"Embodied Narrative" in Transhumanism: Notes on Emerging Models of Ethos

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http://ellids.com/archives/2023/10/5.4-Forum-Baumlin.pdf

> [It is only] with legal ideas about rights, Christian ideas about the soul, and Cartesian ideas about the ego that our modern, categorial self is born.
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> —Martin Hollis, "Of Masks and Men" (223)

> But should we in turn wish to "look into the future" and form an image of what it will be, there is one childish error we must avoid: to base the man of the future on what we are now, simply granting him a greater quantity of mechanical means and appliances.
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> —Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (246)

It is a Western rhetorical model that Martin Hollis addresses in the epigraph above, and it's from within that version of the "categorial self" that my own comments proceed. I am, by training, an historian of rhetoric whose research has focused on classical models of ethos and their postclassical advancements. Our transit through antiquity to the 21st century is marked, in large part, by a gathering up of rights, roles, and affordances, each pressuring the "category of the person" (Mauss). These have granted (to some people at least, some of the time) rights of self-possession (separating citizens from slaves); rights of class, inheritance, and occupation (establishing medieval castes and aristocratic privilege); rights of privacy and private possession (preconditions both of individualism and early-modern capitalism); rights of citizenship within modern nation-states (a precondition of capitalist expansion and colonialism); and, much later in Western society, rights pertaining to gender (including suffrage and bodily self-possession/control).

If these and other accretions to the "category of the person" carry us from antiquity into modernism, we need to ask what further developments are reshaping us, not simply in social-political practice *but as an embodied species* today. Over the past decade, my sense of the accelerating speed of change—in urban technoculture, in global economy, in transportation and media/communication, in informatics, and in technoscience (the medical sciences particularly)—has turned my gaze forward. It's not where we've come from, but where we're going, that holds my attention. Here's my thesis in a nutshell: In our species' interface with scientific technoculture, new versions

of ethos arise. And, as our habitus evolves, so will our storytelling. For it's within "embodied narrative" that postmodern ethos most forcefully, most fully emerges.[1]

From Logos to Ethos (to Mythos)

In considering the resources of 21st century ethos, we must first observe the model that it seeks to supplant. The discourses of modernism—of social-technological progress, neoliberalism, and science itself—belong to the grand narrative of Enlightenment rationalism. Logos-driven, such discourse posits a "universal subject" premised on the primacy of mind within our shared humanity—and *not* on bodily/cultural difference. Since Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), we've come to question the power of such metanarratives: "Local knowledge" (Geertz), as we have learned, grows out of "local narratives." As a corollary, we've learned to foreground discourse, irrespective of its rhetorical/presentational structures, against the backdrop of some enabling pre-existent or emergent story.[2] Both individually and collectively, the lifeworld as we experience and imagine it is built from within narrative. The diversity of our stories—again, both individually and collectively—grows out of the diversity of our positioning within history as well as within the current lifeworld, with its varied markers of identity: of gender, ethnicity, class, age, ability, and culture generally. In much contemporary discourse, these markers of identity—fashioners of ethos for speakers and audiences alike—describe markers of difference, as well. The agonistic, contentious quality of much social-political debate arises out of the conflict, not simply among speakers, but among their competing narratives, each clamoring to be heard and, in finding an audience, making that speaker (or community, or party, or organization) visible.[3]

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[1]I take Jim W. Corder's definition of ethos—"character as it emerges in language" (2)—as a starting point. Following Erving Goffman, I treat "character" and "personhood" as flip sides of a coin, where character marks the performance of ethos *as observed by/within others*, whereas personhood marks the performance of ethos *as experienced by/within the self*. And I follow Pierre Bourdieu in his use of "habitus," which covers much of the same territory as rhetorical ethos, though from a sociological perspective:

> Habitus is, Bourdieu states, "a socialized subjectivity" and "the social embodied." […] [I]t is, in other words, internalized structure, the objective made subjective. It is also how the personal comes to play a role in the social—the dispositions of the habitus underlie our actions that in turn contribute to social structures. Habitus thereby brings together both objective social structure and subjective personal experiences, expressing, as Bourdieu puts it, "the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality." (Maton, "Habitus" 52–53)

[2]Focused in literary and film studies, narratology has evolved its own vocabulary, which only occasionally parallels or intersects with classical-Aristotelian and postclassical rhetoric. (For a useful discussion, see Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*.)

