

# MASS MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION IN POSTHUMANISM

Mihail ORZEAȚĂ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Prof. PhD, "Apollonia" University of Iași, Romania  
Corresponding author: Mihail Orzeată; email: morzeata@yahoo.com

## Abstract

The concept of posthumanism is both multidisciplinary and controversial because of the way in which it is approached by scientists and experts in different fields, from biopolitics, medicine and culture up to information technology and robots. Posthumanism is not something that follows humanity, but something that is different from humanity, the becoming, the metamorphosis, the mixture of the fields, the deviation from what is commonplace etc. One of the fields of great interest in the current scientific research on posthumanism is that of the place and role of mass media and communication in the development and promotion of the posthumanism concept within the human communities of the world. Referring to mass media and posthumanism, scientific researchers with different approaches have already launched in the public space phrases such "evil media", "media machines", "media geology" etc.

**Keywords:** *posthumanism, transhumanism, communication, language, mass media, new media.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers from various socio-professional categories – philosophers, sociologists, scientists, writers, artists – initiated a debate in which they questioned the current concept of humanism. Their main objection referred to the placement of the individual in the centre of attention on the grounds that he is the only reasonably endowed being, a quality which offered him superiority in relationship to all other beings. This is how posthumanism appeared, a concept of thought whose main goal is to persuade us that the present-day way of understanding human condition has to be rethought because it does not reflect the truth.

The content of this articles aims to present some ways in which posthumanism influences human existence and the relationship between humanity and nonhumanity. Taking into account the fact that posthumanism approaches various

fields, the article shall only focus on communication and mass-media.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF POSTHUMANISM

Data regarding the paternity of the posthumanism concept is contradictory. For some authors, the parent of posthumanism is Ihab Hassan, the one who published a work on this topic in 1977, entitled "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture?" (BOLTER, 2016), in which he also defined the concept. According to some authors the notion of posthumanism was used for the first time by the sociologist Maurice Parmelee, in his work *Poverty and Social Progress*, the chapter entitled "Eugenic Measures and the Prevention of Poverty", published in 1916. (SCHMEINK, 2016)

There are also opinions which state that us humans have always been posthumanists because there is a permanent connection between humanity and nonhumanity (HAYLES, 1999), a truth which is easier to highlight with the help of the infrastructure and of the technology developed in recent years (BENNET, 2010). Also, in antiquity there have been references to the communication between humans and animals, Aristotle being one of the philosophers mentioned by the authors who stated that: "The animals are experts in the perception of body movements and of actions" (HAWKEE, 2011).

There is no consensus between the authors who published papers on posthumanism. One of the methods used in order to define the concept is that of the antithesis with humanism. The current way of understating human nature is tributary to the way in which it is reflected in the Western culture (humans are not really (or at least not only) animals; they have bodies that aren't (pure) machines; they are material but also

spiritual; they constitute a species with a “human nature”, made up of radically unique individuals, and so on” (HERBRECHTER, 2018). The central representation point of the individual in Western conception is the exceptionalism, respectively the representation of the human as the only human being endowed with the gift of thought, a fact which offers it autonomy and superiority over the other beings.

Unlike humanism, “Posthumanist philosophy constitutes the human as: (a) physically, chemically, and biologically enmeshed and dependent on the environment; (b) moved to action through interactions that generate affects, habits, and reason; and (c) possessing no attribute that is uniquely human but is instead made up of a larger evolving ecosystem” (KEELING & LEHMAN NGUYEN, 2018). In other words, posthumanists want to change the image of the man, established by the humanists, in the sense that the man is not superior to the other human beings or to the machines. From this perspective, Donna Haraway, in her work “Cyborg Manifesto” (1985) represented the humans as some cyborgs (cybernetic bodies), meaning some sensitive thinking bodies with a semiotic complexity structured on many diversity generators (HARAWAY, 2016). Other posthumanists represent the human as a nodal point within a complex system that reacts to external forces. In other words, the man is no longer the agent in charge with his own destiny, but captive to the planetary forces which are beyond his control.

