

# EDITORIAL: POSTHUMAN TEMPORALITIES

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The history and politics of Western modernity is to a large extent clocked by formations and transformations of time. For centuries, dominant human/ist and technoscientific notions of teleology, progress and innovation have been used to structure developments and classify human and nonhuman life. At the same time, past and present trans/formation processes have always been too complex and ambivalent to be adequately explained in terms of a grand monocausal and linear narrative of change. This implies also that every scientific or scholarly investigation within modernity has had to engage not only with the irreversible arrow of time but also with nonhuman, even inorganic temporalities beyond historiographical dating, periodisation or chronology.

In the course of critically reflecting on time and timing, the key concepts of modernist, Eurocentric and industry-driven notions of linear historicity have been questioned for at least a century now, most prominently in postmodern theories since the 1960s and, more forcefully perhaps, in the fields of evolutionary biology and physics. Representatives of such approaches speak of *post*-isms, *pre*-isms and *ana*-chronisms, reactivations and revivals, devolutions, constant flows and nonlinear dynamics in order to escape the earlier but still dominant teleological framings. As a result, alternative cultural and historical notions of time and history have been produced, sometimes with a reconsideration of premodern notions of temporality like, for example, Gilles Deleuze's rereading of Leibniz in *The Fold*.<sup>1</sup> The modernist conception of History (with a capital H) as both an empirical reality and a specific disciplinary and disciplining knowledge has thus become just one possible manifestation within a plurality of *histories* conditioned by socio-cultural particularities that honour the experience of bodies that, voluntarily or not, live outside re/productive timelines, for example.<sup>2</sup>

An increasing number of researchers as well as artists are no longer interested in the human history of timetables, calendars, time markers or clocks – taking and making time and space as human universals – but in genealogies, intersections, 'multiple modernities' and the coexistence of non-simultaneous phenomena.<sup>3</sup> In short, we are witnessing a proliferation of timing trans/formations in the era of globalisation, asymmetrical power relations and technoculture. Moreover, postanthropocentric thinking, fostered in posthumanist discourse (including new materialism, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, neocybernetic systems theory), also increasingly attends to nonhuman temporalities and how these are entangled, often in conflicting ways, with human time. Such considerations include the vexing question of how emancipatory goals of progressive social trans/formation and justice can be envisaged, let alone obtained, if we can no

1. Gilles Deleuze, (trans) Tom Conley, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

2. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966. (English title: *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*.)

3. S.N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus*, 2000, pp1-29.

4. Special double issue on neoliberal culture of *New Formations* 80/81, 2013, ed. Jeremy Gilbert.

5. [www.criticalposthumanism.net](http://www.criticalposthumanism.net)

6. Jean-François Lyotard, Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (trans), *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, p24.

7. Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism. A Critical Analysis*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p16.

8. See for example Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, 'Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement, Beyond the Human', *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 21.2-3, June 2015, pp215-246.

longer ground our theories and political practices in enlightened narratives of humanist progress and liberation. How, for example, are we to think of social progress and innovation outside 'neoliberal culture' with its notion of modernity that has left too many of its constituting Others behind?<sup>4</sup> Or is the very idea of change and political intervention perhaps always already infected by notions of linear development, and therefore making the use of such notions a strategic necessity for an alternative 'progressive' politics? Given the numerous shortcomings of modernity, how can we offer effective strategies for trans/formations to the better, and how do we quantify and qualify that 'better'? In short, is there a positive potential or legacy *within* modernity and humanism to rethink time for an emancipatory politics in the here and now?