Through the following, I'm not concerned with the formalist distinctions made among such terms as genre, mode, text, script, story, etc. I'm interested, rather, in the rhetoricity of narrative (and the narrativity of rhetoric), both broadly defined. I'm also interested in the ways audiences respond, physiologically and neurologically, to the linguistic structures of narrative. Language inhabits us; its rhetorical structures give shape to our thoughts, feelings, gestures, attitudes. It is within a rhetoric of embodiment that I shall be situating the models of ethos that follow.

[3]Conforming to traditional humanistic values, the struggle for equal rights has been, for centuries, an ethotic struggle to acknowledge a *common human identity* and destiny. But affirming "the universal human agent" of Enlightenment rationalism has achieved little in correcting inequalities based in gender, color, ethnicity; rather, it allows these "markers of identity" to disappear. That's perhaps the most striking movement within

Elsewhere, I've described ethos as the "cultural dress" of speakers.[4] Here, I'm describing ethos as the *embodied enactment* of the stories that we tell of ourselves and of our world—and, concomitantly, of our response to the stories told elsewhere and otherwise. In our transit from modernism into realms of the postmodern, the Enlightenment *homo rationalis* has evolved into *homo narrans*. Within the vocabulary of classical-Aristotelian rhetoric (specifically, the triple *pisteis* of logos, ethos, and pathos), this transit declares more than the primacy of ethos over logos; more germane to this discussion, it invests mythos—that is, the structures and resources of narrative (and which I take, not from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* but from his *Poetics*)—effectively as a fourth *pistis* or proof, implicated in persuasion.[5]

Before we can say what a postmodern ethos "is," we must pull back the curtain of language to observe the "thing" that it's tasked to represent. For any adequate theory of ethos must begin with a theory of the human—that two-legged animal without feathers whose nature and possibilities have astonished, puzzled, and obsessed philosophers since antiquity. The possession of language is not, in itself, unique to the human species, if the former is defined (reductively) as a species-specific faculty of communication somehow hardwired into the nervous system. As a further *definiens*, we can point to our nature as storytellers: *homo narrans*. That said, it's the neurophysiological triggers of *embodied* narrative—bodily affects tied not to cultural immersion simply, but to evolutionary biology more deeply—that account for the hold ethotic discourse has on our species, to a considerable extent governing our social-political behaviors. The cross-fertilizing of such disciplines as cognitive science and narratology are teaching us ways to observe— and, important for rhetorical theory, to anticipate—the real (if largely unconscious) effects that narrated action, gesture, and affect have on readers and audiences.

It's the claim of cultural authority that binds narrative so strongly to ethos. Energized by "local narrative" (again, see Lyotard), cultural difference has come to dominate in discussions of ethos today. But, increasingly, technology is reshaping our lifeworlds, the human body included. The urban-cosmopolitan habitus is increasingly

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ethos studies today: its shift toward an ethotics of bodily/cultural difference (Baumlin and Meyer, "Positioning Ethos" 6).

[4] As Craig A. Meyer and I write, "Character 'emerges' […] within a distinctive 'cultural dress,' one that presents itself—in effect, 'clothes itself'—within markers of identity/difference (ethnicity, gender, social status, regional accent, etc.)" (Baumlin and Meyer, "Positioning Ethos" 6). In so saying, we take inspiration from the classical Athenian ethos, as described by Michel Foucault:

> "Ethos was the deportment and the way to behave. It was the subject's mode of being and *a certain manner of acting visible to others*. One's ethos was seen by his dress, by his bearing, by his gait, by the poise with which he reacts to events, etc." (Foucault, "Ethic of care," 6; emphasis added). Ethos, in this sense, displays cultural "markers," such that the speaker's task is "to open a space" through language that allows the self to be heard and, saliently, *to be seen*. (Baumlin and Meyer 6)

[5] For readers unfamiliar with the classical vocabulary, Aristotle posits three *pisteis* or "proofs," these being *logos* or rational argument, *pathos* or an appeal to emotion, and *ethos* or the projection of expertise and trust. Through logos, the speaker persuades by adducing "good reasons." Through pathos, the speaker elicits sympathy and a heightened emotional response. Through ethos, the speaker displays an image of "good sense," "good will," and "good moral character." By naming *mythos* a fourth proof, I'm suggesting that narrative contributes uniquely to persuasion. What it adds, I would argue, is a sense of the *worldliness* of argument: Impelling our bodies toward action-in-the world, our stories unfold as so many action-series situated in time and space.

eclectic in its affordances—of workplace, living arrangements, communication, and transportation as well as of cuisines, fashions, and entertainments. In a genuinely globalist setting, our aspirations expand beyond traditional "birthmarks" of local culture and cultural identity. In the U.S., the urban-cosmopolitan ethos is nomadic, almost by definition.[6] To this culturally-eclectic habitus, we can add a range of bodily enhancements (genetic, hormonal, orthotic, prosthetic, and reconstructive) that transform individuals from biological organisms into biotechnical assemblages. (The cyborg, as Donna Haraway described it some decades ago, has been fully realized in daily life.) Within this implicitly transhumanist model, ethos comes to be defined, not by markers of birth or of culture, but by choices of lifestyle (Bostrom).