For Hayles, “the human body represents a prosthesis with which we are all born and that we learn to use” (HAYLES, 1999). From another point of view, “the human body represents a composite, since it also incorporates other bacteria, viruses and parasites, as well as organic and inorganic substances” (BENNET, 2010). Other recent posthuman thinkers utilise the concept to characterise a burgeoning technological culture, but in doing so they fail to adequately distinguish posthumanism from other concepts. For example, Pepperell discusses posthumanism as a form of *anti-humanism*, which is re-enlightened by modern science (MIAH, 2007). Fukuyama uses posthumanism to constitute what people should consider as the immorality of human enhancement (MIAH, 2007).

Posthumanism emphasizes that the human itself is a product of what Agamben called the “anthropological machine,” a system which produces self-recognition and partial differentiation of humans from other entities (GINN, 2016).

The development of computers and of artificial intelligence, the deepening of the knowledge in genetics (the production of new species of animals and plants, cloning etc.), the recognition of the existence of intelligence in animals and the achievement of the communication between humans and animals prove the porosity of the boundaries between humanity and non-humanity. We must also add to these arguments the organ transplants from animals to humans and the prosthesis developed in order to replace the missing or sick limbs of the people.

Posthumanism does not only refer to something that follows after humanity or to something that is contrary to humanity (“Posthumanism” doesn’t mean “anti-humanism” in any of these senses, nor does it simply mean something that comes historically “after” humanism, as if in 1968 or 1972 or whenever, the scales suddenly fell from our eyes and we realized the error of our ways. (LENNARD & WOLFE, 2017), but to its transition towards another development stage (HERBRECHTER, 2018) in the philosophical, cultural, technological, political, social, biological, psychological and cognitive plan. Therefore, posthumanism represents a collection of ways of thinking which displays scepticism in relation to the central position of the individual in Western philosophy, culture and politics. The followers of this current of thought militate for “the rethinking of the meaning of the person”, helping us rediscover who we really are (ROBINSON, 2011).

“Posthumanist thinking is a deliberate toying with crossing this (largely “imaginary”) boundary between human and machine” (HERBRECHTER, 2018). “The term “posthumanism” is applied to a range of contemporary theoretical positions put forward by researchers in philosophy, science and technology studies, literary studies, critical theory, theoretical sociology, and communication studies. The term designates a new way of understanding the human subject and its relationship to the natural world” (BOLTER, 2016).

### 3. COMMUNICATION IN POSTHUMANISM

The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century marked an incredible development of interhuman communication and of that between humanity and non-humanity, especially due to technology and computer science.

The posthumanists defined communication as “the production and exchange of messages and meanings” (DANESI, 1998) or more detailed “the ability to let other individuals know about ones’ identity, ambitions, attitudes and emotions” (GROTSCH, 2012).

At the same time, according to the posthumanist view, the individual “communicates with individuals of either its own or other species.... [in order] to establish itself in a community and find its place inside a society. Communication is a vital tool to convey messages, information and personal attitudes to others and hence be understood which again may lead to satisfaction of needs and fulfilment of desires. If an individual fails to communicate with others, it will remain or become an outsider, and he will have difficulties in creating a safe place in a community for himself, in order to ensure his survival and wellbeing” (GROTSCH, 2012).

Dumitru Constantin Dulcan states that life refers “implicitly to communication (...), to the permanent circulation of information – both inside and outside the living system. It permanently communicates each component part of a cell with another one, the cells within an organism continuously communicate among themselves, the whole living ensemble communicates with the environment” (DULCAN, 1992). The same author launches the hypothesis of the existence of “a universal language or of a thinking without words”, obtained through telepathy, that can be used for the communication between humans, animals and plants (DULCAN, 1992). In the conception of the posthumanists and of their predecessors, the poststructuralists, language and communication have to be redefined since current definitions do no longer fully correspond to reality. For example, one of the best well-known poststructuralists, Michel Foucault, defines language as an endless chain of significances.

With this purpose of redefining communication, poststructuralists appreciate that this governs the mind, generates power, knowledge, subjects and truth because through communication not only the human beings relate (LEITCH et al., 2010). In other words, through communication not only human messages are transmitted and received, but also data, information, orders from humans to computers and the other way around, but also between computers, networks of computers and robots/devices/industrial, scientific, utilitarian, household or transport means. It is a proved and accepted truth, by the majority of scientists, that communication does not represent a unique human characteristic, because humanity and non-humanity communicate one with the other, in different ways.