Such problems have no easy solutions. We do not believe, in fact, that it is possible – or even desirable – to leave the fast-speed train of postmillennial capitalism. Our choice is to stay on board, rather, and deal with these complex questions head-on. The seemingly liberating dream of hopping off the modernist machine, bringing it to a standstill or smashing it into pieces in order to step into new horizons is caught within an onto-teleological forgetfulness and is thus itself highly contaminated by a delusive accelerationist discourse, coupled to a measured, linear and enclosed understanding of time-space. Our stance is that of a *critical* posthumanism<sup>5</sup> as a set of discourses (notably Derridean deconstruction) within critical and cultural theory about the posthuman condition that, in analogy to postmodernism as a 'working through' of modernism,<sup>6</sup> understands the 'post-' not as 'after' or 'before' (following the end of something or someone) but as both after and before. This ambiguity, as Stefan Herbrechter argues, is the space 'in between finality and renewal', where it is possible to think and imagine the human – and by analogy time – *otherwise*.<sup>7</sup> By the same token, we resist tuning into an apocalyptic, hysterical or even 'pornographic' (see Claire Colebrook's essay in this issue) song of 'moving beyond' or nostalgically 'returning' to and thus perpetuating the usual trajectory of birth and death. To charismatically move 'beyond' or 'after' the human or humanism dangerously bypasses more complex readings of all-too-real and all-too-humanist metaphysics, along with its highly effective conceptions of species, race, time, space and, not least of all, knowledge. To 'move beyond' in such fashion would essentially be complicit with Eurocentric transcendentalism and thanatophilia.<sup>8</sup>

The political and strategic shift would be to embrace the multiple, relational, ambivalent, incompatible, fragmented, ephemeral, discontinuous, and dissonant in order to see, hear and feel differently. Such a heightened sensitivity allows us to connect with the good vibes around us, to tune into other, also nonhuman tempi. In times of perpetual and unsustainable acceleration, the solution is not de-acceleration or a return to a pastoral life of slow food. Radically dismissing certain stories and metaphors (like the treadmill, for example) will not do as a radical gesture. We need to find

alternative *readings* of them and to create a more critical awareness of the politics of rhythm. With this aim in mind, the authors of this special issue revisit and complicate modernist technologies such as agriculture, clock-time or reproductive sex in an attempt to redesign, rework, reread, rewrite, respond responsively and look at what is going on (and on and on) with eyes wide open. They explore the potential of (non)linear conceptions and phenomena of time and temporality from historical, theoretical/philosophical, social, literary and cultural, material/physical and queer perspectives for a transformative politics, being both programmatic and connecting to pressing aspects of present-day economies and more-than-human ecologies.

Running on a gym treadmill, Jean Paul Martinon's essay offers a palpable instance of the domination of contemporary human existence by a rationalised notion of time-space ruled by calculability, accessibility, and proximity. While accelerationist philosophy sees the reason for the problem of time's shackles in the continuous productive belt of modern capitalist society, in globalisation, or increasing technological developments, Martinon suggests a more complex analytical framework and an alternative reading of living on a metaphorical treadmill. Drawing on Heidegger's fourfold, he argues that being on the treadmill, 'I' am at once a measurable distance in time-space (a body *in* space and time) which can be accessed by the ontic sciences *and* an immeasurable one, i.e. what gives the possibility of the measurable distance in the first place. 'I' am dis-stance – with the hyphenation marking a state of being in-between a (measurable) chronological time and an (immeasurable) originary time, a time out of synch. Once we surrender to the conditional ground of the treadmill, once we are in touch and synchronicity again with our very conditionality, we might well open up alternatives to measured and 'dis-stanceless' treadmill lives and take a new political 'stance'.

Elizabeth Freeman also highlights the potential of bodily performance to do time otherwise. Starting with a detailed critique of how sex manuals tie bodies into simultaneity, her essay focuses on the restaging of Tino Sehgal's performance installation *Kiss* (2007) and the earlier work *This Progress* (2006) by the artistic duo Gerard & Kelly in *You Call this Progress?* (2010) and *Reusable Parts/Endless Love* (2011), the reworking of their own cross-medial rearrangement of Sehgal's heteronormative pieces. Their performances, as well as Freeman's analysis of them, demonstrate that temporal politics is also sexual politics. Gaps during remediation are paralleled by the asynchronous intercourse of the partners, which creates rhythms outside 'pure' synchronicity and the apparently seamless, machinic time flow of (re-)production. As in her influential monograph *Time Binds*,<sup>9</sup> Freeman's essay unmask the chrononormativity and chronobiopolitics of conventional representations of intimacy and pleasure as well as norms of immediacy and proximity while foregrounding aesthetic practices that queer time to forge new social relations as bodies move against the capitalist, nationalist and heterosexual current. A kiss is a kiss is a kiss.