Emergent Models in Search of Ethos

As I've noted, any adequate theory of postmodern ethos begins with a theory of the human. Without denying the dominance (and necessity) of an ethotics of cultural difference, we must take account of several emerging theories, each interdisciplinary in discourse and informed/enabled by technoscience. Answering Nietzsche's aphoristic "human, all too human," these offer a broadly evolutionary model of human "becoming-" (Braidotti). The hyphen here is deliberate and necessary, since the future/s of ethos rest/s not in an essentialist model of human "being," but rather in modes of "becoming-" suggestive of our species' transit into something more: something more deeply examined and better understood, something capable of healing and enhancement—literally machinable in components—and freed in ways that mere decades ago remained the stuff of science fiction. In sum: Our study of ethos must account for an ever-burgeoning species whose worldly aspirations range from human augmentation through transhumanism to (post)human "becoming-."

Though current within their respective socio-scientific disciplines, the following models remain on the periphery of ethos studies (and of rhetoric generally). Each deserves a separate essay, though I can give mere paragraphs to each, leaving readers to decide which, if any, merit attention. But such is the purpose of this forum contribution: to serve as an entry-point for further research, inviting readers to look more closely for themselves. What unites the following models is their shared interest in embodiment and embodied cognition/action—all of which reinforces the narratological basis of contemporary ethos.

In their recent study, *With Bodies: Narrative Theory and Embodied Cognition* (2021), Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen outline an approach to cognitive psychology that foregrounds the *embodied*, *enactive*, *embedded*, and *extended* nature of mind—hence the moniker, 4e Cognition. By embodiment, they refer "primarily to the way in which cognitive processes are shaped by the makeup and sensorimotor possibilities of human bodies" (4). Of the emergent models surveyed in this forum, 4e Cognition offers to ground narrative—along with reader/audience response—within evolutionary biology: For "all narratives—including stories as trivial as an account of an ordinary day at work—are deeply embodied in that they tap into a repertoire of embodied

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[6]According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average American moves 11.7 times over their lifetime (United States Census). Also, the average American will change jobs 12 times (List Foundation).

interactions with the world (through situation models, motor resonance, and so on)" (Caracciolo and Kukkonen 15).

At the neurolinguistic core of these "embodied interactions" lies the human brain's mirror neuron system:

> The key concept that [mirror neurons] invoke is "motor resonance": when we observe another individual perform a physical action, our own bodies become attuned to, or resonate with, the movement—as the activation of the mirror neuron system suggests […]. [T]his resonance effect is not limited to the direct perception of other people's actions *but can be triggered by language understanding as well* […]. Put otherwise, reading action sentences of specific body parts *activates the corresponding areas of the brain*. (Caracciolo and Kukkonen 129; emphasis added)

Of its varied applications to rhetorical narratology, 4e Cognition explains our human empathetic response to storytelling: Through the mirror neuron system, readers and audiences reexperience *from within* the lifeworlds of speakers/subjects/actors/actants. Caracciolo and Kukkonen's work also explains why it is that fiction and nonfiction narrative are isomorphic in brain function and effect.[7] Irrespective of genre, audience-response is ethotic—a sharing of experience, attitude, and affect across texts. In later paragraphs, I'll return to the workings of mirror neurons in popular discourse. This next ethotic model—the actant of Latour's actor-network theory (ANT)—adds a further, technosocial, dimension to Caracciolo and Kukkonen's neuropsychological "repertoire of embodied interactions with the world" (15). Both methods focus on embodied narrative but from different orientations: Whereas 4e Cognition looks inward in studying human affect, actor-network theory looks outward in studying human social behavior.

