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**JAN STASIEŃKO (2022), *MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AND POSTHUMAN INTIMACY*, NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY, PAGES. 304, ISBN: 978-1-5013-8051-8**

This review provides a description and recommendation of Jan Stasięńko's monograph, which is a deeply critical project. Media technologies comprised in the title serve not only for systematizing the description of mechanisms and influences but also as a frame of reference for reflecting on the language, scope, utility, and consequences of studying the human in media communication. These reflections, supported by a wealth of visuals, are conducted from a posthumanist perspective, which requires careful consideration. Consequently, the review emphasizes the theoretical layer over factual elements.

To date, posthumanism as a project of a research perspective has only been referenced once in CEJC (Kalpokas, 2020). This is surprising when taking into consideration the long tradition of a trend formed half a century ago under the influence of the critical paradigm (in the versions of R. Barthes and M. Foucault) but also in a certain opposition to technological determinism, both well-known to media studies reflection. The criticality of posthumanism appears to remain neglected potentially due to its challenge to established epistemological and ontological categories, frequently perceived as constant and strict, particularly within the empirical and deterministic paradigm of large-scale communication studies and the concurrent development of transhumanism.

In contrast to transhumanism, which focuses on the empirically tangible deterministic technologicality of transforming the human being as a species, posthumanism emphasizes individual subjectivity (not only human) as a product of discursive relationality and intimacy between humans and the *other being*. In the context of posthumanism, the concepts of human subjectivity, integrity, and rationality are not strict but rather emerge and are made tangible through discursive relationships with non-human beings and those recognized as subjective beings, namely products of nature and technology.

Previous posthumanist studies have concentrated on two categories of other beings, namely creations of nature (subjectified animals and plants) and near-human creations of technology (autonomous machines). Stasięńko proposes a new line of research, which is particularly relevant from a communicological perspective. The author identifies the primary objective of his work as an endeavor to delineate the third category of otherness—information, and to investigate the

subjective relationships between media technology users and the meanings and interpretations derived from information creations.

The incorporation of the principles of neomaterialism, which challenges conventional dichotomies between subject and object and representation-materiality opposition (pp.14–15), is one of the foundations of this approach. In the posthumanist perspective, human actions are always considered part of complex and dynamic structures, referred to as assemblages, apparatuses, or, as Stasieńko proposes, vehicles. It appears that the concept of a media vehicle most effectively represents the dynamics of communication processes between participating beings. Employing the terminology of programming theories, Stasieńko characterizes these beings as ‘instances’, i.e., occurrences of objects representing particular classes. The process of instantiation, or ‘becoming’ of a being assigned to a class, is a discursive phenomenon in which otherness and subjectivity are constructed as resulting from a dynamic power relationship. In this model of analysis, human, medium, and information become instances.

This research project can be interpreted as an attempt to answer numerous questions. These comprise: how and what kind of people do we become in our relationships with information? To what degree do we control it? By what power and what do media and the meanings created in them do to us? And where do these media vehicles in which we disintegrate our subjectivity take us?

The functioning of technology is an indispensable aspect of the media vehicle, as its mechanisms establish the frameworks and conditions of the relationship between the user of the medium and information, positioning it within a specific context within the apparatus. Under the influence of technology, blurring of the boundaries of the human subject and also its construction and deconstruction occurs in distinct ways and with varying effects. ‘Being or not being posthuman, being or not being a subject, is determined by the position of the being, understood as its place in the sense of a physical or conceptually construed space occupied by beings that differ in ontological status’ (p.21).

The author conceptualizes this process as an ‘agreement protocol’ initiated by a specific consent, namely the adoption of a dialogical, open, and sensitive position (p.22). In another section of the text, the author presents the same criteria employed as conditions for the acceptance of the posthumanist perspective: ‘it is I, the human being, who become aware of the presence of a non-human other, for whom I take responsibility. (...) I will shape my ‘self ‘so as to be capable of connection with the ‘other,’ and find a plane of understanding or ontological integration’ (p.18).

The model for analyzing these processes is based on the notion of the apparatus, initially proposed by M. Foucault and G. Agamben. This concept exceeds the technological dimension, functioning as a metaphor for the systemic power structure of a given discourse. Nonetheless, this analysis lacks comprehensive

contextualization of media discourse. Stasieńko's work delves more into the cybernetic aspects of the system than the social ones, exploring a discourse in the interactional dimension rather than sociocultural, examining power not merely as a means of establishing and enforcing norms but as a tool for controlling the relationships between subjects. This approach entails conceptualizing power relationships through a discursive perspective based on symbolic and normative orders—not at a micro-scale but the level of private (intimate) mini-discourses, where within an unstable balance of power and dialogicity balancing between cooperation and competition, negotiations of boundaries between the human and the non-human (informational) are held.