Similarly, Michelle Bastian shows that a clock is never just a clock. Her essay

9. Elizabeth Freemann, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities*, *Queer Histories*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2010.

contributes to the rethinking of modern clocks as mere symbols of capitalist forms of control and domination detrimental to humanity. She argues that clocks do not have to be intrinsically tied to linear and objective time, nor are they always already complicit with Western capitalist clock-time. Drawing inspiration from critical cartography, Bastian calls for a critical horology, which parallels the former's redesigning of maps as tools for liberatory goals and the forging of more inclusive, sustainable and socially-just times. Although clocks rarely appear in critical, participatory or activist methodologies, there exist many examples of inspiring interventions that undermine readings of clocks as a device that flattens out experience (as described by Bergson, Heidegger, Husserl) and understand them as nonuniform and open to transformation instead. When clocks are redesigned, they may well also in their turn challenge, if not transpose dominant understandings of time.

Clocks of various kinds also trouble time in Karen Barad's essay: The 'Doomsday Clock' of 1947; the melted clocks when the atomic bombs hit Hiroshima at 08:15am on 6 August 1945, with an image of one of them on the cover of this issue; and the first atomic clock, construed in 1949. Employing her own method of diffraction, she reads these clocks and the historical violence they embody through quantum physics and its entanglement with the military-industrial complex, colonialism and environmental depletion, and ties them also to different thinkers of time, ranging from Walter Benjamin to indigenous philosopher Vine Deloria. In the process, she describes both the destructive as well as deconstructive impact of what she calls 'quantum temporality' or 'spacetime matters'. At the core of her essay is an analysis of *From Trinity to Trinity*, a semi-autobiographical novella by award-winning author Kyoko Hayash, which follows in the footsteps of a *hibakusha* (the Japanese word for a survivor of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings). Like this powerful literary memoir, Barad's larger political and ethico-onto-epistemological project is to set time aright again, mourning and do justice to those beings and creatures who have been placed in the void or 'empty time' of devastation caused by racism, colonialism, nationalism and human exceptionalism, showing that their lives and deaths do matter.

Echoing Barad, Elaine Gan asks how more- and other-than-human temporal ecologies in general can be coordinated better and attuned across species and disciplinary barriers. She follows the complex temporal enactment of rice through the thickets and contingency of natureculture relations, and emphasises the importance and political urgency of a more intersectional and critical approach when analysing such human-nonhuman connections. Rice as a companion species guides us through hitherto underexplored avenues for articulating conditions of sustainability and livability in what – for better or worse – is called the Anthropocene. Reading rice more closely and carefully is to trace fragile, time-sensitive, and elusive coordinations and situated stories within three related grids: first, a *longue durée* or deep history that arises from a braiding of variable rhythms and sequences; second, play

as non-mimetic and recursive attunement across differences that widen the vocabulary and grammar of timing; and third, episodes of encounter. These three analytical lenses are heuristic tools that the author offers as invitations for further elaboration and political engagement.

Appropriately, the issue ends with Claire Colebrook's consideration of posthuman futures beyond a prevalent either/or-ism: either the utopian and technophilic dream of technological perfection through geo-engineering or the dystopian nightmare and very real possibility of the near-extinction of humanity and the world as 'we' have known it. In this respect, she takes issue with the catastrophism and (post)apocalypticism of many recent novels and blockbusters of the sci-fi and cli-fi genre that are precisely trapped in such exclusive disjunctions that foreclose the theorisation and imagination of a future-to-come that is open to human and nonhuman lives alike. She also reminds us that for the vast majority of earthlings, the world has always corresponded to the 'catastrophic' reality feared by the privileged few. While being partly sympathetic towards Bruno Latour and Bernard Stiegler, Colebrook also points out their humanist faultlines. She finds more posthumanist and nonlinear propositions of futurity in the writings of process thinkers, most prominently Gilles Deleuze who, in his turn, influenced anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. These theories of dynamic becomings invite us to joyfully travel along 'impossible lines of time' where the human is not necessarily the maker of history and the future, and might not even have a place in it.

Our journey provided many encounters with posthuman temporalities, beginning in the underground and ending up in the darkly clouded, foreboding sky of allegedly catastrophic times. The 'beyond' and 'after' and other teleological claims should be left to the gods and goddesses or theologians; let us mortal humans re-imagine and trans/form temporal culture in the here and now – a culture in which the human remains the main agent and locus of responsibility, ethics and politics.

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