As Bruno Latour argues in "A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans" (1999), the human agent *is expanded* by technology into a "hybrid someone-/something-else" (158): Human agent + technology = actant. "Each artifact has its script," writes Latour, with "its potential to take hold of passersby and force them to play roles in its story" (158): In so noting, he declares the narratological basis of actor-network theory.[8] *A body corporate* "is what we and our artifacts have become" (Latour 168). He continues:

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[7]Here, too, I refer readers to the further analysis given in Part 1 of my double essay, "Empathy and Abjection After Burke," to be published in the ongoing Issue 5.4 of *LLIDS*.

[8]Elsewhere (Baumlin, "From Postmodernism" 46), I've described the ways ANT "scripted" ethos in the early days of pandemic, turning human agents into hybridized actants:

> Responses to COVID-19 are ethotic: people infected become "carriers," their every cough a viral bullet-spray. People are defined by the infection in ways that change their self-image (projected as well as introjected) as "healthy," as "at risk," as "infected" in quarantine, as "infected" in hospital, and as "infected" on ventilator life-support. Latour's actor-network theory provides the equations: An assemblage (person + virus + ventilator) describes an actant in ICU. When out in public, an assemblage (person + mask + social distancing) describes a conscientious citizen following CDC guidelines, whereas (person − mask − social distancing) describes a "risktaker" showing little care for self or others.
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> Healthcare workers have earned a heroic ethos in putting their own lives at risk. Again, Latour provides the equation: nurse + PPE + safety protocols + coronavirus patient = "caretaker." Remove the PPE—the personal protective equipment of mask, gloves, and gown—and you've

> We are an object-institution. [...] "Of course," one might say, "a piece of technology must be seized and activated by a human subject, a purposeful agent." But the point [...] is symmetrical: what is true of the "object" is still truer of the "subject." There is no sense in which humans may be said to exist as humans without entering into commerce with what authorizes and enables them to exist (that is, to act). (168)

For a socially-politically charged example, Latour offers the actant of citizen + gun, whose ethotic identifications range from "good citizen," "soldier," and "cop" to "murderer." Ultimately, it's not the agent or the artifact or the script or the act *per se* that defines the ANT actant-ethos; rather, it's the communicative *network* of interrelated actants—that is, the actant's placement within larger social, occupational, or institutional systems—that completes the ANT model, giving the hybridized agent/technology its distinctive narrative ethos.

Whereas Latour redefines the human actant *by addition* (agent + technology), Donna Haraway defines the human-cybernetic organism *by incorporation*. As described in her influential "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), Haraway's human cyborg is rebuilt from within, as a machined and assembled biotechnical system. "Late twentieth-century machines," Haraway declares, "have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines" (72). She continues:

> It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine [...]. In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice [...], we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become biotic systems, communication devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic. (82)

Against other postclassical models, Haraway's cyborg deprivileges "cultural difference" and all "markers of identity" deriving from the gendered body (Baumlin, "From Postmodernism" 1). Within the cyborg assemblage, rather, "nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" (Haraway 71). In making this declaration, Haraway liberates the cyborg from biological essentialism among other (patriarchal) ideological constraints against freedom (Baumlin, "From Postmodernism" 9).[9] Unsurprisingly, the cyborg figures prominently in both transhumanist and posthumanist models of personhood.

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destroyed the healthcare workers' efficacy and safety (and, effectively, their "caretaker" ethos) [...].

    Other pandemic-related actants are primarily nonhuman: A test kit, for example, is supposed to provide reliable diagnosis (assuming proper construction, all necessary equipment, proper human administration, and timely interpretation) [...]. In sum: Every aspect of the pandemic affects habitus, embodiment, informatics and "expert systems," practices of self-care, and self-image (both introjected and projected).

[9]In its "deliberate confusion of boundaries" (70), Haraway's cyborg resembles Latour's hybridized actant: In the passage just quoted, "nature" (for which, read human/animal biology) cannot be privileged as the

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In contrast with Haraway's technocultural cyborg, Rosi Braidotti's humanimal situates our species' worldliness—its habitus—in non-anthropocentric nature. Within her bold vision of "the posthuman subject," ours becomes an interspecies, "planetary" ethos. In *The Posthuman* (2013), Braidotti writes of "this new knowing subject" whose "complex assemblage of human and nonhuman, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured […] requires major readjustments in our ways of thinking" (193). The posthuman subject, she adds, dwells "within a common life-space that the subject never masters nor possesses but merely inhabits, crosses, always in a community, a pack, a group or a cluster" (193). Being "fully immersed in and immanent to a network of non-human (animal, vegetable, viral) relations" (193), the posthuman subject of necessity rejects biological essentialism, "species supremacy," and individualist ideologies (Baumlin, "From Postmodernism" 9).

