

# EDITORIAL

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As our civilization faces probably its worst crisis in the form of the pandemic COVID-19, through which thousands have lost their lives while millions are infected globally and billions are at severe risk, we head towards an uncharted territory with unforeseeable socio-economic and geo-political scenarios. With the entire world grinding to a halt through lockdowns and quarantine, our team of editors has been working overtime to publish this Issue: to feel the normalcy of life by warding off the sense of doom that awaits outside our closed doors.

This dystopic experience of the world disjointed in time also serves as a point of departure to reflect upon the category of ‘human’ itself—for ethics invariably depend upon the ways in which one makes sense of or defines human which is a contentious site—vis-à-vis the emergent concepts of posthuman as well as their praxis within our civilizational context. In the modern humanist thought of the West, category of ‘human’ is conceived as a rational being who is “[...] epistemologically self-transparent, all-knowing, all-seeing agent of history” (Soper 5). Cartesian cogito sets itself up as one who has the audacity to be at the center of existence to perform the ethical task of conquering nature which, like all other non-human reality, remains at his beckoning. This idea of modern praxis underlines a shift away from the Aristotelian ethics, which advocated benefits for both the self and the world he inhabited, towards performing this task of conquest either as a duty (Kant) or as a utilitarian engagement with the world around us (Bentham). In each sense, cogito’s ability to act inevitably calls for an implicit conception of ethics: a set of shared notions of values within a community to which cogito subscribes. Anthropocentric ethics’ fondness for notching up watertight boundaries, within which this humanist ethical praxis flourishes, manages to exclude all other non-human forms of life—organic, inorganic, mechanical, artificial—from its ambit. This ethical tangent of praxis at the center of humanist thought, shaped by cogito’s will and grounded in his actions, involves both existential as well as moral questions that are now being challenged by the emerging posthuman deliberations attempting to overthrow these long-held ideas of human exceptionalism and open its folds to incorporate others. Posthumanist thought therefore problematizes any sense of demarcation that requires passports legitimizing the anthropocentric ethics—such as rationality, linguistic code, appropriate biological form or psychological frame—for affiliations to the ‘human’ community.

An inclusive Posthumanism that refuses to privilege human species at the cost of other existing or emergent species may seem contrary to the rationale of Darwinian evolutionary paradigm, but its elements remain available within the existing humanist discursions because, as Katherine Hayles claims, “[human beings] have always been posthuman” (291). Within such deliberations, however, can we also look forward to a suitable form of posthuman praxis that is waiting to be born within the anthropocentric ethical framework, possibly through the labours of a necessary/imaginary midwife, Science Fiction, or do posthumans need alternate grounds for ethical praxis altogether? “SF,” Sheryl Vint states, “is particularly suited to exploring the question of the posthuman because it is a discourse that allows us to concretely imagine bodies and selves otherwise, a discourse defined by its ability to estrange our commonplace perceptions of reality” (qtd. in Gomel 2). Ethical praxes within SF then introduce readers/viewers to a palpable world of imagination where humans’ encounters with a range of posthuman entities, as their ‘other,’ play themselves out in myriads of ways. Here ethical praxes work within two broad tropes—firstly, where both humans and their ‘other’ struggle to survive at each other’s expense and, secondly, where both attempt to coexist, acting outside of the given boundaries of their ethical practices, and bring about a shared vision of peaceful coexistence. Common among these tropes within SF, as the vehicle for posthumanist thought, lie a spectrum of nuanced positions which invite the readers/viewers to collapse, or at least to blur, the anthropocentric distinctions between the human, in itself one of the most tortuous categories of recent decades, and non-human organic-inorganic forms. Reinforcing this collapsing of distinctions between the human and posthuman, once again prompts an enquiry into ‘what it means to be human’ and manifests itself not only as a way of thinking about ‘humans’ but also demonstrates modes through which it purports to overcome the same.

Keeping in line with the above issues, Jonathan Hay’s paper in the themed section speculates upon the already manifest posthuman characteristics of our technologized society via the concept of ‘mundane.’ Disputing Darko Suvin’s notion of ‘cognitive estrangement,’ Hay comes up with the alternate concept of ‘cognitive engagement’ to develop a critique of technocentric ideologies by reading Russel T. Davies’s narration of Doctor Who’s travels in time through the concept of mundane. Oluwadamilare I. Bello, on the other hand, explores the emergence of ‘Automodern femme’ through our access to digitized performance platforms that dispense agency to women who are, conversely, denied the same in physical world. Contextualizing his paper within Robert Samuels’s concept of ‘automodernity,’ alongside Eva Alordiah’s development of ‘Spoken Word Videos’ as a genre, Bello

reflects upon the paradoxes of public and private, automation and autonomy, machine and human that are inherent in technology.

The Special Submissions section of this Issue features Rosanne Ceuppens's exploration of Paul Celan's poetics of otherness, as expressed in his speech "The Meridian," in relation to Emmanuel Levinas's theorization of the Other in *Existence and Existents*. In doing so, Ceuppens discusses in detail Celan's as well as Levinas's reflections on the ideas like nature of language in its relation to the Other, the (im)possibility of representational thinking through language, and poetry's movement to the Other in Silence. Greg Riggio's essay deplores the representations of Indigenous peoples as relics in the American marketplace and captures their struggle to be a 'present tense people.' Through a critique of technology and the connectivity Tommy Orange's *There There* provides, through deployment of post-modern literary techniques, Riggio puts forth strategies for Indigenous peoples to be 'modern, relevant, and alive.' Houda Hamdi, likewise, reads Don DeLillo's *White Noise* as a critique of American postmodern consumerist culture by drawing upon Baudrillard and Bakhtin. Hamdi explores supermarket as a metaphor for the simulated and postmodern world as well as a polyphonic space within the fictional world, where the act of shopping is seen, among other things, as a way to ward off the existential consciousness of mortality.

In these times of unprecedented global calamity, we remain deeply grateful to our Editorial Board, Authors, and Peer Reviewers who, despite their own struggles in this quarantine, have extended their support and cooperation to make this Issue possible. We hope to keep doing justice to the faith of our readers by our publications.

### Works Cited

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