

METAHUMANIST MANIFESTO: its genealogy, evolution and relevance 10 years after

by Jaime del Val

The purpose of this text is to reevaluate the specificity and relevance of the Metahumanist Manifesto's proposal in the context of its 10th anniversary in 2020¹, and allow readers to contextualise, expand and trace genealogies and evolutions of the ideas proposed in the Manifesto, as well as its differences and relations with post- and transhumanism, as I see them.

How is Metahumanism different, and what makes it relevant?

Let's start by defining Humanism as the cultural and philosophical tradition initiating in Europe around the 13th Century, with roots in ancient Greece, that defines the human as distinct and superior species, distinguished by rationality, autonomy, individual subjectivity and free will, associated to hegemonic subject that is predominantly European, white, male, high-class, neurotypical, heteropatriarcal, to a colonial project of domination of nature, other humans, other species and the planet and to an all-encompassing thrust to rationalisation which continues expanding in the current digital shift.

I consider Transhumanism as an extension and radicalisation of the colonial project of humanism (it is therefore a hyperhumanism) that is setting the agenda of the digital shift in the planet, by extending the will to control every aspect of the world through technology. Meanwhile it is unfolding a radical paradox: AI is proposed both as means for affirming an existing individual in the search for immortality, the disembodied Parmenidean dream of an immobile being that wants to paralyse the movement of becoming, fostering a quantitative "enhancement" of existing and dominant capacities rather than a qualitative transformation towards greater plurality. But AI is also proposed as the ground for a Technological Singularity which besides being radically unforeseeable displaces the human as locus of agency and higher intelligence.

Current society is already transhumanistic. Google, now Alphabet, has an explicitly and implicitly transhumanistic agenda and so do most technology corporations, which are perhaps the most powerful agents on the planet and those more deeply crafting our daily perceptions and infrastructures, as has come out during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is accelerating the digital shift. This state of affairs enacts an extremely problematic global and social condition, a model of implicit social credit where every action gets quantified, oriented by algorithmic systems, and is promoted by almost everyone since hypercontrol has become a desirable condition, however managed by increasingly autonomous, dynamic and ontologically opaque algorithms in Big Data networks. This goes along a "Facebook society" of increasingly immobile bodies clicking on screens. This increasing sensorimotor atrophy,

¹ This is a contracted version of forthcoming texts being prepared for the anniversary.

which I claim is also a cognitive-affective atrophy, is crucial and structural to algorithmic control, that can only operate on the basis of the reduction of movement's indeterminacy. Therefore the importance of claiming an irreducibly complex movement and body, as will be a core claim of metahumanism.²

In turn Critical Posthumanism encompasses a wide variety of minoritarian discourses that question the dominance and hegemony of humanist conceptions and their transhumanist evolutions, in search for more plural, relational and sustainable presents and futures that account for our interdependence between each other, with our technologies, other species and the planet, for our indeterminacy and plurality, our vulnerability also and a strong claim for the body against the disembodiment chimeras of cartesianism and transhumanism that expand a millenia long tradition of despise of the body. Critical Posthumanism, resonating with Donna Haraway, points to the idea that humanism's human, as autonomous and superior rational entity, is a chimera that never existed: a colonial, speciesist, classist, sexist, racist, heteropatriarcal, phallogocentric project of compulsory abledness. The crisis of humanism becomes evident, as Katherine Hayles exposes, when the coupling with information systems is so intense that the boundaries of the self dissolve as it's "no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits" (Hayles 1999, 35).³

In contrast to transhumanism's alignment with global power, critical posthumanism remains a minoritarian academic (and political) discourse coexisting with other equally necessary and minoritarian practices of composting and hummus making.⁴

At the same time the intellectual traditions from which critical posthumanism acquires consistency, mostly in feminist thinkers, is one I would define as poststructuralist, building upon genealogical critiques of discourse stemming largely from Nietzsche and Foucault, as well as upon Derrida's deconstructive critique, and slightly less upon a Deleuzian vitalism, though Braidotti (2013) clearly claims that legacy. The focus of critical posthumanism on discursive practices, language and critique from within power matrixes is a necessary one

