Walls – barriers –

I’m very happy to take part in this series of lectures, from my home in Israel.

My talk focuses on the collapse of the walls that demarcated the boundaries between the human and the non-human, walls that seemed fortified and unbreakable.

See this list of binaries, of opposite attributes of the human and the non human – the list here pertains to the non human machine (the robot, the artificial man):

Natural/artificial, organic/inorganic, alive/inanimate, free/unfree, unpredictable/predictable, rebellious/obedient, autonomous/controlled, flexible/rigid, graceful/lumbering, intelligent/unintelligent, conscious/nonconscious, spontaneous/programmed, sensitive/unfeeling, emotional/unemotional, intuitive/algorithmic, passionate/apathetic, playful/serious, sexual/asexual, emphatic/callous, moral/non-moral, appreciative of beauty/ oblivious to beauty, artistic/practical, poetic/literal, spiritual/material

Timothy Shanahan 2014, 30

The human is natural, free, autonomous, intelligent, conscious, moral, sexual, sensitive, empahtic,

 This is the way we tend to think of the human.

From the 1960s onwards these binaryies, or walls separating between the human and the non-human have been attacked from two main directions:

First, on the part of Scholars of postmodernity and poststructuralism. Derrida, Foucault, Harraway, Butler, Latour, Hayles, thinkers who

problematize the anthropocentric and foreground the constructed cultural and historical nature of the human. Their mission was Destabilizing, debasing, deconstructing the humanist idea of man as the center of the universe along with the deconstruction of basic ideas such as individuality and subjectivity.

The argument is that the individual, as an essential entity, who possesses psychological continuity and coherence and a unified self is an invention dating back to the enlightment, perhaps earlier than that - to the renaissance. It was Foucault who concluded his seminal tract “Les mots et les choses” – ‘man might be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea’ and a wave is approaching to erase it. the human is little more than another contingent and what is ostensibly irredeemably anthropocentric is but a cultural construct.

The other attack came on the part of the tremendous technological advancement of the last decades. Technology extists – it is invisible and inevitable and everywhere, The human becomes interlaced with the machine and the question is how it impacts, or leaves its indelible mark on the human. Evidently, technology opens new avenues for thinking about the human.

The traditional perception of a unified self-body is no longer relevant given the immense powers of technology that cross through the human mind and body. The new bio-chemical, cybernetic and connectivity technologies . first, bio-technological-chemical engineering possibilities have implications on selfhood and subjectivity.

Scot Bukatman posthuman subjectivity is a terminal identity computer terminal

Modifications of the human itself embodied

Changes in they way we perceive space – through GPS systems, Knowledge – not memoriezed in our brain but at the palm of our hand with a tap to search in our smartphone,

For instance screens around us – smartphone, laptop, Ipad that allow presence in more than one place, thus the subject is no longer limited to his physical body

Under the aegis of technology we are becoming more than human, as the body is infiltrated by technology: the prolongment of life, anti-aging, transplants, , Xenotransplantation – organ transplants from animals to humans.

The cyborg (Cybernetic Organism, Donna Harraway’s term) is seen not as deformation but as self-formation, the cyborg in the sense of anyone and all of us who lets machines/technology be a part of them

Scholars of technology and culture such as Harraway, Hayles, Latour and Lecourt foreground the construction and performativity the human, and extol sequences and continuums instead of binaries

Some say we have already become posthuman

Ph is the articulation of a non-anthropocentric vision of the human, of transcending the binary human non-human, be it the machine or the animal.

Posthumanism is a subject position open to alternative perspectives and alternative stances which decenter the human. It challenges the wall separating between the human and the non-human,

Literature is significant player in forging our imaginations regarding the collapse of the walls of the Anthropocene.

As Manuella Rossini maintains in the Cambridge Companion to “literature and posthuman” published in 2017

“rather sooner than later, cyborgs and other hybrids, androids, and technologically enhanced humans will people the earth (and maybe other planets). Imagineered in “sciencefictive” texts […] such embodied subjects can be seen as cultural prefigurations of future human beings in the real world”.164-165

The challenge is predicated on the human/non human binary . it is our burden to take up this challenge, , rather than avoid it.

Literature speculates, It asks: what if?

What if post or neo-humans lived amongst us?

What if we could have organic spare parts to overcome illness and disease?

What happens after the final bou

Have the new posthumanist ideas revealed fissures in humanism’s rigid foundations?

One interesting speculation was provided by Kazuo Ishiguro. And this is the focus of my talk today

Previous literature dealt with distinguishing the artificial from the human, questions about the human in the non-human, can it be a singular, coherent, unique individual.

 Ishiguro refers to this debate with the gallery in the novel, but for him the question of whether non humans can be humans is negligible altogether, we are beyond that phase.

, overrides them. Asking if these machines have conscious and reason