

posthumanism

(art in the anthropocene)

The aim of this lecture is to provide an introduction to posthumanism and its relation to art-making practices in the age of the anthropocene.

Rob Jones

Coexistent Perspectives (ADCD7001)

what is **posthumanism**?

(a new philosophy for the age of the anthropocene?)

What is Posthumanism?

Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that **we have always been human**, or that we are only that.

Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history.

the (post)human and the (post)pandemic

rediscovering our selves

Thinking through Posthumanism in the Pandemic Era

The Covid-19 pandemic is being experienced individually and collectively as a crisis. Referred to as the **‘disease of stoppage’** that brings about a ‘rupture’ of the ‘everyday’ and heightened **defamiliarization**; the pandemic is causing massive social and economic disruption, physical and mental suffering and deaths.

And yet, it also has the potential of being generative: the first evidence of a potential silver lining to it being the radical diminution of pollution caused by significantly reduced human traffic leading non-human animals to thrive and venture into urban settings. Images and reports of wild goats and boars roaming urban settings and dolphins enjoying the Bosphorus and getting closer than ever to the city of Istanbul have elicited smiles and wonder at the power of nature to reclaim the world once humans cease to be so active, giving us glimpses of what would follow our species’ extinction.

However, for the humans relegated to their private spaces and forced into different variations of quarantine and lockdowns, the pandemic has reduced, rather than expanded, horizons. Examining the meaning of ‘crisis’, ‘emergency’ and ‘catastrophe’ in the context of the pandemic, **Rebecca Solnit** argues that the pandemic is an instance of sudden large-scale disruption, a point after which we need to reorient ourselves. Solnit explains that disasters teach humans lessons, the first of which being ‘that everything is connected . . . [Disasters are] crash courses in those connections’. She further argues that **‘Our sense of self generally comes from the world around us, and right now, we are finding another version of who we are’**.

I contend that **the being we are discovering – this other ‘version of who we are’ – is actually the being we have always been but forgotten we were: a radically materially entangled being.**

The pandemic is allowing us to grasp ourselves as the posthumans we always were, namely the materially entangled beings that we are rediscovering. [Christine Daigle]

What does Posthumanism mean in the Pandemic Era?

Posthuman Pathogenesis

That **humans are not sovereign but assemblages** whose identity, coherence, and functioning are all contingent upon structures and presences as diverse as an immune system propped up by the infusion of an alien life form and pharmacological interventions of antibiotics, enzymes, and other chemicals has been brought home to us in sudden and intractable ways.

The support systems— medical, welfare, communitarian— became even more significant (even when they collapsed) during especially the first year of the pandemic and underscored **the embedding of human life within networks**.

The pandemic experience has brought into play several aspects of posthuman thought.

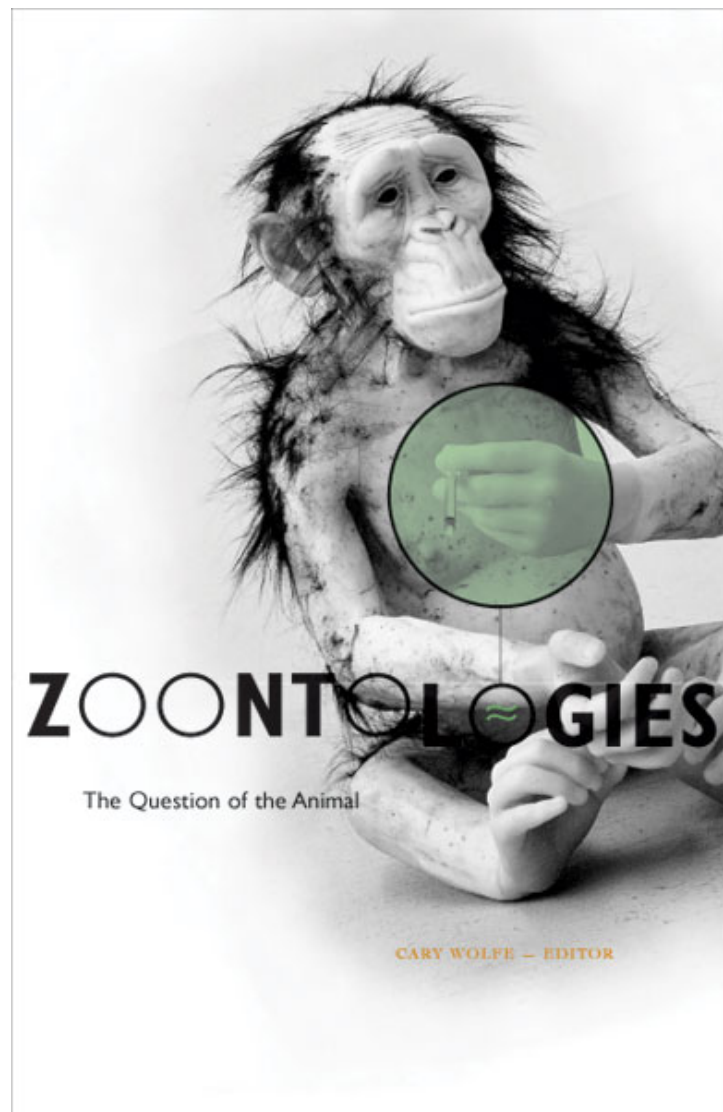
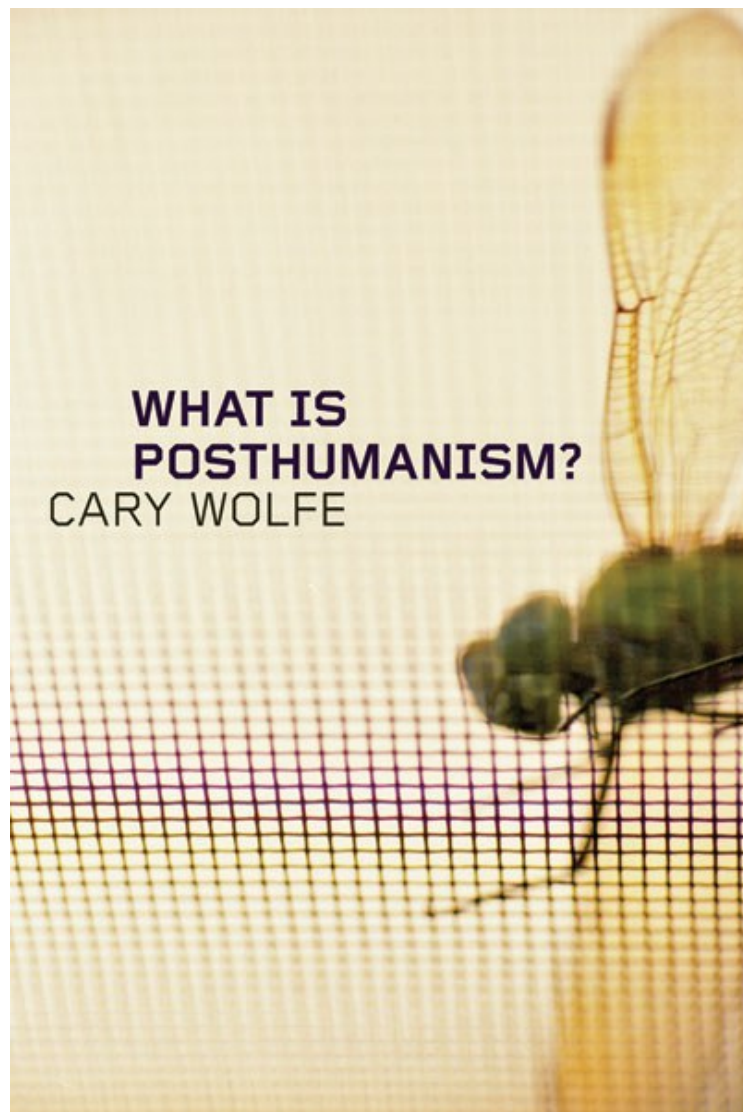
1. It has laid bare how temporality has shifted from **anthropocentric to post- anthropocentric**.
2. **The experience has modified our sense of space.** Our corporeal, community, and **species borders have been breached**.
3. An **arithemacy** entered our posthuman lives.
4. **The very networks that made human mobility**, from airports to public transportation systems, **became conduits for the virus**.
5. All lives were rendered precarious in a state of mutually assured infection. The **socius** became a **patho-socius**, as the basis of human community became the basis for the spread of the infection.

what is **posthumanism**?

(a new philosophy for the age of the anthropocene?)

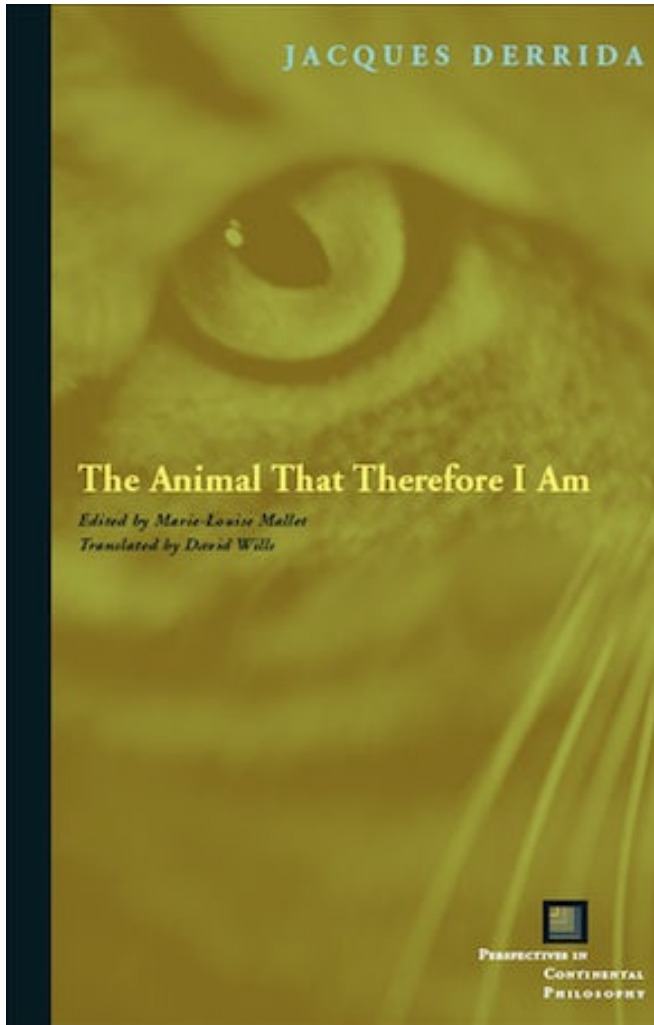
An irrevocably postdisciplinary endeavour, posthumanism, has enabled the creation and elaboration of novel concepts such as '**entanglements**' or '**transcorporeality**,' thanks to the works of established scholars such as **Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett, and Stacy Alaimo**.

It has also become an **umbrella field that encompasses feminist studies (including epistemology), postcolonialism, disability studies, science and technology studies, environmental studies, cultural studies, animal studies, and queer studies**. Newer developments such as **critical plant studies** (with **Randy Laist and Janet Janzen** being the forerunners) have also blossomed around posthumanism and are sure to render the field even more vibrant.



The Animal That Therefore I Am

Speaking of the entire philosophical tradition, Derrida **accuses it of having deliberately forgotten the animal**, and along with it the very animality of human beings, of this life which crosses our path but which philosophy insists on covering up, excluding it from something that is supposed to be proper only to human ...