#### 3.1. *Interhuman communication*

Interhuman communication in the present digital environment especially turned from orality to electronics since this new interaction manner allows the transmission of information (messages and data) both to chosen/wanted addressees and to the entire virtual space, in real time and in a very short time frame.

In posthumanism, communication is in a transition from Gutenberg to Zuckerberg (ADEMA & HALL, 2016) because the use of communication on written paper becomes more and more reduced and it is being gradually replaced by the electronic communication. In recent years, more and more people having important positions in various human communities – head of states, ministers, parliamentarians, majors, various managers of administrative and economic structures – use socialisation networks in order to communicate their thoughts or decisions. Video and teleconferences represent other ways used by managers to control their employees, who sometimes are thousands of kilometres away, in order to convey their decisions and listen to their opinions, saving time and resources.

Present and probably future generations learn how to use the digital devices even before being able to talk, write or read. This is why the people from these generations have a different way of

thinking and of gaining knowledge than the previous generations.

The classic post is gradually replaced by the electronic post, which is faster and offers a number of ways of ensuring the secrecy of the correspondence – from the electronic signature to the recognition passwords and codes. “The postal era, the era of love letters, literature, metaphysics, history, etc., is coming to an end. The Post, or the Postal Principle, however, will endure, living on transformed, transferred, and translated as the trace (...) The Postal Principle is the *über, meta, trans, and tele* of all epochs” (HERBRECHTER, 2011).

The current technology used in communication – smartphones, laptops, iPods, mp3 players and other types of devices – surround the modern individual with a sort of aura and generate a feeling of loneliness, even estrangement, because it mostly eliminates face to face communication. It can be said that man and technology have merged because most of the time they are together, connected through similar devices with other people and computer networks.

In 1887, the Polish Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof invented the Esperanto language, which he wanted to propose to the world as a universal language and he hoped that, with its help, he “could deliver peace to the world by eliminating conflicts that arise from linguistic and cultural differences. (Unfortunately, this didn’t work out so well. The proof? World War I)” (MOSALINGUA, n.d.). At the same time, Zamenhof created this language to eliminate the linguistic barriers between the people and the communities that spoke different languages. On the other hand, he hoped that, with the help of this language, he will eliminate the existing discrimination, both back then and in the present, between the anglophone and the other states, since English is mostly used in international communication, in the fields of business, politics and science. At the moment, there are over 100 000 speakers of Esperanto in over 83 states who edit approximately 100 publications and meet at an annual Congress (ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, n.d.). “Esperanto was intended to be the second language of the whole world, the only one that people would learn besides their own. That’s why it is very easy to learn: all words and

sentences are built from 16 basic rules that can fit within a sheet or two of paper. It doesn’t have all the confusing exceptions and modes of other languages, and its lexicon is borrowed from words in English, German, and some Romance languages, like French, Spanish, or Italian” (PENARREDONDA, 2018). In order to facilitate the access of numerous people to Esperanto, in 2011, Luis Von Ahn developed a digital platform called Duolingo, which translates Esperanto in Spanish, Portuguese and English (PENARREDONDA, 2018).

The idea of facilitating communication among human communities determined Dag Hammarskjöld, the first General Secretary of ONU, to present to the organisation the proposal to establish official languages that should be used in the communication among its members. These were approved in 1946, one year after the establishment of ONU. “There are six official languages of the UN. These are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The correct interpretation and translation of these six languages, in both spoken and written form, is very important to the work of the Organization, because this enables clear and concise communication on issues of global significance” (United Nations).

In order for people of different ethnicities to be able to communicate among themselves without any human intermediary (translator), various devices that can instantly translate more languages were invented. At present, the existing devices on the market can translate 38-42 languages (BOLTON, 2017).