If Lyotard describes the grounds of postmodernism, Braidotti gives the outline of a posthumanism in which our species is toppled from its traditional, privileged place above (and, indeed, "outside of") the rest of material/biological nature. As Henri Lefebvre writes, we cannot base "the man of the future on what we are now, simply granting him a greater quantity of mechanical means and appliances." (Indeed, we're not obliged to call this "man" a *man* at all, in whatever traditional senses—grammatical, cultural, biological—we might choose to apply.) But Braidotti's posthumanist, post-anthropocene vision is futuristic—utopian, even—and distant from current social-political realities. In contrast, the transhumanist models of actant and cyborg—*models aimed at enhancing rather than redefining our humanness*—are present in technoculture and operant now. As Nick Bostrom notes,

> It is not our human shape or the details of our current human biology that define what is valuable about us, but rather our aspirations and ideals, our experiences, and the kinds of lives we lead. To a transhumanist, progress occurs when more people become more able to shape themselves, their lives, and the ways they relate to others, in accordance with their own deepest values. Transhumanists place a high value on autonomy: the ability and right of individuals to plan and choose their own lives. (345–46)

On these points, I believe that Bostrom and Braidotti would agree. And I believe that Bostrom would cede the following: that the question most worth asking is not what a human being "is," but rather what our species "is becoming."

So much for emerging theory. The mirror neuron system, the actant of actor-network theory, the cyborg, and transhumanism generally: What can such terms teach us about the contemporary lifeworld? How can they help us interpret and, equally important, help us talk about our evolving modes of being-in-the-world? We shall find that these new ethotic namings explain much popular discourse *even as they problematize our*

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prior organic whole to which "culture" (for which, read technology) is simply added or attached, leaving nature unchanged in its essence. Technoculture, similarly, cannot remain unchanged by its interfusion with biology. As Haraway writes elsewhere, "gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity" (73). Rather, "gender, race, and class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism" (73).

understanding of the interrelationships among narrative, personhood, self-identity, technology, language, and politics. Whereas the paragraphs above are grounded in theory, what follows is an exploration of these terms in practice.

The Challenge of Postmodern Ethos: Being Seen, Being Heard (Differently)

Consider the political (and indeed, the potentially legal) implications of actor-network theory in the current debate over gun violence. "Guns kill people" is a slogan of the American political left, to which the political right, energized by the National Rifle Association (NRA), replies, "Guns don't kill people; people kill people." In his ANT analysis, Latour writes:

> The first slogan is materialist: the gun acts by virtue of *material* components irreducible to the social qualities of the gunman. On account of the gun the law-abiding citizen, a good guy, becomes dangerous. The NRA, meanwhile, offers […] a *sociological* version more often associated with the Left: that the gun does nothing in itself or by virtue of its material components. The gun is a tool, a medium, a neutral carrier of human will. (157; emphasis in original)

"What does the gun add to the shooting?" Latour asks. He responds, "In the materialist account, *everything*: an innocent citizen becomes a criminal by virtue of the gun in her hand. The gun enables, of course, but also instructs, directs, even pulls the trigger" (157–8; emphasis in original). A critical reader might aver, "How can a gun pull its own trigger"? Of course it can't on its own, literally; but its material presence in a person's hand creates a script—a narrative that enlists the human agent within a specific sequence of actions that show the gun and gunowner performing together, as one. Latour explains:

> If the agent is human, is angry, wants to take revenge, and if the accomplishment of the agent's goal is interrupted for whatever reason (perhaps the agent is not strong enough), then the agent makes a detour: […] Agent 1 falls back on Agent 2, here a gun. Agent 1 enlists the gun or is enlisted by it—it does not matter which—and a third agent emerges from a fusion of the other two. (158–9)

Which of these, then, the gun or the citizen, "is the *actor* in this situation?" Latour's answer, unsurprisingly, is "*someone else*—a hybrid—a citizen-gun, a gun-citizen" (159; emphasis in original). His further explanation is deeply ethotic in implication:

> *You are a different person with the gun in your hand.* Essence is existence and existence is action. If I define you by what you have (the gun), and by the series of associations that you enter into when you use what you have (when you fire the gun), then you are modified by the gun. […] This translation is wholly symmetrical. *You are different with a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it.* You are another subject because you hold the gun; the gun is another object because it has entered into a relationship with you. (159; emphasis added)

It is at this moment that the actant-ethos is named: This "someone, something else," this "hybrid actor" comprising gun and gunman *needs its own terminology*, since "agents can be human or (like the gun) nonhuman, and each can have goals (or functions, as engineers

prefer to say). Since the word 'agent' in the case of nonhumans is uncommon, a better term […] is actant" (Latour 159).

