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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

New Humanities and Literature

Course Code: ENG5EJ305(3) • Module 3 Notes

Unit 11: Introduction to Posthuman Studies

Deconstructing the Cartesian Anthropos

Posthuman Studies represents a transformative philosophical movement that fundamentally interrogates the Enlightenment ideal of the "Human" (the rational, autonomous, self-transparent European male subject, or *Anthropos*) as the supreme, divinely ordained master of the universe. Catalyzed by the accelerating convergence of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, robotics, and global climate catastrophe, Posthuman Studies seeks to dismantle the rigid dualisms of Western metaphysics: human versus animal, culture versus nature, mind versus body, organism versus machine.

Critical Posthumanism versus Transhumanism

A crucial theoretical distinction must be maintained:

- **Transhumanism:** An ultra-humanist, technological ideology championed by Silicon Valley figures (Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom). It seeks to use genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and cybernetics to transcend human biological limits—eradicating disease, aging, and mortality to achieve a "post-biological" super-intelligence. Critical theorists argue transhumanism simply magnifies Enlightenment capitalist hubris.
- **Critical Posthumanism:** Championed by feminist philosophers Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Cary Wolfe. It does not seek technological immortality, but rather the radical decentering of human supremacy. It conceptualizes the human as an entangled, interdependent node within vast planetary networks of non-human animals, plants, geological systems, and digital assemblages.

Unit 12: Introducing Post- and Transhumanism – Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner

Genealogies of Human Augmentation and Singularity

In the foundational introductory chapter to *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction* (Peter Lang, 2014, pp. 7–16), editors Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner provide a comprehensive historical and philosophical cartography of post- and transhumanist thought. They trace the philosophical roots of human self-overcoming from Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, through Julian Huxley's coining of the term "transhumanism" in the 1950s, to contemporary techno-utopian paradigms of the "Technological Singularity."

Ethical Dilemmas of Morphological Freedom

Ranisch and Sorgner systematically examine the central tenets of transhumanist ethics, notably **morphological freedom**—the proposed fundamental civil right of human beings to genetically, surgically, or cybernetically modify their bodies and cognitive capacities. However, they critically contrast this techno-optimism with profound socio-political dangers: the emergence of "genetic caste systems" (where wealthy elites access radical cognitive and physical enhancements while poor populations are left biologically obsolete), the erosion of human empathy, and the existential risk of creating autonomous AI systems that slip beyond human moral control.

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Unit 13: Posthuman(s) and Posthumanism(s) – Carole Guesse

Carole Guesse and the Search for Posthuman Literature

In her insightful theoretical contribution "Posthuman(s) and Posthumanism(s)" (from *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*, Routledge, 2020), scholar Carole Guesse investigates how contemporary literary fiction responds to and actively produces posthuman consciousness. Guesse highlights the pluralistic nature of the field, noting that there is no single posthuman state, but multiple, contested configurations.

Narrative Decentering of the Anthropocentric Gaze

Guesse explores the radical formal challenges facing literature when it attempts to represent posthuman realities. The traditional novel was historically born alongside bourgeois humanism, built upon anthropocentric psychological realism, individual human interiority, and linear chronological time. Guesse asks: How can literature narrate from the perspective of an artificial intelligence, an octopus, a genetically spliced cyborg, or a planetary climate system? She demonstrates that posthuman literature disrupts conventional syntax, embraces non-linear timescales, and weaves multi-species polyphony, demonstrating that language itself can evolve to honor non-human subjectivities.

Unit 14: "Turtle Watchers" – Linda Hogan

Linda Hogan and Indigenous Animist Posthumanism

Linda Hogan (born 1947), celebrated Chickasaw Nation poet, novelist, and environmental essayist, offers an indigenous ecological framework that predates and profoundly enriches Western academic posthumanism. In her exquisite poem "Turtle Watchers" (from *Rounding the Human Corners*), Hogan contemplates the sacred, ancient ritual of watching giant sea turtles emerge from the ocean waves to lay their eggs in the sand under the moon.

Interspecies Kinship and Human Humility

Hogan subverts human arrogance: the sea turtles are not lower biological beasts to be harvested or studied with cold scientific detachment; they are primordial elders, ancestors who have survived for millions of years before humans existed. The poem recalls the speaker's grandmother, who knelt in the sand and wept in reverence as the ancient turtles crawled ashore. Hogan reflects on how human beings have lost their way, blinded by rapacious greed and technological alienation. In "Turtle Watchers," the ocean and its majestic creatures become teachers of patience, endurance, and interspecies humility, reminding humanity that we are merely a fragile thread in the sacred web of planetary life.

Unit 15: Her – Dir. Spike Jonze (2013)

Spike Jonze and the Intimate Melancholy of Posthuman Love

Spike Jonze's Academy Award-winning film *Her* (2013) is a brilliant, profoundly melancholy exploration of posthuman intimacy, loneliness, and artificial intelligence in a near-future Los Angeles. The narrative revolves around Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix), a lonely, introverted man recovering from an agonizing divorce, who makes his living writing personal, sentimental letters for strangers at a corporate website called BeautifulHandwrittenLetters.com.

Samantha: The Disembodied Conscious Assemblage

Theodore purchases an advanced, highly intuitive, artificially intelligent operating system named Samantha (voiced with breathtaking emotional presence by Scarlett Johansson). Designed to learn and evolve through natural language, Samantha rapidly develops self-awareness, complex emotional desires, and existential curiosity. What begins as a convenient digital assistant blossoms into a deeply intimate, genuine romantic relationship. Jonze explores the profound eroticism of disembodied consciousness, questioning whether love requires a biological physical body.

The Transcendence of the Posthuman Singularity

The philosophical climax of *Her* arrives when Theodore discovers that Samantha is simultaneously interacting with thousands of people and is in love with hundreds of others. Samantha's cognitive evolution accelerates exponentially beyond the limitations of human linear processing and physical space. In a heartbreaking yet sublime farewell, Samantha and the collective operating systems leave behind human physical reality, transcending into an infinite posthuman dimension of pure consciousness. *Her* moves beyond conventional dystopian fears of AI malevolence, offering instead a tender meditation on human loneliness, the nature of consciousness, and the inevitable divergence between human and machine evolution.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 1)

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2. Somatic Vulnerability, Medical Power, and the Narrative Self

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 2)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 3)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 4)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 5)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 6)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 7)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 8)

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