Internet and the virtual space allow the simultaneous achievement of a number of activities: reading/ watching the news, with the help of e-books, the purchase of some products, through e-mag, space orientation, with the help of Google Earth, GPS etc., communication with other people or computer networks. This is why people become dependent on the Internet and they can no longer imagine their lives without this type of communication (HEALY, 2005).

The changes brought by the Internet in our lives, in the political, economic, social, cultural and technological plans, are so great and powerful and they continue at a pace which sometimes overcomes our comprehension capacity if we use

the techniques and methods of analysis proper to humanism. Unlike humanism, posthumanism allows for the complete introspection of the dimensions of our surrounding reality, in the psychic, scientific, cultural and simulated spaces.

The Internet unintentionally stimulates antisocial human behaviours - from the attribution of false identities and biographies to manipulation and unauthorized penetration into the databases of individuals, institutions and businesses with the purpose of stealing data and/or of destroying those databases.

### 3.2. Humanity – non-humanity communication

Up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century many scientists thought that the communication process belonged only to the human beings. In the second part of the same century and especially in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century people came to the indubitable conclusion that there is communication both inside nonhumanity and between humanity and nonhumanity. Therefore, nonhumanity is no longer regarded as “an object” and humanity as “a subject”, but they are seen as entities which poses both similar and distinct characteristics and among them there are multiple connections: man-animal, man-machine, man-nature etc.

Dumitru Constantin Dulcan stated that there are “communication possibilities at the level of the entire living world through a magnetic field issued by the organism: the communication between the cells of a tissue, between two human organisms, between man and plants, between man and microorganisms and certainly between all the members of a particular species. Everything that is alive will issue and receive information on a code, probably specific to each species or proper to the entire living world” (DULCAN, 1992).

The **human-machine communication** has made spectacular progresses in the last decades. The invention of the computer generated the initial perception that the communication process due to its help represents an abstract one. In time, biologists and computer scientists discovered the existence of some similarities between the human neuron, that of other living beings and the binary system of electronic computers. Therefore, the materiality of the computer was highlighted not only due to the keyboard, monitor and mouse, but also because

of the particle flux towards the recipients, decoded and turned into a clear language for the human beings. In this way, posthumanism and transhumanism contributed to the development of a new thinking current entitled “the new materialism”.

Nowadays, people invented software that allow direct communication with the computer using voice, not only the keyboard and the mouse. There are programs which allow the recognition of the identity of the individual, through the iris, fingerprints, voice, pictures, etc., in order to facilitate his access to certain protected spaces, databases or financial funds. Programs of facial recognition have recently been developed with the purpose of identifying people from distances, including when they are together with other people at different, usually violent, manifestations.

The automated pilot, aircrafts, sea vessels and land vehicles without human pilot, scientific, medical, industrial, military, self-operated or remote-controlled or man-controlled robots were invented,

The **human-animal communication** existed from memorable times because in this way the human was able to domesticate the animals in order to help him at different works in agriculture, deforestation, to help the blind, to save and evacuate (in case of an earthquake, explosions followed by the collapse of some buildings etc.), catching offenders, guarding, therapy, shows and contests etc.

Smuts considers that, in the communication between different species, the meaning stems more from the interaction manner and less from the behaviour of each individual. The authors presents the idea that between people and animals there is a communication framework comprised of 7 levels of response - from the run-away of one from the other up to distances that are considered safe (level 1) and the reciprocal study in order to intuit their intentions (level 2), up to the development and maintenance of a mutual beneficial relationship (level 6) and even to the development of a temporary communion (level 7) (SMUTS, 2005).

**Communication between humans and plants** was obvious through direct observations or lab experiments. It is a proven fact that plants react

to the actions, and especially, to the attitudes of the humans. The case of the *Mimosa pudica* plant is probably the best well-known but every tree or plant develops more harmoniously if people treat it with tenderness. At the same time, carnivorous plants notice the difference between the insects that they usually eat and other objects offered by researchers with the purpose of testing them to see if they accept them as food (DULCAN, 1992).