Though widely studied in academic circles, Latour's actant remains conspicuous in its absence from public social-political debate. To aid in its popular currency, we must hybridize Latour's own vocabulary, translating it from sociology into a strategy of political-legal rhetoric. The same may be said of Haraway's cyborg and Bostrom's transhumanist. Whether any of these retellings of ethos develop popular currency depends, in large part, on the fate of the Enlightenment subject and "his" continuing dominance in discourse. Though caricature, Stephen K. White's version rings true:

> *He* is conceived as *disengaged* from his social background and oriented toward *mastery* of the world that confronts him; nevertheless, he can *discover*, by the light of *reason*, *universally applicable principles of justice*, found in some *foundationalist account* of God, nature, progress, or human communication that can become the basis of political *consensus* with other individuals. (33–34; emphasis in original)

By universalizing human reason and experience, the Enlightenment subject denies racial, cultural, and bodily difference: Subsumed within its "he," all subaltern voices (minorities in power, if not in number) fall silent.

I've quoted Bostrom: "To a transhumanist, progress occurs when more people become more able to shape themselves, their lives, and the ways they relate to others, in accordance with their own deepest values." By these criteria, the biotechnologies of gender reassignment—the surgical and hormonal reshaping of the material body in accordance with one's self-identified gender—are transhumanist to the core. (Indeed, many socially- and religiously-conservative websites have attacked transhumanism through transgenderism.)[10] In claiming their right to be seen and heard, many transgendered speakers reject the old gendered pronouns and their implicit biological essentialism, preferring the gender-neutral "they." And many voices in popular media have followed suit: The growing use of gender-neutral pronouns in academia and journalism demonstrates that rhetorical practice *can* bring change. (If language filters our social reality, then the ways we speak inform our ways of seeing and knowing.) But the transgendered speaker has also met with vehement, indeed virulent abjection. The proliferation of anti-transgender legislation in the U.S. shows the strength of backlash against transhumanism generally.

Ineluctably, the renamings and retellings of postmodern ethos contribute to the "culture wars" roiling America today. Fought largely over bodily/cultural difference, these describe contests *of competing narratives* with ethos as a battleground. Adequate healthcare for the transgendered, equal rights within same-sex marriage, freedom in teaching critical race theory: The socially progressive aim of all such discourse is *to humanize* markers of bodily/cultural difference. In the gender- and color-blindness of

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[10]See, for example, Rob Dreher's article in *The American Conservative* magazine, "Transgenderism as Transhumanism," to which is added the subhead, "At stake? 'The most fundamental aspects of what it means to be human.'" Or, consider the web headline published by *The Catholic World Report*: "From Transgender to Transhuman: The Expanding Culture of Death" (Hendershott).

recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, such speakers effectively disappear. Submerged within the undifferentiated "universal subject" of Enlightenment rationalism, they lose their distinctive ethos. So, if an aim of postmodern ethos is *to be seen* in order *to be heard*, then we confront a basic question, as yet unanswered within popular culture: Are we ready, as a species, for those "major readjustments in our ways of thinking" (Braidotti 193) that can carry us into a healthfully diverse, caring and accommodating, fully inclusive transhumanist future? The answer, for a not-insignificant portion of the American populace, is "No—at least, not yet."

What might it take to readjust our ways of thinking?

Long known to narrative studies, the Russian formalist notion of *ostranenie* or "defamiliarization"—of making the strange seem familiar, and the familiar strange—is invoked in 4e Cognition: "To truly decenter human notions of consciousness and subjectivity […] narrative has to implement embodied strategies that are capable of destabilizing (or 'defamiliarizing,' to use a more technical term) an anthropocentric understanding of the body" (Caracciolo and Kukkonen 180). Arguably, this defamiliarizing strategy pertains to transhumanist models generally.