DERRIDA AND OTHER ANIMALS THE BOUNDARIES OF THE HUMAN



Judith Still

CRITICAL PLANT STUDIES

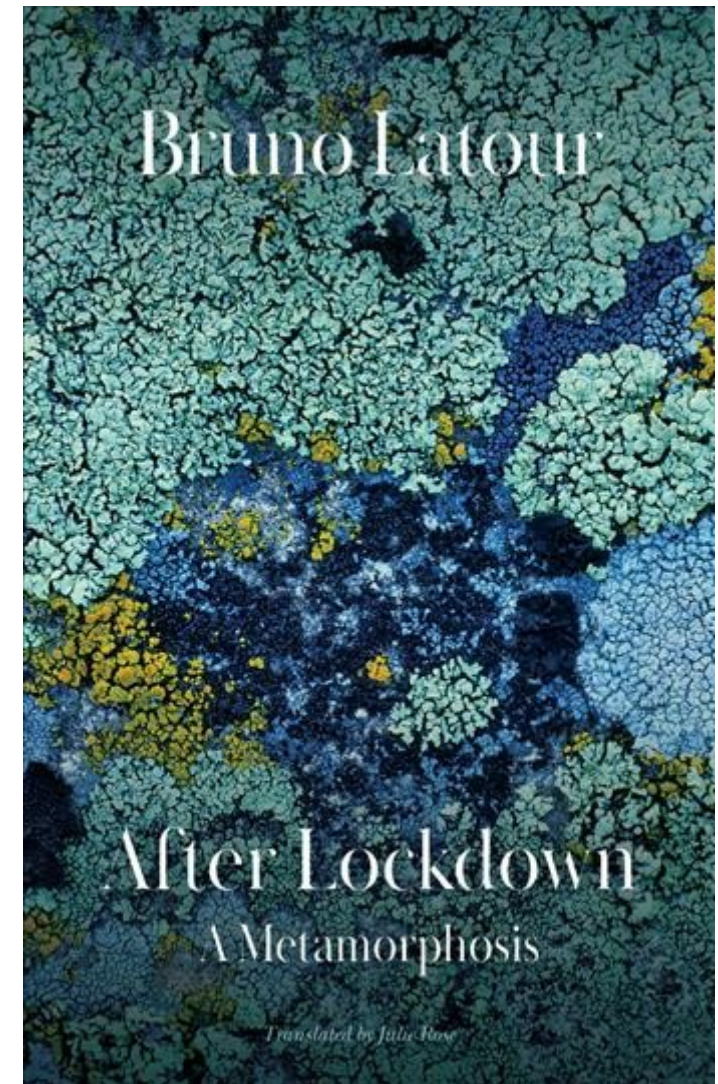
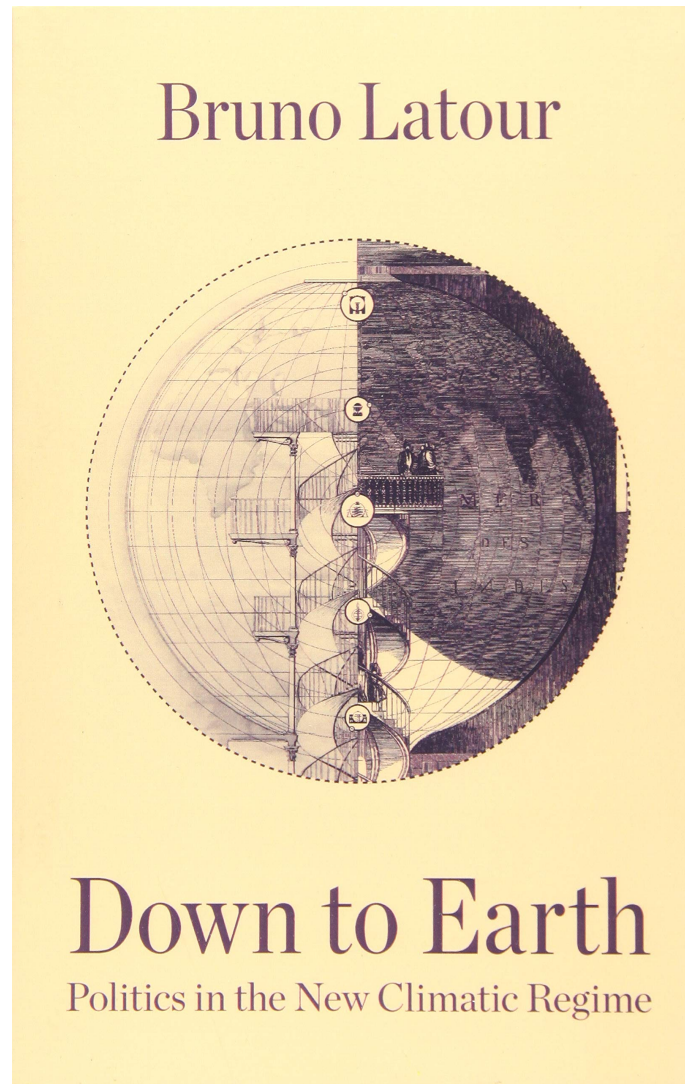
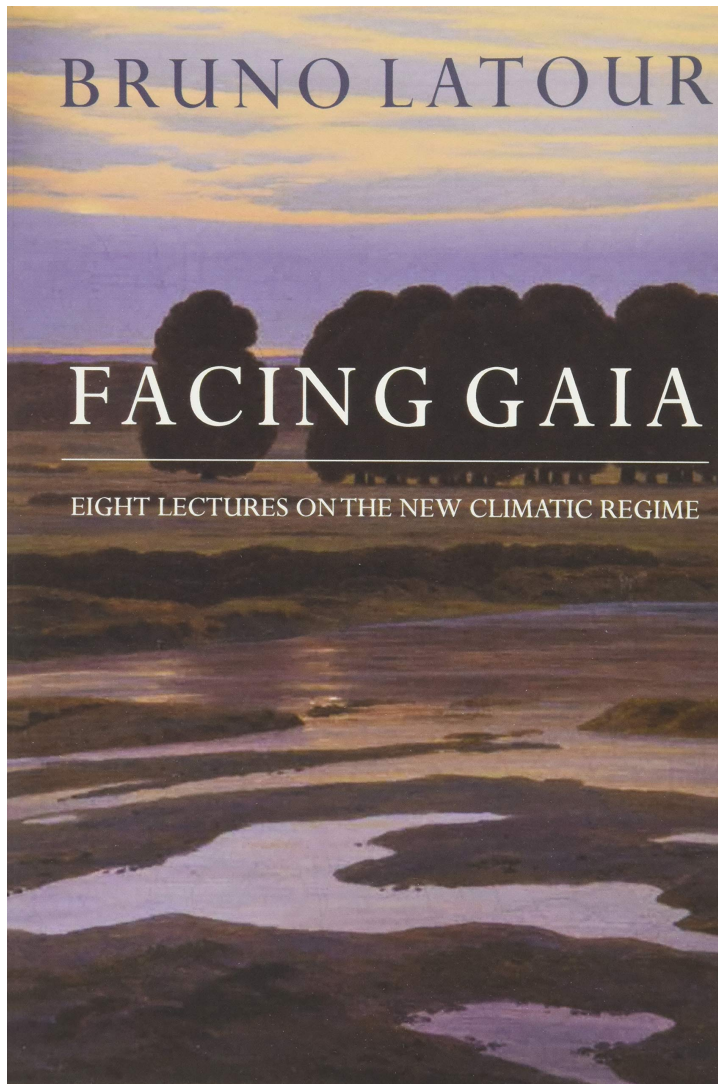
Philosophy, Literature, Culture

Series Editor
Michael Marder

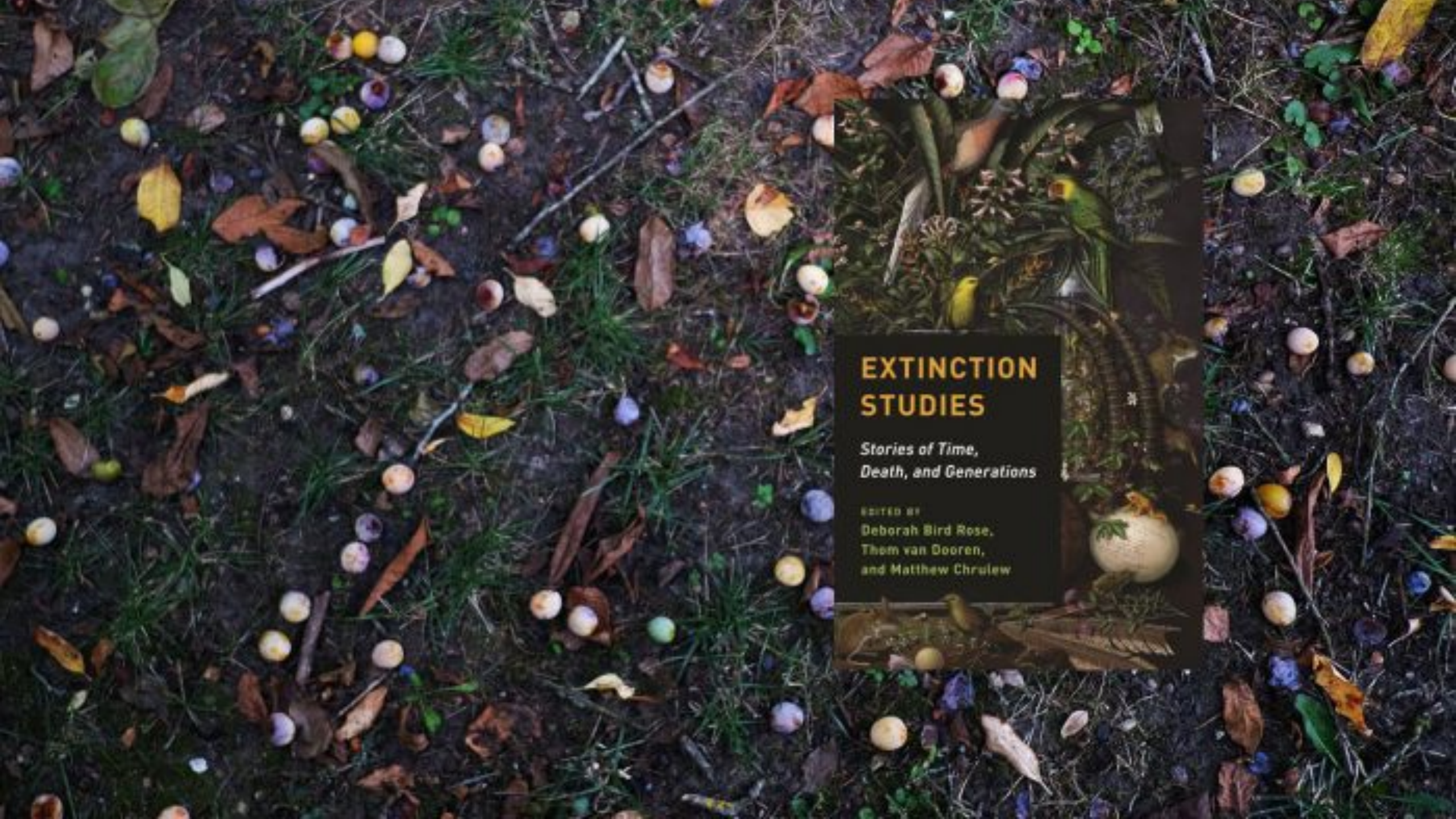
BRILL | RODOPI

Plant- Thinking A *Philosophy of Vegetal Life* Michael Marder





Bruno Latour (1947-2022)



EXTINCTION STUDIES

*Stories of Time,
Death, and Generations*

EDITED BY
Deborah Bird Rose,
Thom van Dooren,
and Matthew Chrulew

(Renaissance) humanism – (Post)humanism

The birth of the human 'project'...

...what is the future for the human project?



THE HUMAN PROJECT

when did we become 'human' ?





MARA EAGLE. "IF YOU CAN NOT AVOID, ENJOY THE CHARM OF RAIN CAMPING!; THIS WETLAND IN CALIFORNIA IS HABITAT FOR MIGRATING SNOW GEESE; TUCUMÁN (SPANISH PRONUNCIATION: [TUKU MAN])" FROM THE SERIES ATLAS OF MAGNILOQUENT DIGITALIA. (2017-2018). COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE BERGGRUEN INSTITUTE.

The Transformations of the Human

Transformations of the Human (ToftH) was founded by Tobias Rees in 2018 as an experimental program within the Berggruen Institute in Los Angeles, California.

