137).



Regarding transhumanist art, Rosi Braidotti emphasizes the need to connect “animal, plant, earth and planetary forces that surround us,” providing a non-anthropocentric vision of our planet. Natasha Vita-More, a declared philosopher and transhumanistic artist, imagines a future in which people are freed from the construction dictated by nature. One of his works, *Primo Posthuman* (1997), shows what man can look like in the future, accepting technological improvements (changing-color skin, for example). Artist Patricia Piccinini states that “organic is now the layer through which technology passes most regularly,” suggesting that the natural and the artificial cannot exist without each other.

Versatile and innovative, Eduardo Kac experiences several interfering genres. Considering himself a bio-artist, he uses unique mixtures and hybridizations: he creates a transgenic rabbit, named Alba, by introducing a fluorescent gene into it, which makes it glow green; creates a petunia in the

genome of which it introduces its own blood, to obtain a specific color pigment, but also a first human/plant hybrid.



Romanian Dorin Baba exhibits sophisticated anthropomorphic silhouettes, in which the natural and the artificial are ingeniously combined: human busts dressed in natural “leather” clothes, but ostentatiously wired and transistorized; paintings that “make” themselves once connected to electricity; paintings from which the characters blink or follow you with their own eyes. *Mental hologram*, exhibited at the New Temple Galery in Sarajevo, is a visual-holographic installation that reproduces sequences of the author’s mental world. What do we take with us in extreme situations? Subjective, personal memory, emotional data settled in the brain, the faces of the loved or the nearest ones. The artist archives and then transfers them to the memory of the image-generating machine – a foreign body, “loaned” in a certain occasion – which will project them randomly.



11. Conclusions

Undoubtedly, humanism in its final forms has exhausted its resources. A return to the past is neither desirable nor possible. Today’s man seeks to respond completely to other “crises” and challenges. Its heuristic and

creative potential is practically unlimited. Science and technology exponentially surpass new frontiers. The man of tomorrow will not resemble the man of today, as the present differs radically from the obsolete figures of the past. Suggesting moments of criticism, contesting, or overcoming the human condition, one at a time, anti-, meta-, post-, and trans-humanism can offer solutions, either realistic or just utopian. The most important of all would be that man, in the effort to naturally increase his qualities and possibilities, even if he distances himself from the reference of “human,” to keep that something of essence level, meaning “humanity” or “humaneness,” in forms – as far as possible – unaltered, strangely and dangerously unhybridized. Otherwise, once opened, the Pandora’s box will release monsters. Many, fierce, out of control.

Notes

¹ Here, Habermas makes “a classification of possible crisis trends,” different depending on the system to which they refer. These cause specific dysfunctions, but also identity problems.

² “The 17th century suffers because man is a sum of contradictions...; he seeks to discover the man, to *order* him, to dig him up: while the 18th century seeks to forget what he knows about human nature, in order to adapt him to its utopia.” (Nietzsche 1999, 68)

³ “How should those people who undertake this transmutation of values be constituted? Hierarchy as scheme for power... The grandiose model: man within nature, rising as master, subjugating less intelligent forces.” What are the grandiose types? “The *shepherd* in opposition to the master – the first as *means* of keeping the flock; the last as *purpose* the flock exists.” (Nietzsche 1999, 553, 580).

⁴ Exigency of “care for the self and others” will be approached by Michel Foucault (2004, 56-60). The “technologies of the self” have a venerable tradition, which takes us back to the philosophy of the ancient Greeks.

⁵ An approach of the same concept in Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut (1985).

⁶ “Everything that is essentially proper to technology harbors in itself the possible appearance of what saves... As long as we describe our technique as an instrument, we remain trapped in the will to master it. Thus, we go beyond the essence of the technique.” (Heidegger 1982, 134)

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