As an ethotic trio, the actant, cyborg, and transhumanist emphasize bodily accretions and enhancements, but it's within narrative—storytelling—that their unique lifeworlds emerge. We take our next lesson, then, from 4e Cognition: Even as it charts a reader's empathetic response to fiction, surely the same neuron system reigns over the nonfiction genres of lifewriting. Our "ways of knowing" character/personhood remain the same for fiction and nonfiction alike: It's for this reason that psychologists learn from novels, while literary scholars learn from psychological case studies. We "know" (interpret and respond to) fictional characterizations by their *mirroring* of historical character, in the same way that we "know" (interpret and respond to) historical characters by their *mirroring* within fiction—for both are narratological. This isomorphism is grounded, not simply in the structures of narrative, but in the structures and functioning of "embodied cognition."

Within popular culture, we meet the actant and cyborg in fiction and film—those privileged, popular modes of entertainment wherein readers and audiences learn to exercise their powers of empathy. As consumers of sci-fi and speculative fiction, we dwell imaginatively within possible worlds inhabited by versions of trans-/post-/super-/human beings. When a story is well told, we admire its inventions of worlds and species; attracted by its possibilities, we seek relief from our own quotidian time, place, and personhood. By such vicarious participation, we familiarize ourselves with our own transhumanist future—a future that is emergent in some aspects *while already upon us in others*. We dwell among actants and cyborgs. Their world is our currency, our co-presence; nothing of this is fiction.

So we ask, Is this same "school of empathy" exercised in the "embodied narratives" of contemporary nonfiction? The answer is—or ought to be—"Yes, of course." A substantial portion of the American populace already embraces transhumanism and its diverse stories. Concomitantly, a substantial portion of the populace does not. The empathy elicited from within the former group becomes, in the latter, something else entirely. This refusal of empathy is not a failure of "narrative ethos"

or of rhetoric more broadly; rather, it's a reflection of differing brain functions. Here, too, cognitive theory gives some insight. Within Enlightenment rationalism, persuasion rests in *the capacity to change one's mind.* Within the neuroscientific model, persuasion describes *a change in brain chemistry*—a difficult task to say the least. For cognitive theory records our innate *capacity to resist persuasion*, given the psychophysiology of abjection. Put baldly, the rhetoric of empathy is countered by an equally forceful rhetoric of "moral disgust."[11]

It is in "the discourse of abjection," writes Bradley J. Irish, "that modern critical theory most squarely engages with the issue of disgust" (56). Vomit, feces, rotting flesh: "It is those necessary preconditions of existence that must, in their loathsomeness, be forcefully cast from sight" (Irish 56). And "the latency of such infantile abhorrence," write Maggie Hennefeld and Nicholas Sammond, "has an irresistible political influence" (2), as well. Tracy Dennis-Tiwary elaborates:

> Evolutionary psychology has long argued that we evolved to experience disgust towards things that could make us sick (rotten meat) or harm us (poisonous plants), and that we then transformed this physical disgust into the moral and ethical domain. […] Moral disgust leads us to "expel" the offenders. We want nothing to do with these disgraceful human beings—they are reprehensible, beyond the pale, and beyond our ability to reach an understanding. They are not part of our group, our society, our tribe. They are outsiders or "those people." ("Politics")

Whereas the mirror neuron system anticipates the liberal/progressivist penchant for empathy, equity, and social justice, the conservative reaction against socially progressive issues (in the U.S., these include same-sex marriage and abortion rights) reflects the psychology of abjection. Stories of empathy vs. "moral disgust": This contest, as Peter Hatemi and Rose McDermott suggest, "does not result from different preferences or derive from diverse childhood socialization, but represents a truly inherent difference in psychophysiological experience."[12]

In contemporary popular-political discourse, the transgendered body has become itself a site of contesting narratives. Within transhumanism, it affirms "the ability and right of individuals to plan and choose their own lives" (Bostrom 346). Within postmodernism, it marks the triumphant progress of medical science. Within its own storytelling, its cognitive effects are alternatively empathetic and defamiliarizing. In its ethos, it stands opposed to the universalism, paternalism, biological essentialism, and other -isms of the Enlightenment subject. The transgendered subject demands to be seen and acknowledged in- and for-itself, even by those who respond in abjection.

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[11]Here, too, I refer readers to the further analysis given in Part 2 of my double essay, "Empathy and Abjection After Burke," to be published in the ongoing Issue 5.4 of *LLIDS*.

[12]As the affect associated with abjection, "disgust encompasses the cognitive, emotional, and physical properties that are predictably divergent across ideological positions and infuses evaluations of morality along dimensions of purity and sanctity in conservatives but not in liberals." (Hatemi and McDermott 677). "These issues," Hatemi and McDermott continue, "receive new attention in light of recent research in neuroscience and psychology that highlights the links between moral judgment and emotion in general and concerns about purity and disgust in particular" (677).