² There are transhumanists such as James Hughes or Martine Rothblatt who have critical concern for democracy and plurality, or libertarian approaches to bodily and personal transformation. One could distinguish at least three types of transhumanism: (1) the "Silicon Valley transhumanism" that is already transforming society and the planet today, (2) the radical branch within or along this, exemplified by Ray Kurzweil and all those who search immortality through mind uploading, and (3) some more critical minorities within the field. Yet there are problematic assumptions underlying the entire project: in the bias on quantitative enhancement over qualitative transformation, in the tendency to assume longevity of the individual as primordial claim, in the tendency to either despise the "biological" body and want to eliminate it, or to consider it obsolete and wanting to expand its quantitative capacities, and in the enlightenment-related will to control all of nature through technology. This goes along an often messianic discourse of salvation that is presented as the cutting edge of freedom, and that effectively conceals is disruptive violence, as opaque algorithmic ecologies impose themselves on the planet while demanding individuals to be transparent while they become *dividuals* (as Deleuze already proposed in 1992): data samples of populations managed by autonomous algorithms in Big Data networks, aggregates of a planetary hypercyborg.

³ There are many posthumanisms, inhumanisms, antihumanisms, and ahumanisms. I focus here on the critical tradition associated to feminism, resonating in Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* and *The Promises of Monsters* in Hayles' *How we Became Posthuman*, and recently in Braidotti's *The Posthuman*. Halberstam's 1995 *Posthuman Bodies* and Stone's writings on technology, particularly *The War of Technology and Desire* and the *Posttranssexual Manifesto*, also give important cues to the critical and embodied genealogy of the posthuman.

⁴ Haraway (2016) claims herself as compostist rather than posthumanist, and the alternative etimologies of human in hummus, in her recent taking distance from posthumanism.

and yet I think it is also insufficient with regard to the upcoming world of autonomous algorithms that operate on movement in preconscious spectrums of radical opacity.

In face of the mentioned structural importance of increasing reduction of movement and the body within current algorithmic society, how to claim an irreducible movement and body, one that counteracts the prevailing tendency to reduction, and how to do so without reducing our spectrum of political agency to the conscious rational subject of humanism? How to mobilise new resistances and regain a lost richness in a world increasingly managed by Big Data networks that preempt the future by constantly producing the new, as proposed by Brian Massumi's concept of Ontopower (Massumi 2015), as operating in preconscious spectrums of movement and exceeding Foucault's concept of biopower? How to mobilise a counter-ontopower where the body unleashes an irreducible richness and indeterminacy in movement itself, and do it in sustainable manner?

This is where metahumanism comes in with a particular twist to critical posthumanism.

Metahumanism takes critical posthumanism in the direction of a relational ontology of becoming that affirms indeterminacy, plurality, hybridity, movement and the body against control and domination.

Metahumanism is difficult to define, as it works against the metaphysical tradition of being, through emergent concepts and embodied practices that are proposing to enact a thinking of the body and in motion. One could say that like critical posthumanism builds upon the genealogical legacy of Nietzsche, metahumanism builds more upon his attempt to renew a philosophy of becoming, taking on also Deleuze's and Guattari's legacy in this respect.⁵

TRANSHUMANISM HYPERHUMANISM	/	CRITICAL POSTHUMANISM	METAHUMANISM
universalism		perspectivism	immanentism
central linear perspective		multiple partial perspectives	proprioception
individualism		relationalism	radical movement philosophy
morality		ethics	ontoethics - ontoecology
paternalistic hegemony		minority resistance	ontohacking
beauty		promising monsters	the amorphous
disembodiment		embodiment	metabodies
linearity		multilinearity	disalignments-swarms-fields- fluctuation-variation-clinamen

Metahumanism opposes transhumanism's control-oriented and hypercolonial agenda, and affirms the non-dualism, non-anthropocentrism and non-phallogocentrism of critical posthumanism yet proposes the shift from performance to metaformance, from content to frame, from form/structure to movement, emphasizing becoming as something not

⁵ In Francesca Ferrando's words "metahumanism is a recent approach closely related to a Deleuzian legacy; it emphasizes the body as a locus for amorphic re-significations, extended in kinetic relations as a body-network." (Ferrando 2013).

subjected to form, always relational and always incipient, always bodily and in motion, with a critical-creative grasp of technologies and the possibility to *ontohack* and reinvent them.