In 2016, Reid Hoffman had introduced Rees to Nicolas Berggruen, who offered to incubate the program at the Berggruen Institute. The program was designed as a testbed for assembling new ideas that would track the ways in which contemporary technologies such as artificial intelligence and genetic engineering are disrupting post-Cartesian notion of the Human.

In July 2021, the Berggruen Institute spun ToftH out as an independent organization, jointly funded by Reid Hoffman and the Berggruen Institute, that works with clients to discover the philosophical stakes of their work and with students to conduct experiments at the intersection of philosophy and technology. Please follow the ToftH school and experience here: toftth.org.

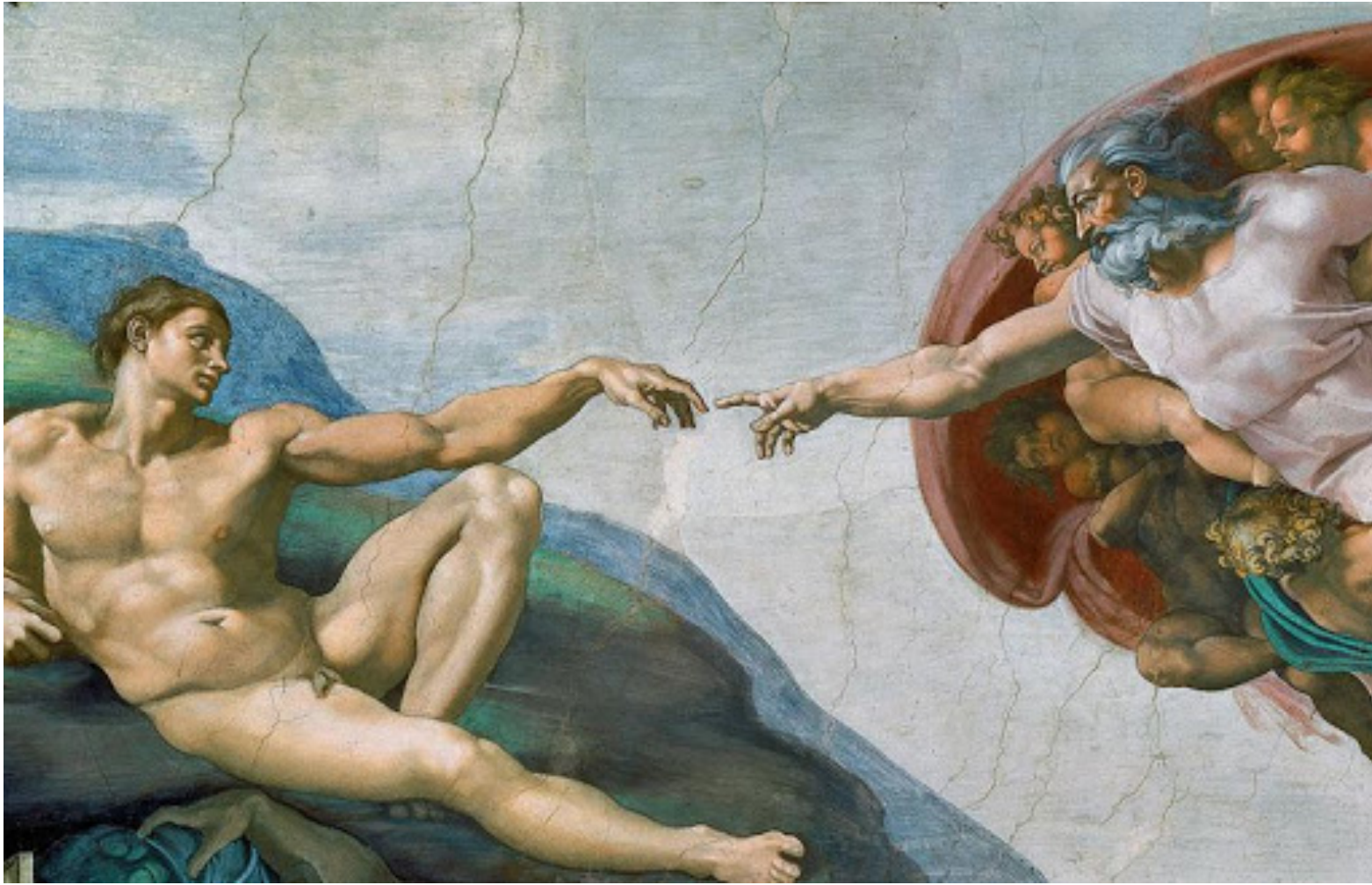
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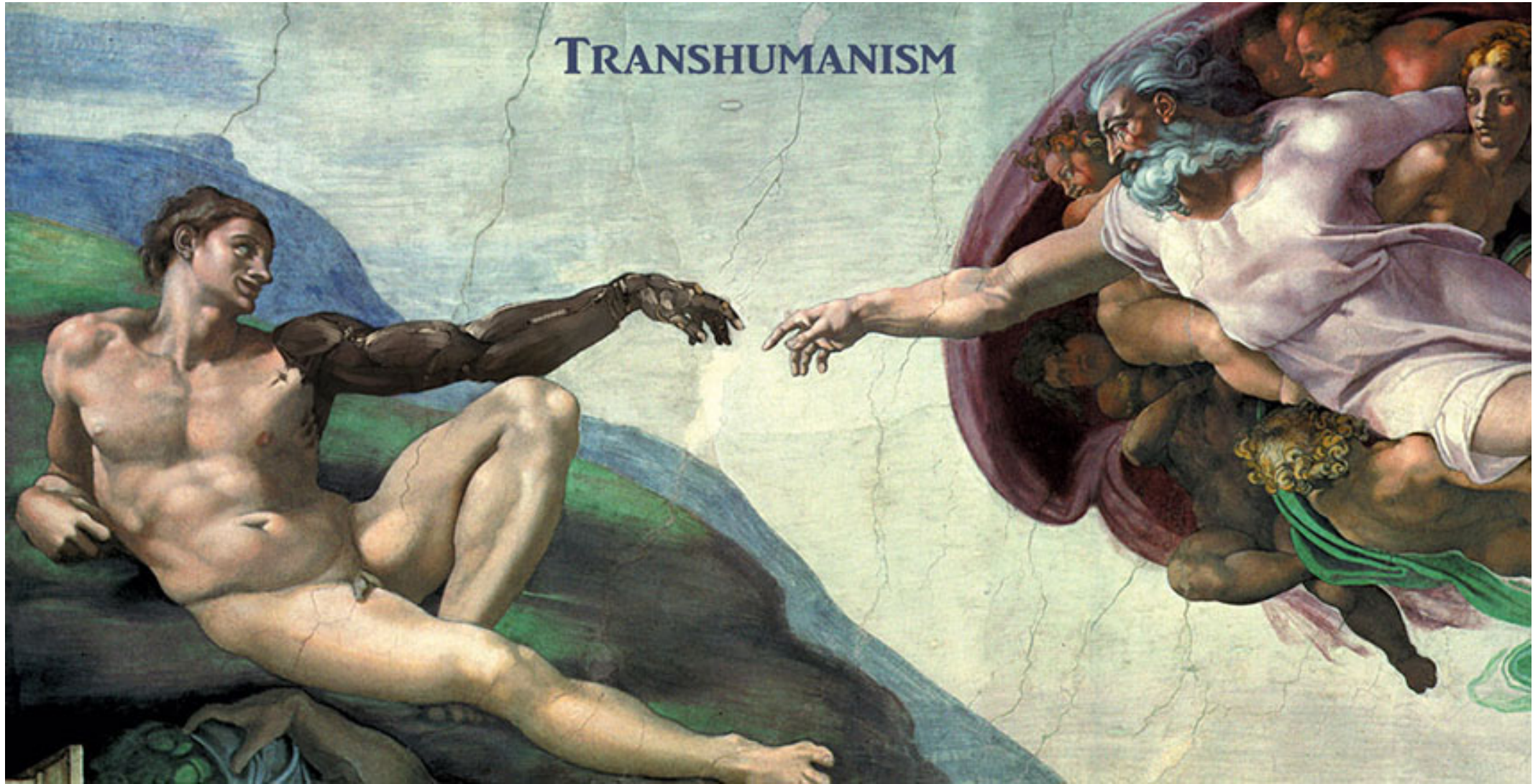
TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE HUMAN (ToftH) at the Berggruen Institute

ToftH is designed as a philosophical study and artistic exploration of the manifold ways in which artificial intelligence and biotechnology challenge our established conceptions of what it means to be human. By placing philosophers and artists in key research sites, the program renders AI and biotech visible as unusually potent experimental sites for reformulating our vocabulary for thinking about ourselves and experiencing the world around us. Our ambition is to feed our findings back into the production of both artificial intelligence and biotech and to thereby contribute to both human and non-human flourishing.