By no means is empathy or abjection the sole province of a particular political camp. As a matter of course, LGBTQ+ persons have reacted in disgust when confronted by people, policies, and attitudes that they find offensive personally. (Theirs, it can be argued, is a "righteous indignation.") Concomitantly, socially- and religiously-conservative individuals have shown great compassion when faced by fellow human suffering. Both processes of empathy and abjection are hardwired into the human brain; both have served our biological evolution; and both have their necessity. Still, where one of these processes predominate, an individual's politics tends to follow suit. Does it surprise that brain chemistry is implicated in one's predisposition toward specific social/political/ideological beliefs and behaviors? Regarding abjection specifically, Hatemi and McDermott write, "it is not simply that conservatives are more easily disgusted, but rather [that] people with greater disgust sensitivity, showing greater neurological and physiological activation when confronting disgusting stimuli, tend to be more politically conservative" (681; emphasis added).

Can a dyed-in-the wool conservative be converted to liberalism, or the liberal to conservatism? In today's deep social-political divisions, is such persuasion even possible? Before hazarding an answer, we must note that convictions deeply held are ethotic, bound to private self-reflection and public self-performance: Our beliefs are inscribed in the stories we tell of ourselves and our world, and to change those beliefs in any significant way is to change our storytelling. (Once again, we cycle back to the ethos of narrative and the narrativity of ethos.) How we make ourselves heard and, hence, visible: That, once again, is the ethotic task of contemporary rhetoric. If cognitive science (as described in this forum piece) aids in our reflective self-understanding, can it not also aid in our active self-fashioning?

Having made their way onto recent editorial pages and websites, such terms as empathy and abjection offer starting points for wider discussion of "embodied narrative." Cognitive science may not heal our deeply divided politics, but it can help explain our real, measurable differences in moral attitude, political conviction, and social behavior. And it helps to understand "the other," even when even when withstanding another's attack. But such phrasing as "to understand 'the other'" begs a question: How do we, personally, situate ourselves within the postmodern habitus? A few paragraphs ago, I wrote, "we dwell among actants and cyborgs." In so doing, I seemed to place some distance between the reader and the lifeworld described—as if inviting the readerly "we" to empathize *without identifying with* "the other." (i.e., "They" are the actants and cyborgs, whom "we" "dwell among," acknowledging their worldly co-presence.) Let me now remove that seeming distance and the old binary thinking that underwrites it. A careful reader may already have anticipated this next point: Within the postmodern habitus, *we are all already actants, all already cyborgs*.

Summarizing Latour, David M. Kaplan writes, "I become a motorist when I drive a car; a gardener when I use a rake" (7). Our task, notes Kaplan, is "to understand our lives as social-technical; our lives are composed of actants" (7-8). *What kind* of motorist one is will be reflected in such social-material details as insurance premiums, speeding and parking tickets, and so on. But let there be no doubt that the car changes the driver, and *vice versa*. Instead of Kaplan's rake, let's consider the iPhone. More than a means to communicate, the iPhone stores phone numbers, supplies driving directions, solves math

problems: In these and other applications, the iPhone effectively remembers, plans, and calculates for us. Within a network of "distributed cognition," the iPhone translates individual thought processes—traditionally the province of human consciousness—into a shared (hence, externally "distributed"), hybrid, biotechnic system. As a "cybernetic organism" or cyborg, our species continues to expand in its possibilities, growing in its freedoms, enhancements, and affordances. Despite these affordances, our species' technology-induced speed in evolution poses an unsettling prospect for some; given the transhumanist rejection of gender binaries and biological essentialism, many have reacted violently and will continue to do so, seeking to banish or legislate against aspects of the current technoculture.

And yet, in any modest-sized crowd there will be people whose contact lenses have been removed through vision-correcting laser surgery, people kept alive by pacemaker implants, people with hip and shoulder replacements, people undergoing hormone- and gene-therapy. Are these not newly-machined instances of the human cyborg? We take these and other procedures for granted, even as state legislatures move to deny gender-affirming health care for transgender children and teenagers. What, then, shall we allow to define us: an essentialist model of "being," or an evolutionary model of "becoming-"? Here, restated, is the question that we face both politically and in popular culture: At what point will we acknowledge our transit from biological organisms into biotechnical assemblages?

There's no turning back. Such is our habitus, for which we are learning new terms, new narratives, new *ethoi*. It's not our collective future merely, but our present that belongs to transhumanism.

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