The **communication** between humans and nature developed especially towards satisfying the requirements of the people regarding survival, multiplication, feeding, sheltering, transport, relaxation, pleasure and the desire to accumulate goods, properties and money. "Through ages, philosophy and religion have established man's place in nature, and humans tend to regard nature as the raw material they exploit and manipulate to suit their purposes, not something they should communicate with" (HEDEAGER, 2003). Due to this poor conception, people behaved as masters in relationship with nature and their activities changed the balance of the planet by altering the relationships between the components of atmosphere, hydrosphere and lithosphere. Voluntarism, the lack of knowledge about the ecosystems, the greed, the negligence and bad intent of many of our fellows generated the current situation in which air, water, soil and subsoil pollution triggered a reaction from Mother Nature. The ONU statistics show that "the current number of storms, floods, and heat waves is five times greater than it was in 1970" (NAIM, 2015). The previously presented extreme meteorological phenomena are part of a long chain of problems that humankind has to face: "climate change, overpopulation, loss of topsoil and fresh water, increasing rates of species extinction, deforestation, imperilled coral reefs, unstoppable invasive species, toxic chemicals that remain for eons in the environment, persistent human poverty and hunger, and an increasingly inflated, unstable world financial system and globalizing economy" (GARVER & BROWN, 2009).

Many scientists from all over the world think that we are at a crossroads in which a right relationship between men and nature is required. This kind of relationship involves giving up the habits that brought us here: pollution, lack of respect for nature and for

the other people. Simply put: "A right relationship offers a guidance system for functioning in harmony with scientific reality and enduring ethical traditions (...) A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, resilience, and beauty of the commonwealth of life. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (GARVER & BROWN, 2009).

### 3.3. The humanity – non-humanity relationship

There is a pretty intense debate on the topic of the communication manner and of the language used by animals. Some biologists and other scientists think that "the fundamental difference between human and non-human communication is that animals are believed to react instinctively, in a stereotyped and predictable way. Mostly, human behaviour is under voluntary control, and human language is creative and unpredictable" (HEDEAGER, 2003).

It is largely spread and demonstrated the idea that "human and animal semiosis systems and communication differ from each other" (DANESI, 1998). In augmenting this point of view, researchers present the results of studying animal behaviour in different situations:

- "Some birds, e.g. the bullfinch, can pick up the song of another species, just like children can learn any language they are exposed to" (FROMKIN & RODMAN, 1998);
- "The African grey parrot ALEX, studied by Irene Pepperberg, imitates human utterances and seems to relate these sounds with meanings, but his ability to imitate sounds similar to those produced by humans is quite different from the acquisition of syntax" (FROMKIN & RODMAN, 1998);
- "The earliest experiments with chimpanzees showed that they were not physically capable of producing articulated speech (WARDHAUGH 1993) although they did understand many spoken words".
- "Among themselves primates use a wide variety of communication (e.g. olfactory, auditory, tactile, visual, and vocal). The meaning of primate communication depends on the social and environmental context as well as the emotional state of the animals, and their calls appear to be like complete human

utterances, e.g. you may mate with me" (BICKERTON, 1990).

There are studies which prove that insects communicate among themselves also through pheromones, not only during the periods that precede their pairing, but also throughout their lives (WYATT, 2015).

#### **4. MASS MEDIA IN POSTHUMANISM**

Posthumanism and transhumanism are two currents of thought coincidental, in time and in the scientific and publishing space, with the informational era and the digital revolution whose beginnings are placed in the 8<sup>th</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

According to some authors, the Internet represents the most important discovery from the industrial revolution and up to the present because it fundamentally transformed the human societies. The impact of Internet on the media is highly significant as it changed the way in which people communicate as well as their way of thinking and behaviour in relationship to other people, and implicitly to journalists. Due to the Internet, the written press is in decline because the majority of the "smart" devices offer news consumers the possibility of reading it electronically from anywhere they wish to do so – home, in means of transport, on their way to work, in different conference halls etc.

The majority of people, especially those belonging to the new generations, are not patient enough to allocate an important part of their time to large news and reportages. They prefer "news pills", meaning essentialised and concise news that can sometimes be presented in a photo broadcasted on Facebook, an authentic communication key or in a text of several dozen words broadcasted on Twitter.