The Creation of Adam (1508-1512) Michelangelo

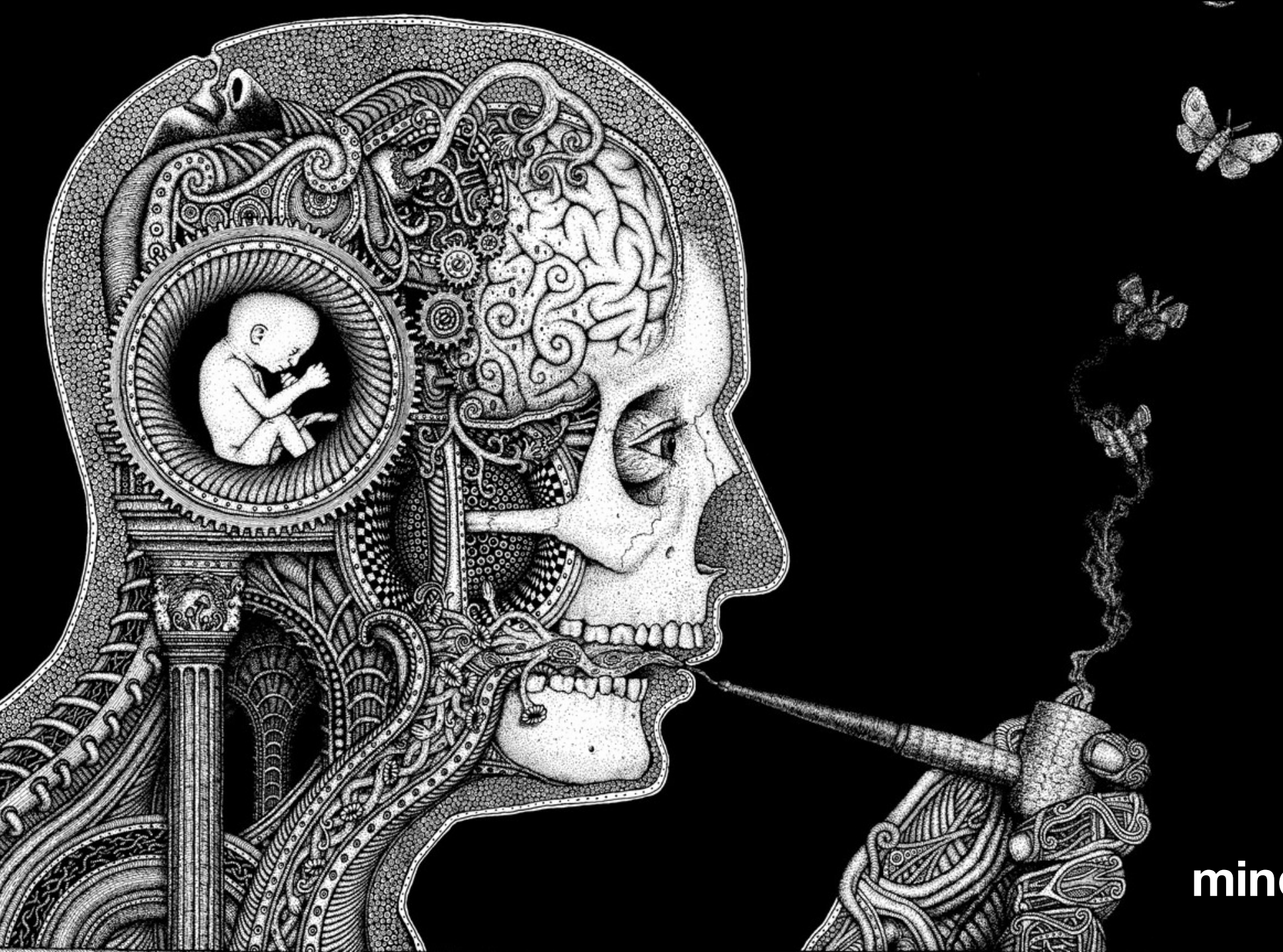
TRANSHUMANISM



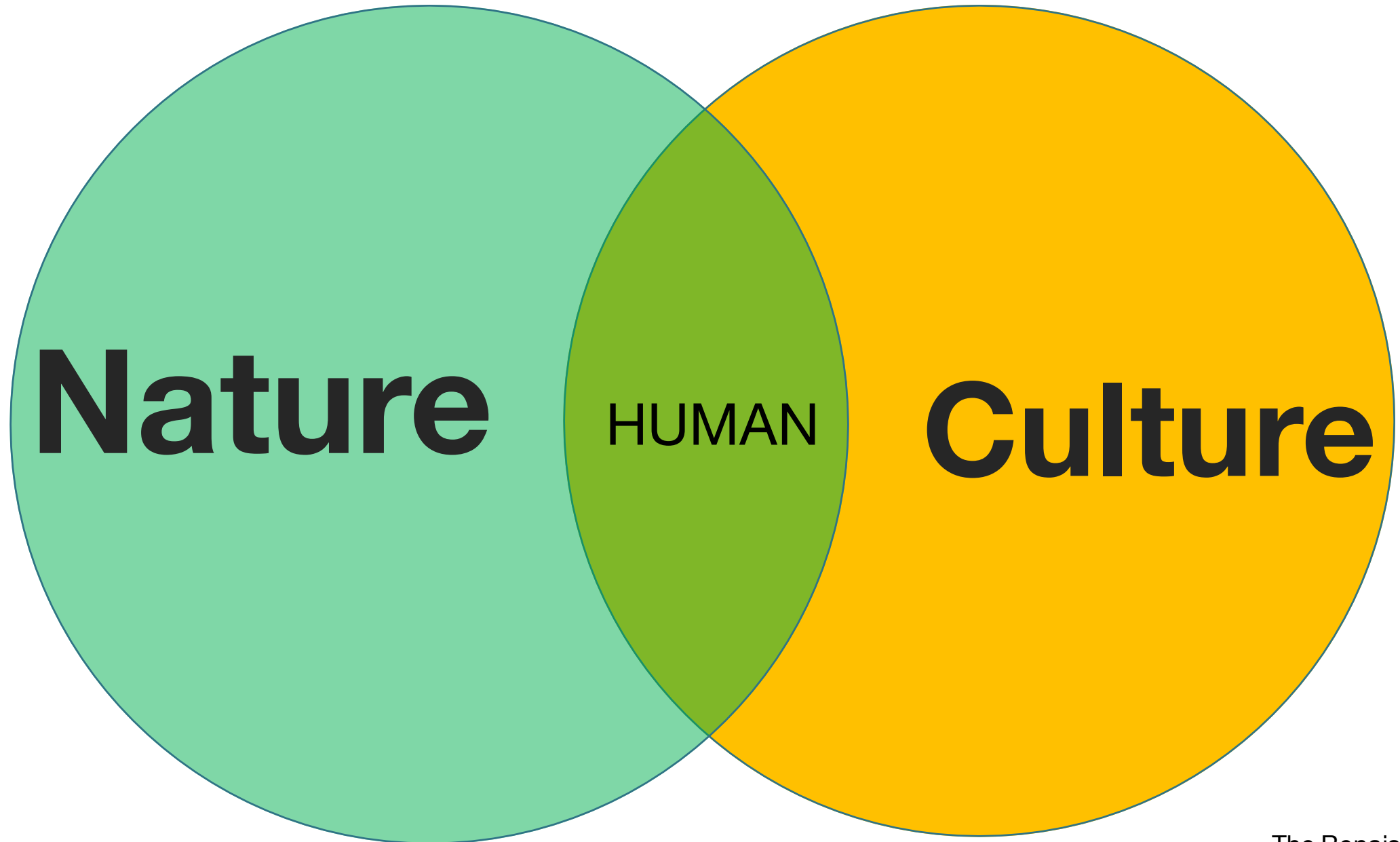
The Cartesian subject (after Descartes)

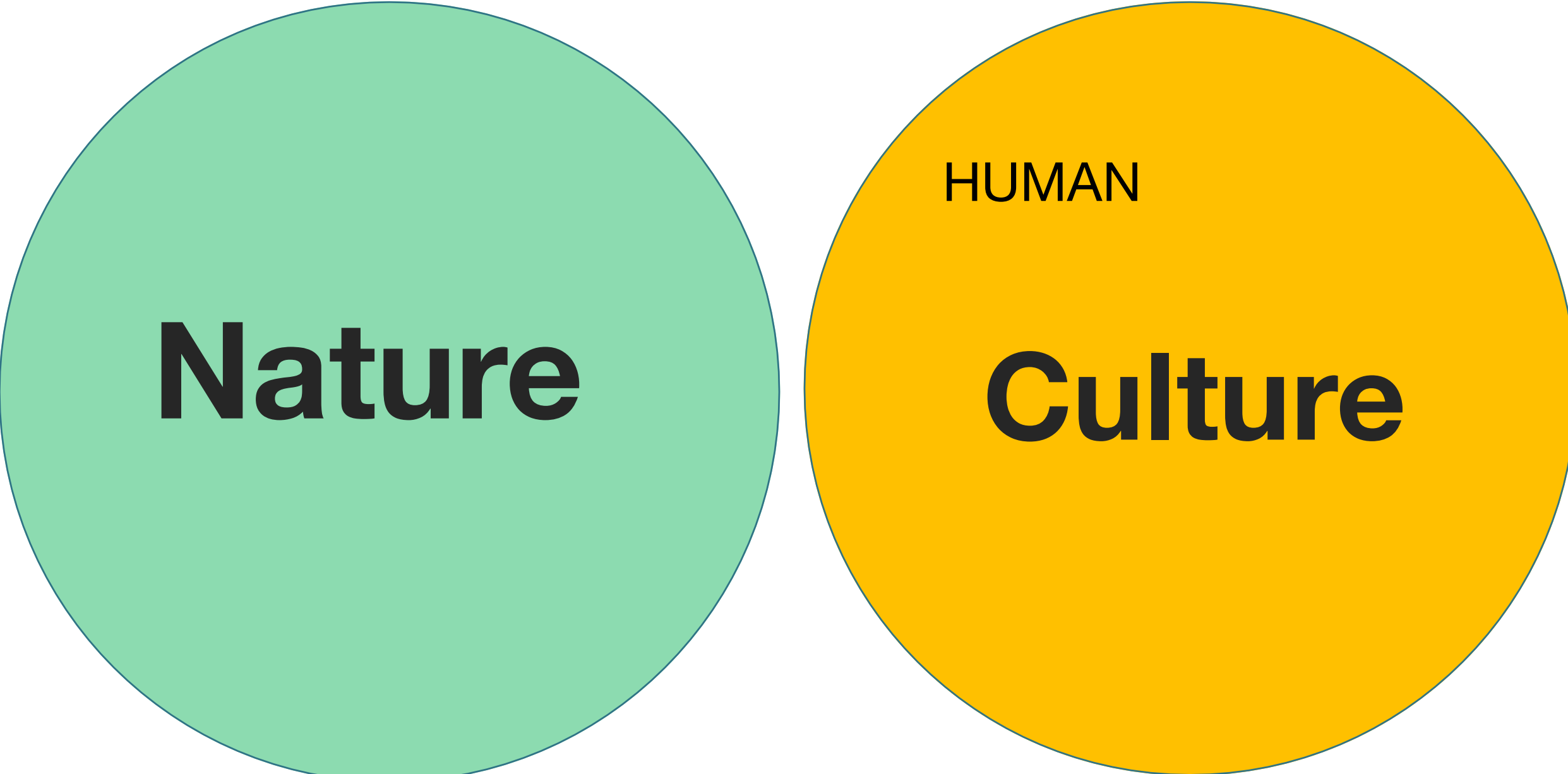
‘The **Cartesian subject** of the cogito, the **Kantian** “community of reasonable beings”, or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on...’
(**Cary Wolfe, 2010**).

Wolfe, C., 2010. What is posthumanism? (Vol. 8). U of Minnesota Press.