The author employs the normative model of subjectivity formation contained within Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis, subsequently critiqued by Deleuze and Guattari, who described protocols of destabilization and disintegration. In reference to these concepts, Stasieńko highlights that the human user's interaction with information has a formatting and destabilizing dimension on their subjectivity (which, in the metalanguage of his research, is reflected in a balance between psychoanalysis and schizoanalysis). This enables Stasieńko to extend the critical instrumentation of posthumanism to encompass concepts such as desire, embodiment, and representation, particularly in the context of visibility and visuality (pp.8–11).

In the study of communication as a relationship, it is challenging to investigate phenomena at a deeper (or closer) level than the micro-level, specifically in the context of establishing and transcending intimacy. When considering the methodology of analysis which guides to the author's unique perspective on posthumanism, this category assumes particular significance. Reconsideration of the conditions of subjectivity at the empirical level entails an investigation of individual communicative acts and the factors directly establishing them. What is the catalyst for this phenomenon? Feasibly, this is most aptly (and subtly) expressed by the author when he discusses the search for a theory of 'users' affect vis-à-vis the technologies' (p.15), which encompasses the digitized body or embodied information (the first vehicle of 'affect vis-à-vis the technologies' was cinema).

In his analyses, Stasieńko considers the occurrence in various technological vehicles of selected individual and private micro-discourses between users and the meanings generated by a given information creation. In these instances, he identifies protocols of intimacy and emotional bond as particularly noteworthy; they construct the dimension of intimate relationships as either a ritualized structure of symbolic or physical violence or as a source of pleasure (including sexual). Another significant aspect of intimacy is theatricality, which can be defined as performative and ritualized world-making (p.13).

The extensive empirical section of this monograph is comprised of materials primarily collected for the purpose of 'intimate anthropology' of the creative

process and consumption (p.13). Such materials include making-of documentation (photographs and audio recordings from the production set, animatics, concept art, and interviews with creators and actors) and confirmations regarding the reception of media messages (blogs and recorded and published statements of media audiences and users).

Stasieńko employs examples from the digital age, applying his version of media archaeology (thereby diverging from the foundations of technological determinism) to suggest that the protocols of intimacy toward the message emerged considerably earlier. The selected examples (e.g., peep shows or a teleprompter) become metametaphors—the forms and uses of particular technologies serve as metaphors for user-meaning relationship in Stasieńko's research instrumentation.

One of the author's motivations for adopting a posthumanist perspective was his aspiration to embrace historical phenomena and reorder the historical account of media. Concurrently, an investigation of the more remote past facilitated the identification of the historical sources of the concept of posthumanism and enabled the formulation of a personal interpretation of it, which is a highly reflexive project.

Reviewing Jan Stasieńko's work, it is feasible to identify several fundamental aspects which can be understood as a critical theory of communication. Initially, on numerous levels, it exemplifies critical philosophy in the post-Kantian sense, challenging and verifying a multitude of rigid assumptions associated with traditional humanities. This is particularly evident when it identifies posthumanist phenomena as manifestations of a critical stance toward anthropocentrism. Subsequently, in the analysis of micro-discourses, power relationships are identified in a manner consistent with Foucault's conceptualization as immanent to the relationship rather than determined by technology itself. Finally, it is characterized by a profound reflexivity. In formulating his research program and method of analysis, Stasieńko engaged in a productive exchange with the assumptions of diverse forms of posthumanism and their language. Due to this, he developed a set of concepts which, as in the case of not strict, relational, and processual categories, is based on multi-level metaphors and an exceptionally dense terminological network, only partially reconstructed in this review.

It is important to notice that the reflexive complexity and multi-levelness of conceptual structures may give rise to ambiguity and a degree of blurring between the discrete references pertaining to the metalanguage of analysis and the language of the subject. The posthumanist researcher talks about the posthumanist human-subject; the method is described as posthumanist and the object of analysis is sometimes presented as posthumanist; and finally, the posthumanist research perspective is simultaneously a dialogical, open, and sensitive posthumanist position of the subject. It is possible to become confused.

Nonetheless, the author's thesis regarding self-reflexive criticality as a defensive strategy against despair and anxiety in the face of the loss of anthropocentric integrity, offering the prospect of redefining humanity may be accepted: 'the measure of our humanism lies in understanding what posthumanism is in all its diverse types and contexts' (p.227).

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## REFERENCES

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