Metahumanism takes on critical posthumanism's stances, and also affirms the transformative power of technology but in a direction opposite to transhumanism, that of infusing greater indeterminacy in our worlds, while challenging our deepest ontological assumptions with a focus on movement and perception: less disruption and deeper, more critical and daring creativity. Rather than taking for granted measurable space-time and disembodied, eternally replicable and stable subjectivity, Metahumanism is about *ontohacking* our realities, infusing in them more plasticity, through movement, recovering and taking on the movement of variation that is evolution. Our essence (and the world's) is plasticity!

The expanded field of the manifesto's concepts: their genealogy, evolution and relevance today

The concepts and neologisms appearing in the Manifesto, it is important to note, are often contractions (thus also inflexions) of a much larger meta-philosophical field I have been elaborating 10 years before the Manifesto's presentation at the 2nd Beyond Humanism Conference in Lesbos in 2010, since at least 2001. This field has continued to evolve significantly 10 years after, till now and beyond, both in my philosophical writings and in my artistic, technological and activist practices.

First of all the prefix meta- contains the important resonances of the proposal as it implies (1) in-between, relationality, *mezzo*, middle, *milieu*, *plateau*; (2) beyond, coming after, exceeding, thus also (3) mutation and emergence or incipience, becoming, and (4) transversality and embeddedness, complex interrelatedness, where one always finds supra or underlying or parallel fields relating to the one that is the matter of concern. These resonances appear in the concept of metahuman and metasex that I proposed at the 1st Beyond Humanism Conference in 2009 in terms of a relational ontology of becoming, (Val 2016, also published in this Reader, a paper that advances many of the proposals of the Manifesto and of Metahumanism).

Metabody is a concept I develop since around 2001 (Val 2002) which has kept persistently hovering as central to my proposals, and more recently in the frame of what I call a Radical Movement Philosophy as *field theory of movement*. Metabody is a way to rethink everything in terms of fields of movement relations of endlessly diverse kinds and with diverse degrees of consistency and openness. Movement always consists as fields, but always retaining degrees of openness, since movement is a priori fluctuation, though sometimes they might get too aligned, losing their openness. This is where systemic domination appears as a problem that blocks evolution-as-variation. Universes unfold as expressions of quantum

fluctuation, evolving as increasing diversification when there is a balance of consistency and openness that allows fluctuation to vary in sustained manner. Will to power of variation (*clinamen*) is what I place as physical, meta-ontological drive of movement as fluctuation in any possible multiverse. This is also implying evolution as ongoing mutation.

Metabody as relational body, a concept I take from Erin Manning's movement philosophy (Manning 2009) is also what since around 2008 I am calling the Common Body as means to rethink commons (Val 2009). This relational common body is also Frontier Body (Val 2006) that speaks in the borders of the legible, opening up the boundary, in resonance with Judith Butler (see Val and Butler 2008), in resonance also with Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza* (Anzaldúa 1987) and Sandy Stone's vampire (Stone 1996) .

Fields consist without need of form. This fight against form has been the most peculiar and stubborn aspect of my philosophy which I condense in the concept of amorphogenesis, a reversal of Aristotle's principle of form. It relates to my embodied and artistic-technological practices in which I experiment with modes of perception and relation that expose form as relative to a peculiar, historical and highly reductive mode of perception: the fixed point of vision of linear perspective that, since the Renaissance and till today has been the most successful means of reduction of movement and bodies to calculable elements. This reduction has been unfolding over millennia in what I more recently call the Algoricene or Age of algorithms, as tendency to reduce movement to codifiable sequences by reducing its field-like ontological indeterminacy, aligning it into causal trajectories (Val 2018). Form thus appears as a reductive expression of movement itself, that turns back against its larger fluctuating field of emergence, a reactive expression that needs to be overcome by continually mobilising the power of variation in movement, what Lucretius called the *clinamen*. Dynamic form used to be a resistance to static form, but dynamic form is already core to how power operates in the Big Data era. Against it I propose the amorphous, the irreducibility of movement to form, even to dynamic form. Formless fields are the trope I propose for movement as ontologically indeterminate.