mind-body dualism

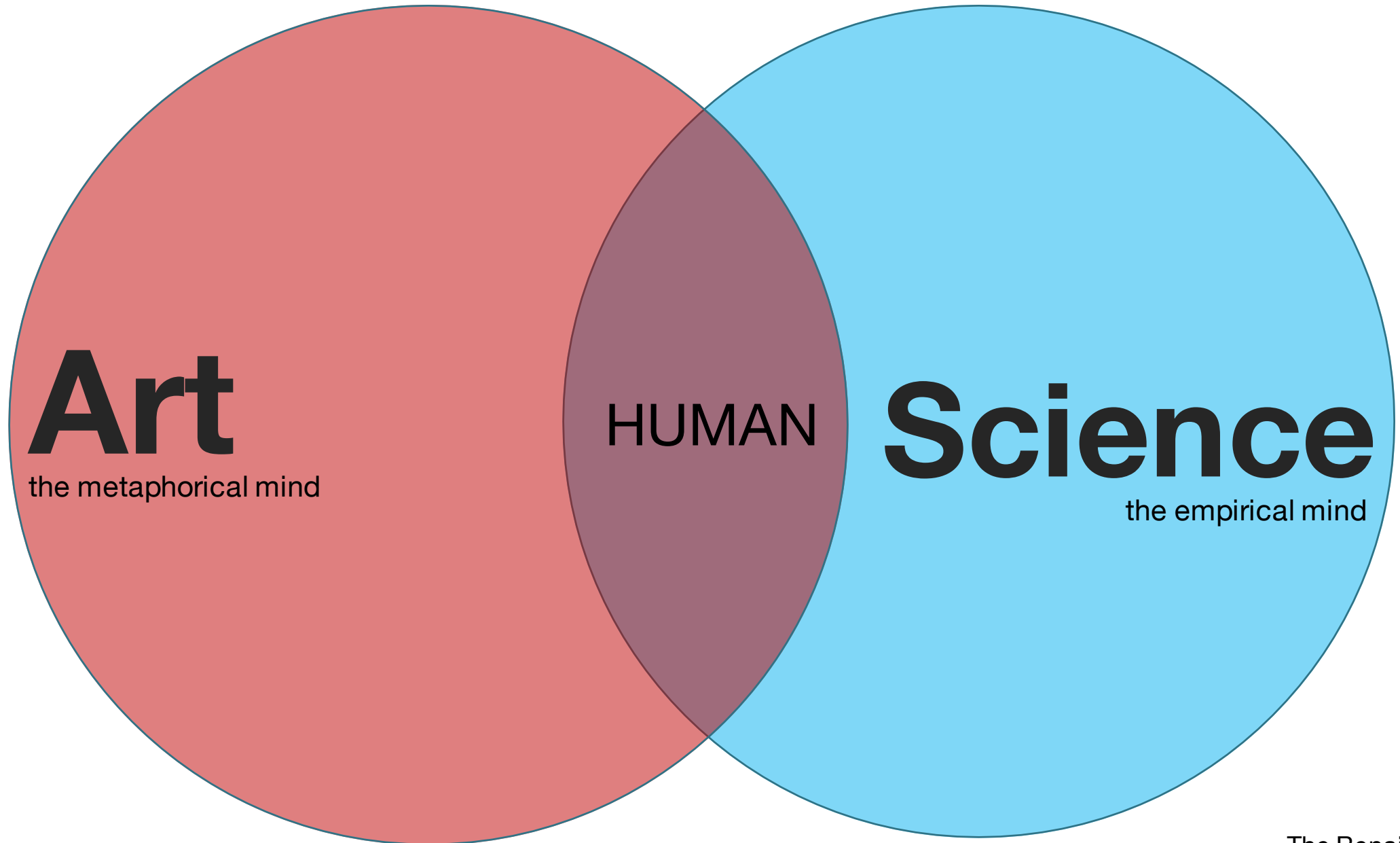


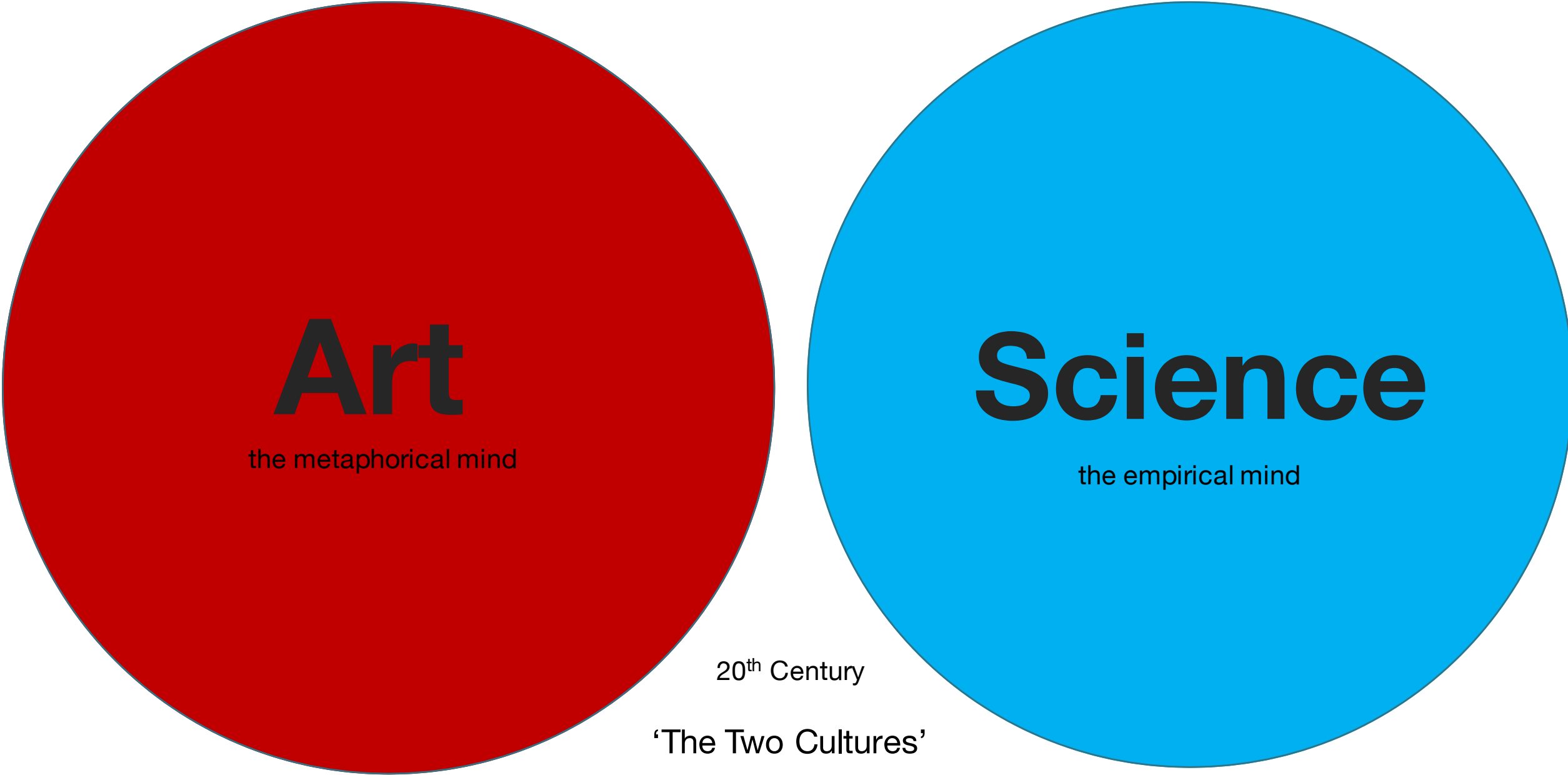


Nature

HUMAN

Culture





Art

the metaphorical mind

Science

the empirical mind

20th Century

‘The Two Cultures’

C.P. Snow & F.R. Leavis

The Cartesian subject (after Descartes)

‘The **Cartesian subject** of the cogito, the **Kantian** “community of reasonable beings”, or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on...’
(**Cary Wolfe, 2010**).

Wolfe, C., 2010. What is posthumanism? (Vol. 8). U of Minnesota Press.

The Age of **Enlightenment**

The **Enlightenment**, also known as **the Age of Reason**, was a philosophical movement that took place primarily in Europe and, later, in North America, during the late 17th and early 18th century. Its participants thought they were illuminating human intellect and culture after the "dark" Middle **Ages**.

- Renes Descartes (1596-1650) – “I think therefore I am”
- The Scientific Revolution – Isaac Newton
- French Revolution – Politics and Ideology
- The Industrial Revolution – James Watt...steam engine
- The ‘Death of God’ – The Age of Rationalism, Skepticism
- Theory of Evolution – Charles Darwin



In his essay 'What Is Enlightenment?' (1784), the German philosopher **Immanuel Kant** summed up the era's motto in the following terms:

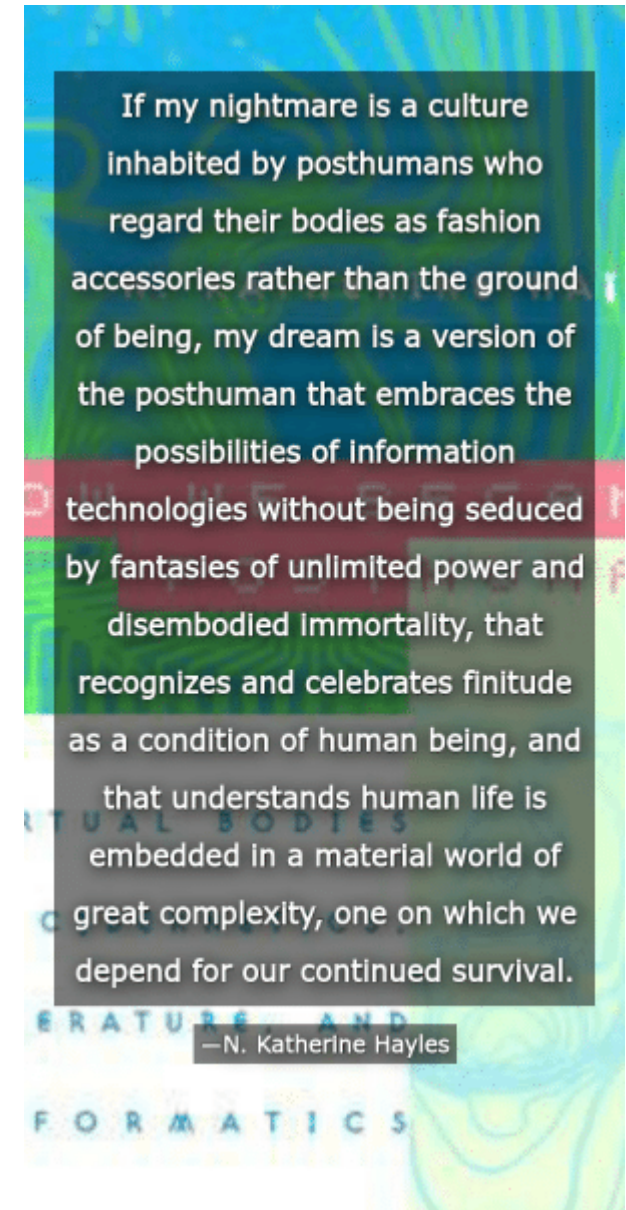
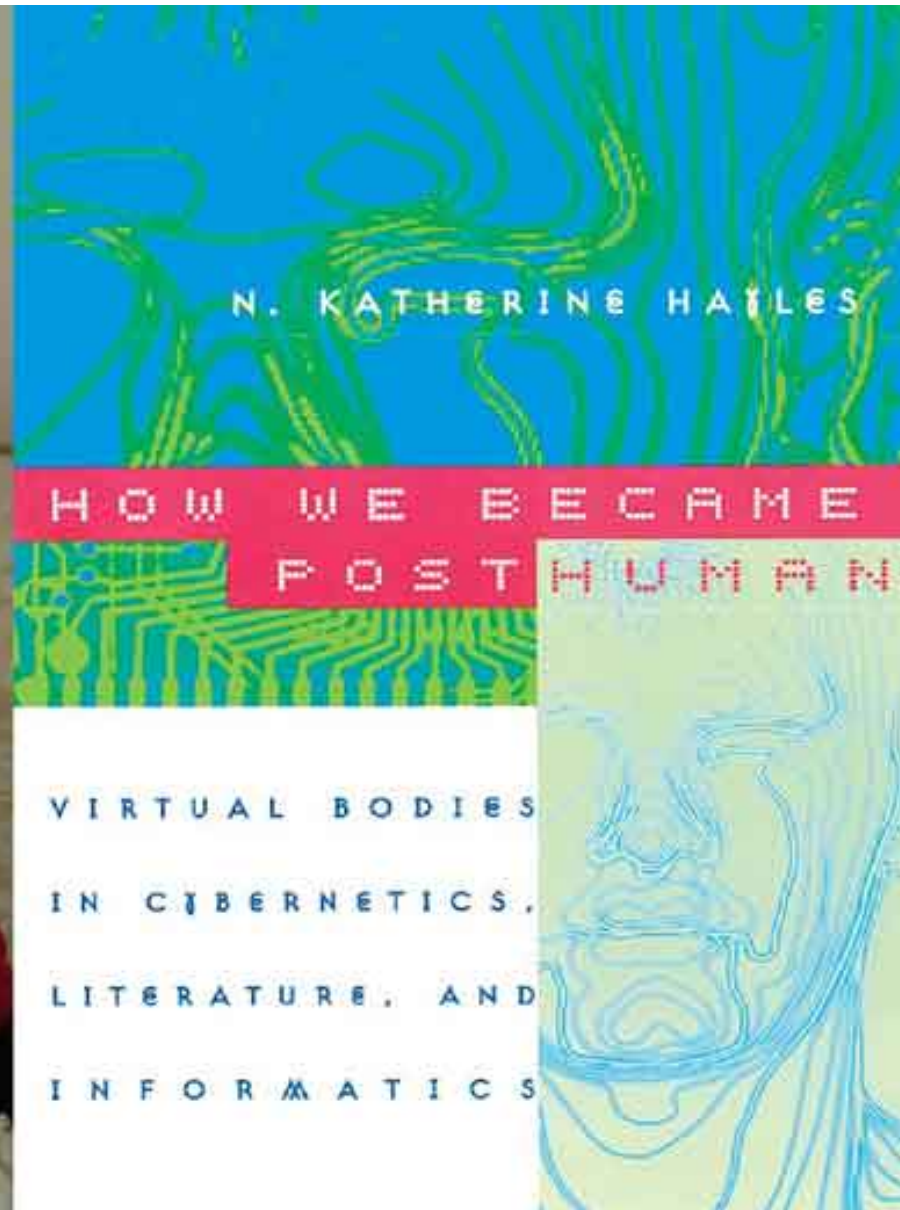
'Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!'

WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?

