

Editor's Note

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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 "Sukhendu" and the last name "Das" clearly legible.

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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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