More recently I am elaborating a new theory of perception grounded on proprioception as distributed, emergent and self-organising mode of perception, proper to a field conception of movement, where a field senses itself and the world through its fluctuations in force distribution. This is what I call the proprioceptive swarm and its BI, Body Intelligence, as self-organising capacity of the body to move-think-feel in nonlinear ways and in excess of form (Val 2018 and 2020 forthcoming). This account of perception takes on and exceeds Karen Barad's posthuman performativity and intra-action (Barad 2007) by doing away with the notion of observation altogether. The body is a proprioceptive field, a swarm of 360 joints with endless capacities to fluctuate and vary, to co-sense and become with the world, without implying movement trajectories or fixed observation acts. Proprioception is the

ground for a more-than-Proustian *microrecherche* into the emergent process of memory and experience.

Metabodies as swarm-like proprioceptive fields exceed the anatomical reduction to a form, they are what since around 2007 I call the postanatomical body (Val 2009c, d and 2016). This connects to my concepts of microsex or metasex as postqueer proposals that shift from a discursive performative critique of gender, sex and the body, to a metaformative critique. The latter proposes to question not so much the content of a given perceptual and discursive frame, but its underlying structure and infrastructure: it's not just a question of mobilising different contents within the already narrowing frame of representation, but of understanding the historical contingency of the frame itself as narrow perceptual affordance that reduces our sensori-motor spectrum and aligns bodies with points of calculation, where bodies become specular, homogenous nodes of repetition for contagious affects and gestures. This further underlies what since around 2007 I call the Panchoreographic and Affective Capitalism (Val 2008), as kinetic infrastructure of power and domination that operates always by narrowing down movement's indeterminacy, by aligning it, where bodies become nodes of homogeneous affective propagation. Over the past years I have unfolded this as full scale theory of the Algoricene, as millenia long tendency to reduce movement's indeterminacy by aligning and narrowing sensori-motor plasticity, which means also affective-cognitive plasticity.

Microsex and the related concepts crucially relate to my queer activism (including in movements of non-binary gender, body freedom, public sex, poliamory, sex workers rights and other movements) and the limitations I saw to the excessive focus on performativity of discourse and language and the need to shift from performance to what after Claudia Giannetti (1997) I call metaformance: the disalignments of excessively rigid perceptual orientations towards more plastic sensori-motor capacities, an art and *tékhnē* of developing more plastic perceptions (Val 2012).

The concepts weave with the practice, they are not an explanation of my practices nor the practices a demonstration of the concepts. They have kept evolving together since 2001 in the projects I develop under the Reverso association and more recently also, since 2013 under the larger umbrella of the Metabody project (Val 2013a) and its international network of associates and collaborators. Microsexes (Val 2013c) and Amorphogenesis (Val 2013b) are also metaformance projects proposing new kinds of perception, evolving since 2007 and before. The Metabody Forums happening every year in multiple countries are instances of "metahumanism in action" where metaformance techniques continue unfolding in relation to diverse communities (refugees, neurodiverse, queer, indigenous, etc.), as ontological therapy and activism, ontohacking. Nowadays this happens in the planetary prison of the pandemic, of home confinement, social distance and digital control, where I propose techniques for reinventing the body and its proprioception as new freedom of internal

movement and as unleashing its BI. BI instead of AI is proposed as politics of movement for a potential r/evolution.

Throughout radical pluralism, as the holding together of multiple and contradictory tendencies is an underlying claim embedded in the very proposal of the Manifesto even at the level of the different visions of myself and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, for whom metahumanism is not opposing transhumanism like it is for me, instead for Sorgner it lies in-between post and transhumanism (Sorgner 2016, Ranish and Sorgner 2014, Deretic and Sorgner 2016), as an attempt to bridge between both, focusing more on perspectivism (myself more on immanentism), but coinciding in the struggle for plurality and against paternalism and totalitarianism through an "immanent perspectivism".

So, what is the relevance of Metahumanism's ideas 10 years after its presentation? I would say, greater than ever, in face of how the pandemic has accelerated the digital shift and its transhumanist tendency to total control and sensorimotor atrophy. Regaining a lost richness of experience and taking it beyond is an evolutionary challenge: a movement r/evolution for ecologies to come.

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