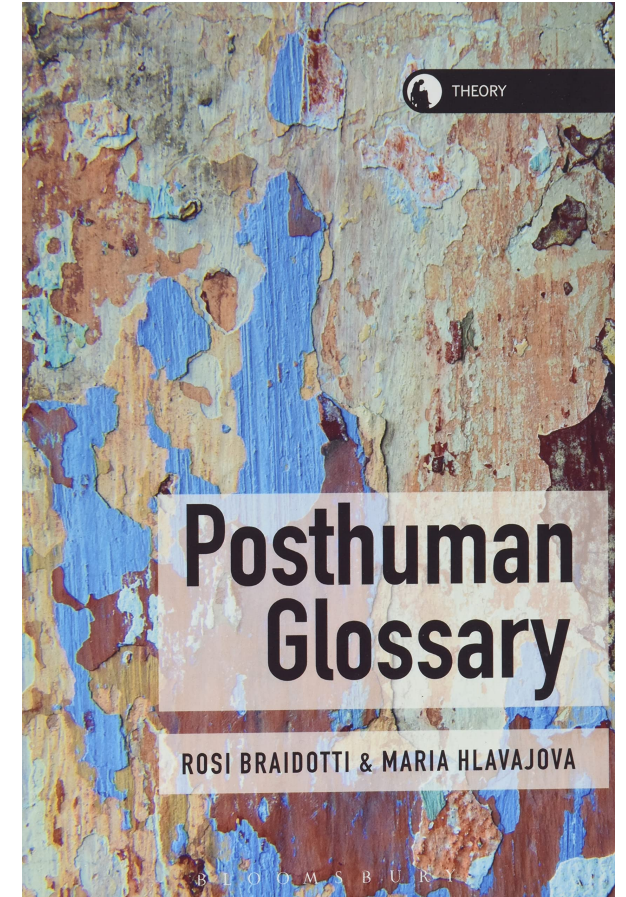
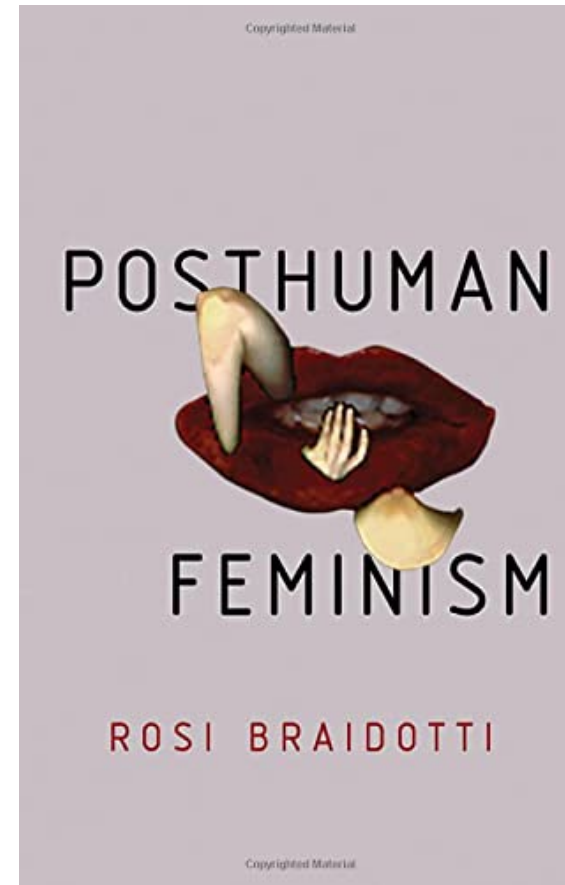
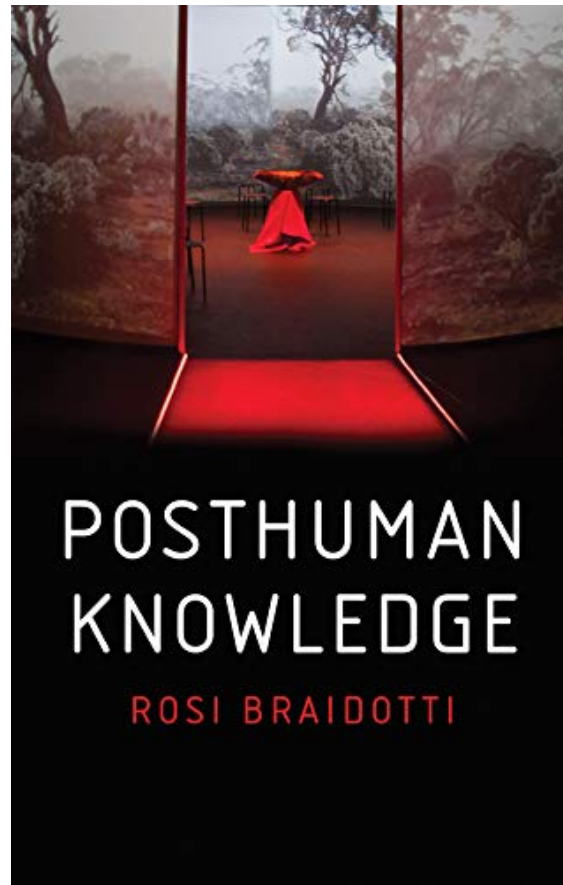
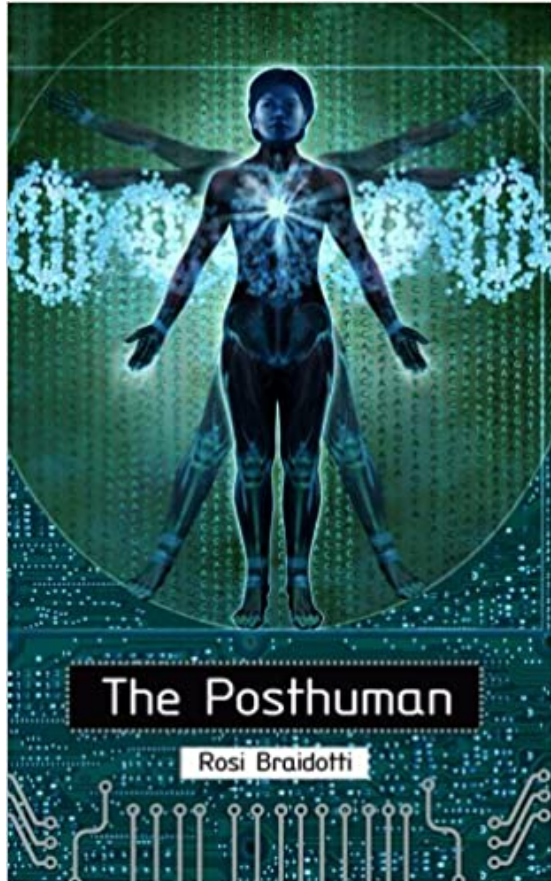
humanism

human
(being)

post-humanism



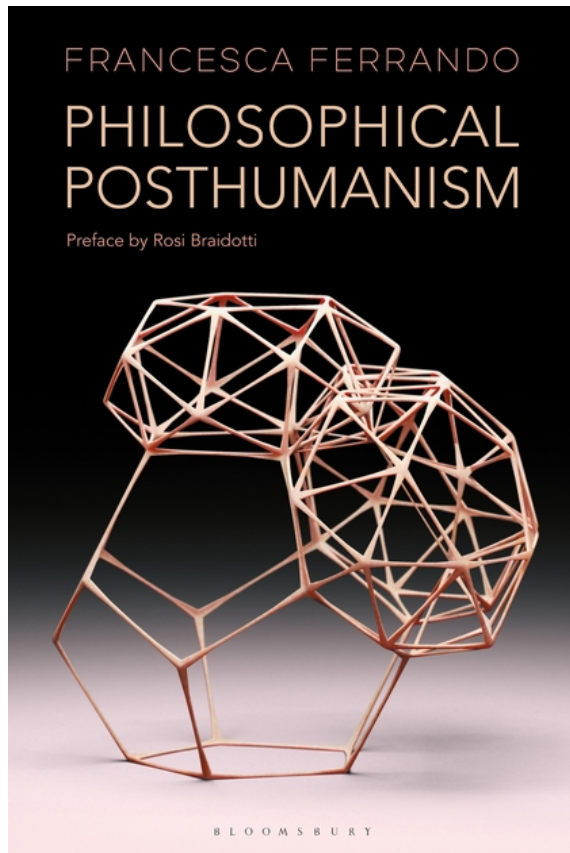
What is the Human in the Humanities Today?



Rosi Braidotti

being (ontology) and **knowledge** (epistemology)

post-humanism



Posthumanism or post-humanism (meaning "**after humanism**" or "**beyond humanism**") is a term with at least seven definitions according to philosopher **Francesca Ferrando**

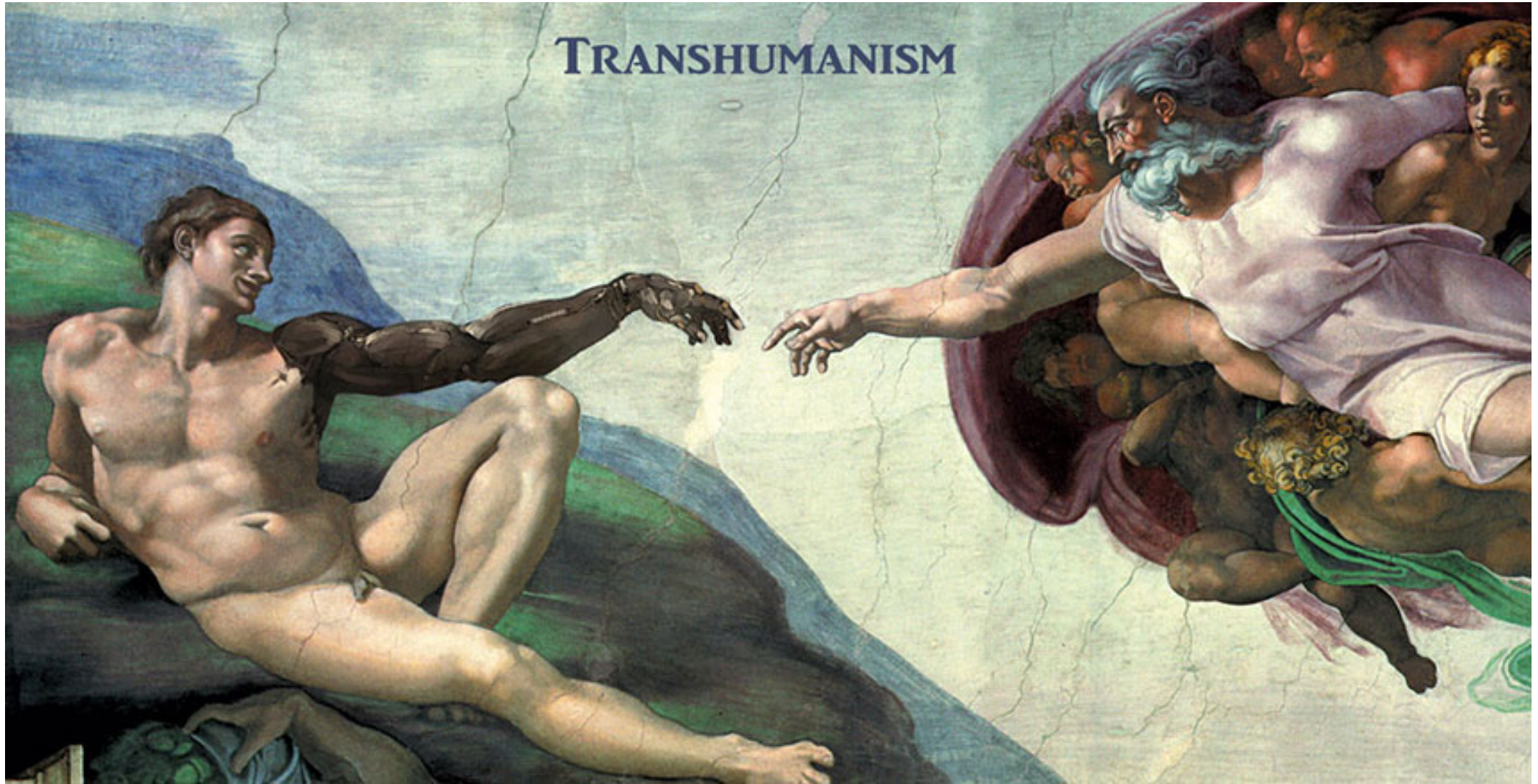
1. Anti-humanism
2. Cultural posthumanism
3. Philosophical posthumanism
4. Posthuman condition
5. Transhumanism
6. AI takeover
7. Voluntary Human Extinction

www.theposthuman.org

What does "POSTHUMAN" mean?