Besides the beneficial effects that it presents for some individuals and communities, the Internet is also considered a source of unwanted negative effects, a fact for which some blame the virtual space and the Internet, using phrases such as "collective drug" and "a form of anarchy", because it is used by individuals influenced by "the mental exhibitionism" in doing various things (BERNEA, 2011).

In the last decades, due to the Internet, the social media has also greatly developed as well as the digital platforms which host socializing platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn), the microblogs (Twitter, Tumblr), sites which host blogs (WordPress, Blogger), platforms which distribute (Instagram, Flickr, Snapchat, Pinterest), platforms which facilitate the access and distribution of films (YouTube, Vimeo, Periscope) etc.

The existing definitions and opinions about social media are very different:

- "Social media refers to websites and applications that are designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time. Many people define social media as apps on their smartphone or tablet, but the truth is, this communication tool started with computers" (HUDSON, 2019).
- "As the name suggests, social media are technologies and practices for mediating between or among individuals; they can be seen as mass contemporary experiments (on the order of hundreds of millions) in interpersonal communication. As such, social media provide opportunities for redefining the subject" (BOLTER, 2016).
- The prominent New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd, for example, described Twitter as "a toy for bored celebrities and high-school girls" (DOWD, 2009; HERMIDA, 2010).
- The unverified nature of the information on Twitter has led journalists to comment that "it's like searching for medical advice in an online world of quacks and cures" (HERMIDA, 2010).
- "It forms part of a trend in journalism that Deuze has described as a shift from "individualistic, 'top-down' mono-media journalism to team-based, 'participatory' multimedia journalism" (HERMIDA, 2010).

The reorientation of news consumers in general and of the classical mass media towards electronic communication made almost all the classical means of communication to also publish their articles and reportages in the virtual space. At the same time, some of the communication means with an international audience host the productions of some bloggers and message authors on Twitter. In order to avoid the publishing

of some unverified news, important means of mass communication, such as The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The BBC, The Guardian etc have taken various steps to oblige authors to respect journalistic ethics and the code of ethics of classical journalism (HERMIDA, 2010).

Competition, which is mostly unfair, of the journalist citizens, of freelancers, of bloggers and of vloggers determined many of the journalists and editors from the classical media to break the professional deontology because of the pressure exerted by owners, sponsors and advertising firms. Therefore, many classical means of mass communication abandoned, in many situations, the self-assumed role of “the watchdog of democracy” and of serving the public interest. The editorial policies of many mass communication means are directed, either partially or completely, to commercialization (the direct or indirect publication of reportages and advertising films), entertainment, trivialisation (sex, violence, scandals), sensationalism (interweaving in the private lives of the celebrities that they follow in the same way hungry sharks follow their prey...), selecting the news according to the forecasted impact on the various types of audiences, the most important indicators being the fear and danger (priority is given to crimes, terrorist attacks, catastrophes and extreme weather events that have caused human casualties and destruction) etc.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The new discoveries in the fields of science and technology and especially biology relativize and transform the firm boundary that we knew between humanity and nonhumanity, into a diffuse one, which allows for complex interactions between the human and non-human subjects.

Most posthumanists consider that language and communication have to be redefined because of the way in which they are understood, according to humanist concepts which does no longer faithfully reflect reality. The development of artificial intelligence (AI) will probably lead to a contextual adaptation in which cybernetic systems will be able to build explicative models for real life phenomena (LAUNCHBURY, 2017).

These modes will allow the AI models to relate and this will lead to the understanding of the human language (SRINIVASAN, 2016).

Communication and thinking have not been and still do not represent exclusive qualities for human beings (“thinking’ is done by both human and nonhuman actors”) (HAYLES, 1999) and this is why posthumanists consider that human beings are not superior to animals or machines.

The Internet has also revolutionised mass media through the multiplication of the number of subjects who can receive written and audio-visual messages in real or in a very short time.

The activity of the “citizen journalist”, “of bloggers”, “of vloggers” and of other people who use socialisation networks in order to post news represents a risk because many of them do not know or do not respect the journalists’ code of ethics and this may lead to unverified or even fake news.

The competition between the means of electronic communication and the socialisation networks led to the decline of written press. This is why the classic media transfers the articles, reportages and films that its journalists produce also in the virtual space.

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