TRANSHUMANISM



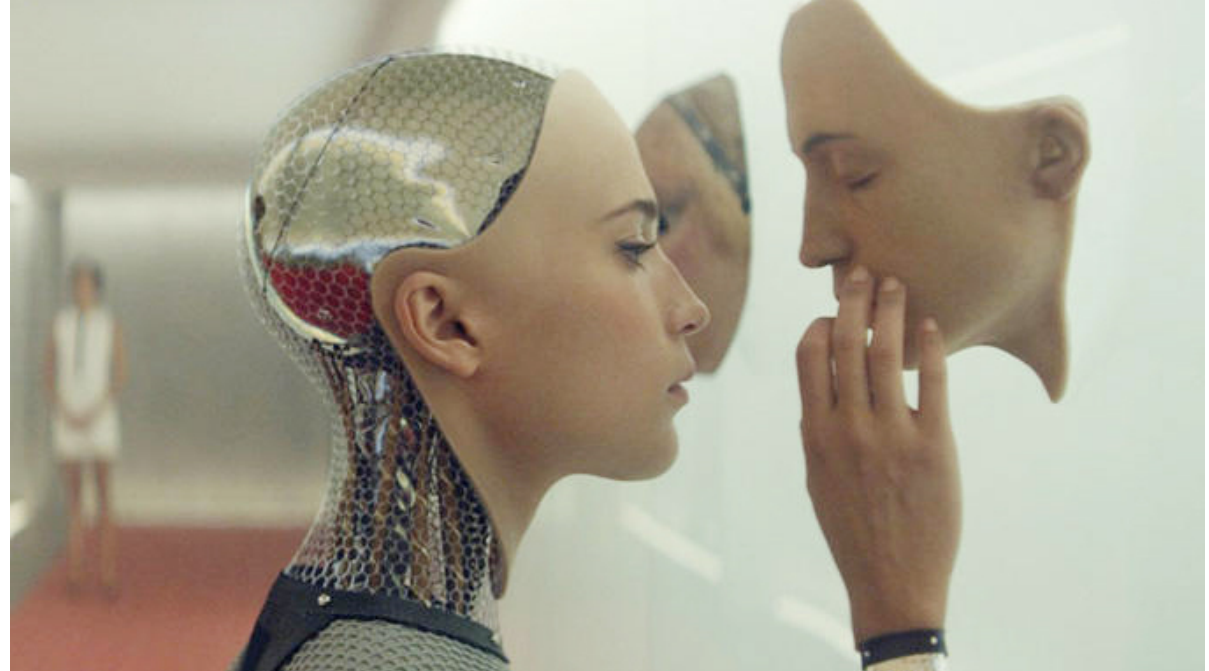
transhumanism

human enhancement

☐ I'm not a robot


reCAPTCHA

Submit



Ex Machina (2014), Dir. Alex Garland

Cyborg Manifesto

Donna Haraway

In it, the concept of the cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, notably those separating "human" from "animal" and "human" from "machine."

Haraway, D., 1990. A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. *Feminism/postmodernism*, pp.190-233.

"We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs."



The Age of the Anthropocene

Anthropocene – A Geological Epoch – The Age of the Humans

- **Human** ('Man') Versus **Nature**
- The Age of the **Enlightenment**

Humanity's impact on the Earth is now so profound that a new geological epoch – the Anthropocene...

The current epoch, the **Holocene**, is the 12,000 years of stable climate since the last ice age during which all human civilization developed.

But the striking acceleration since the mid-20th century of **carbon dioxide emissions** and **sea level rise**, the **global mass extinction of species**, and the **transformation of land by deforestation** and development mark the end of that slice of geological time.

The Earth is so profoundly changed that the Holocene must give way to the Anthropocene.

PERIOD	EPOCH	ERA
QUATERNARY	"ANTHROPOCENE" HOLOCENE PLEISTOCENE	 CENOZOIC <i>Present to 66 million years ago</i>
TERTIARY	PLIOCENE MIOCENE OLIGOCENE EOCENE PALEOCENE	
CRETACEOUS	 MESOZOIC <i>66 to 252 million years ago</i>	
JURASSIC		
TRIASSIC		
PERMIAN CARBONIFEROUS DEVONIAN SILURIAN ORDOVICIAN CAMBRIAN	 PALEOZOIC <i>542 to 252 million years ago</i>	



The Great Acceleration

Accelerationism and the Anthropocene

Accelerationism may also refer more broadly, and usually pejoratively, to support for the deepening of capitalism in the belief that this will hasten its **self-destructive tendencies** and ultimately lead to its collapse



the posthuman in the anthropocene

“We’re probably doomed as
humans if we don’t start thinking in
a posthuman way.”

Mary Mattingly



Mary Mattingly: *Flock*, 2012, chromogenic dye coupler print, 30 inches square



The Furies (Titian, again)

Mary Mattingly, 2013, chromogenic dye coupler print, 40" x 40", © 2013, courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery and the artist



Floating a Boulder

Mary Mattingly, 2012, chromogenic dye coupler print, 40" x 40", © 2012, courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery and the artist

Footing the Bill: Art and Our Ecological Footprint



Life of Objects

Mary Mattingly, 2013, chromogenic dye coupler print, 40" x 40", © 2013, courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery and the artist



Pull

Mary Mattingly, 2013, chromogenic dye coupler print, 40" x 40", © 2013, courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery and the artist

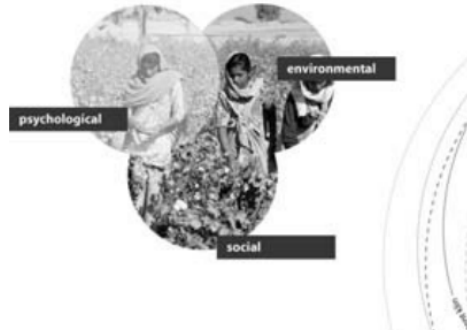
The Posthuman Predicament

Anthropocene Revisited

- anthropocentric v ecocentric
- Custodian approach over nature
- Nature as resource

The Three Ecologies

Felix Guattari



Even though ***The Three Ecologies*** was published in 1989, and offers some approaches to the global ecological crisis, most of the problems it highlights still continue today, some have even become more amplified as we persist to collectively commit *ecocide* as a species.

Felix Guattari re-defines the dictionary meaning of the word **ecology**, traditionally limited to the natural world, and extends its meaning to include **human subjective ecologies and socio-political ecologies**.

The main problem with the crisis of our era he asserts lies in the separation of these three registers.

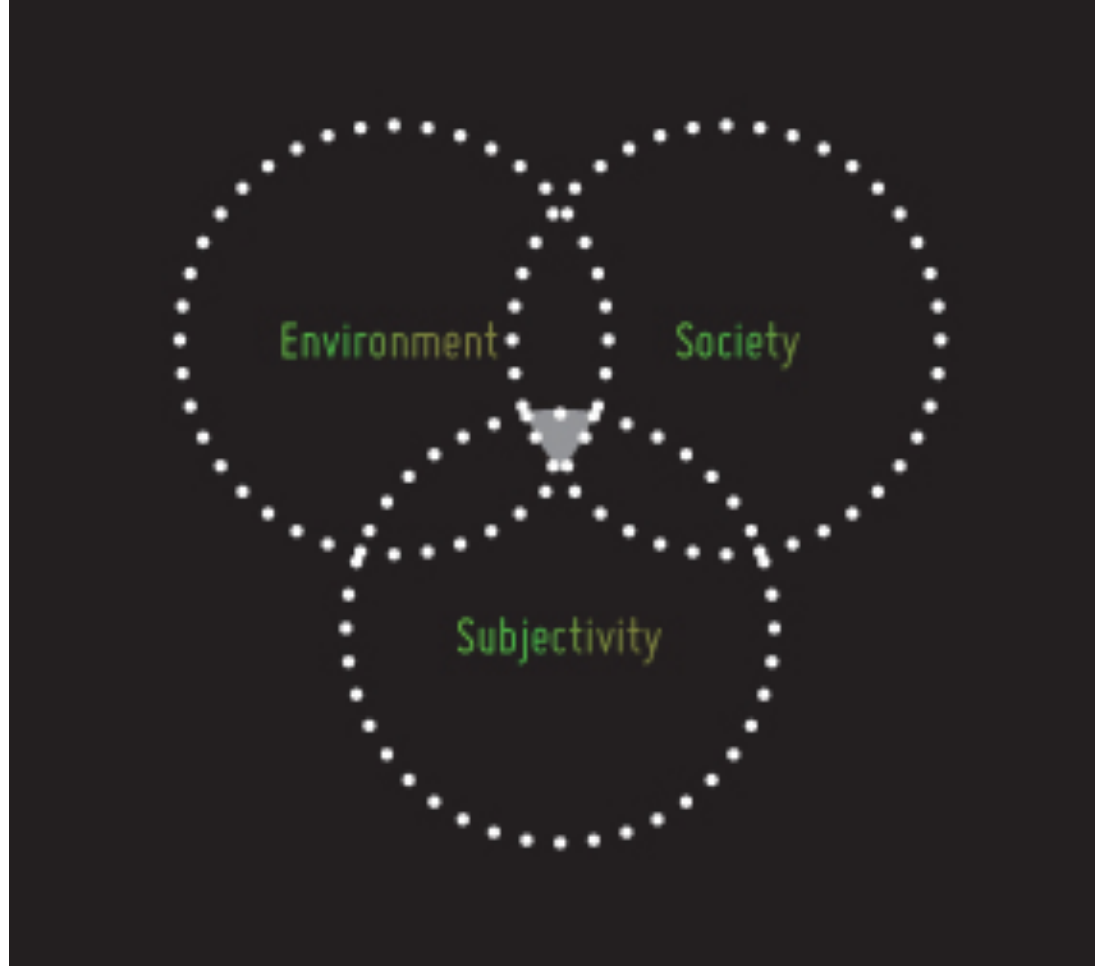
BLOOMSBURY
REVELATIONS



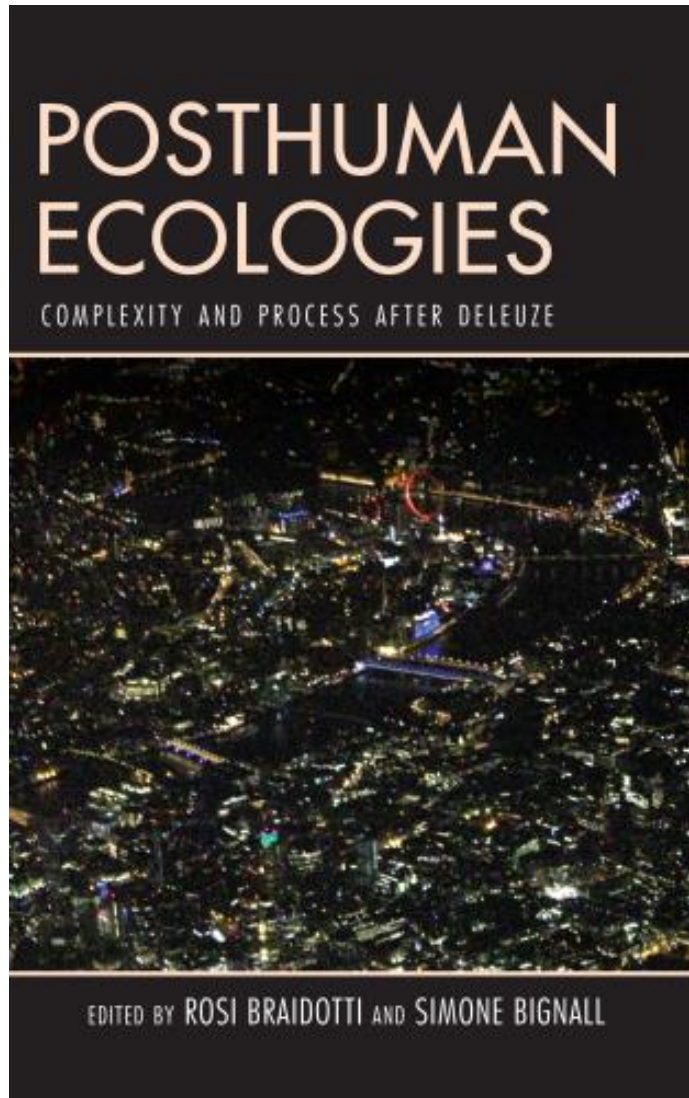
FÉLIX
GUATTARI

THE THREE
ECOLOGIES

B L O O M S B U R Y



Ecosophical perspective as articulated by Félix Guattari, at the intersection of environmental, social and subjective (mind) domains. The ecosophical concept envisions 'a reconstruction of social and individual practices' through both scientific and aesthetic embodiment.



We are in this together – Rosi Braidotti

The Posthuman Condition

The End of Man

A Feminist Counterapocalypse

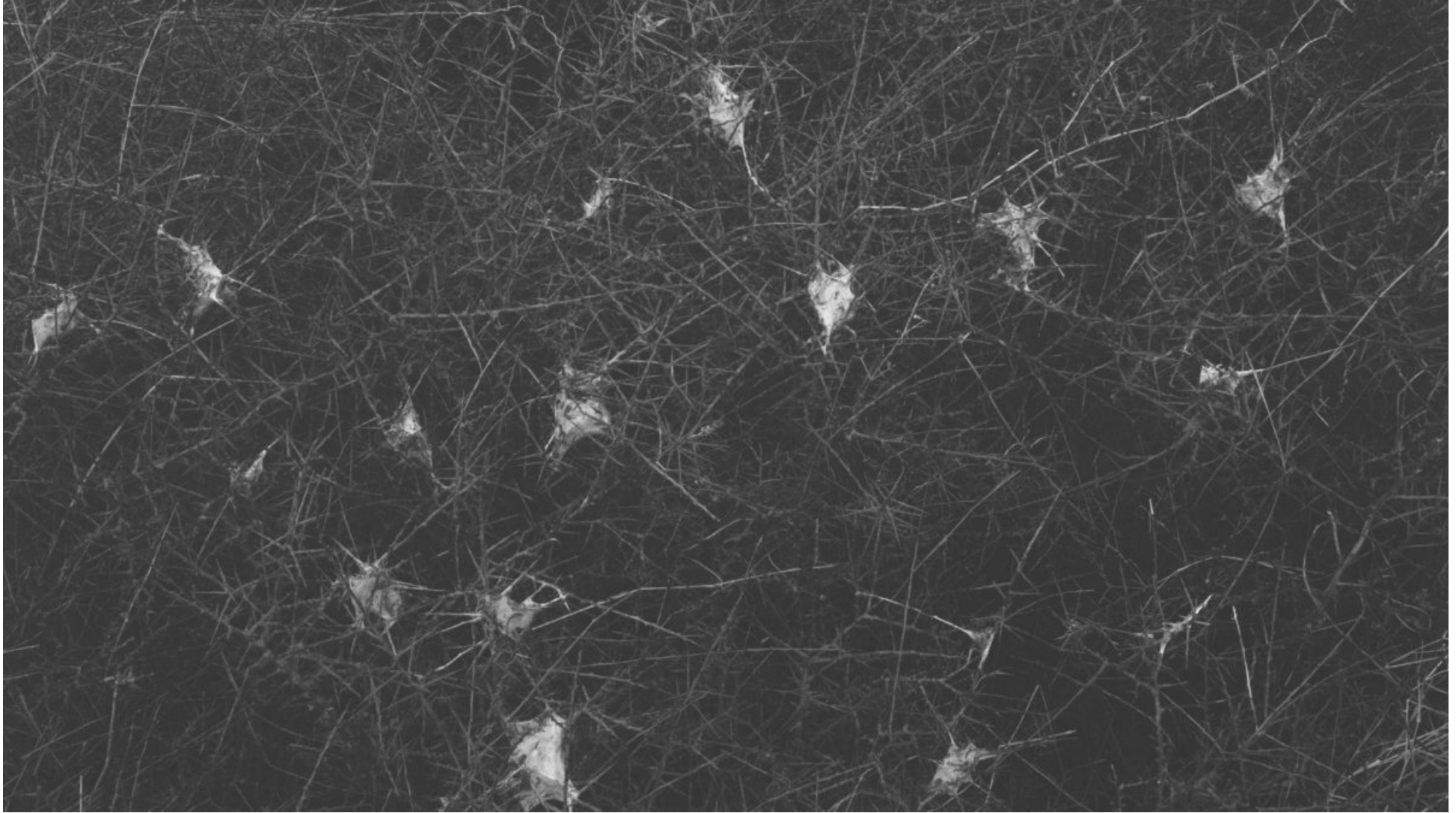
Joanna Zylinska



“We need a new way of seeing the Anthropocene”

EXIT MAN

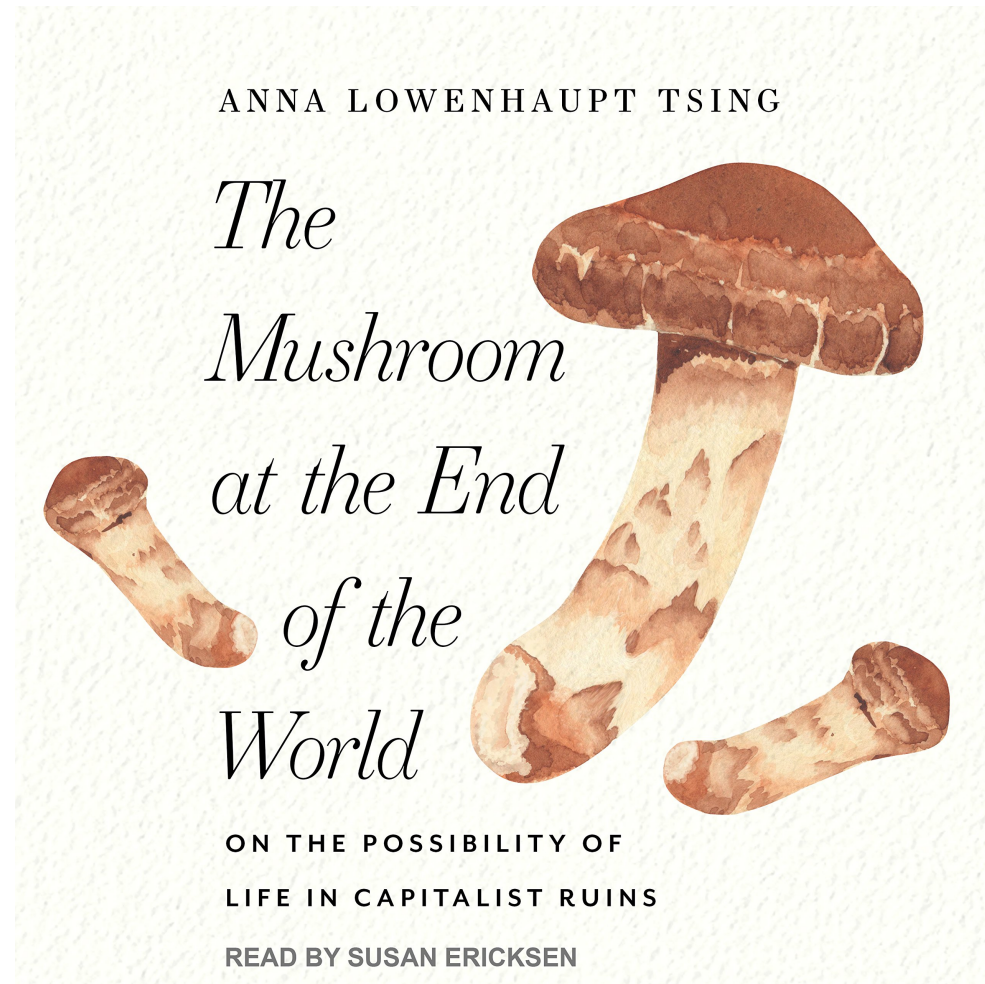
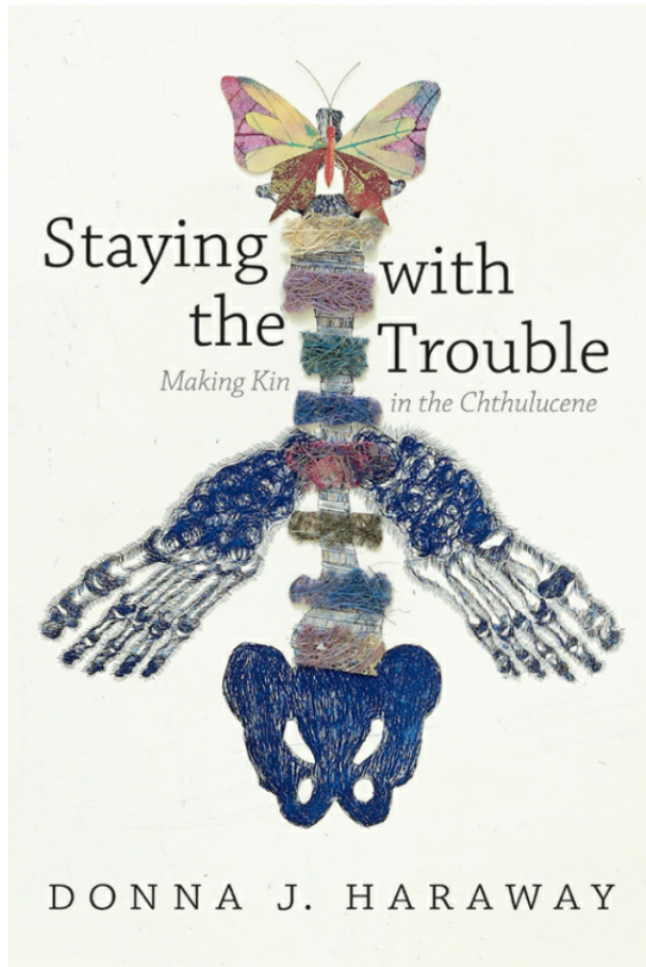
TOWARDS PHOTOGRAPHY WITHOUT MAN?



Nonhuman photography, 2017, Joanna Zylińska

Capturing the End of the World

“precarity *is* the condition of our time”



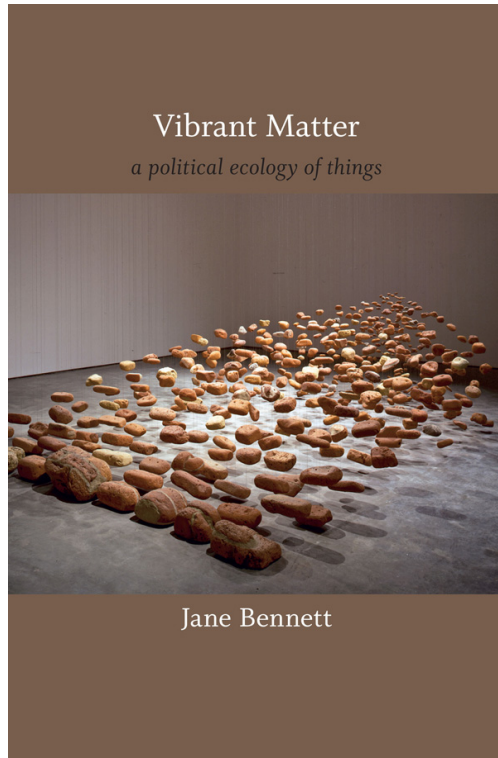
Aluna
*The Mamas
and Younger
Brother*

*The Kogi People,
Columbia*

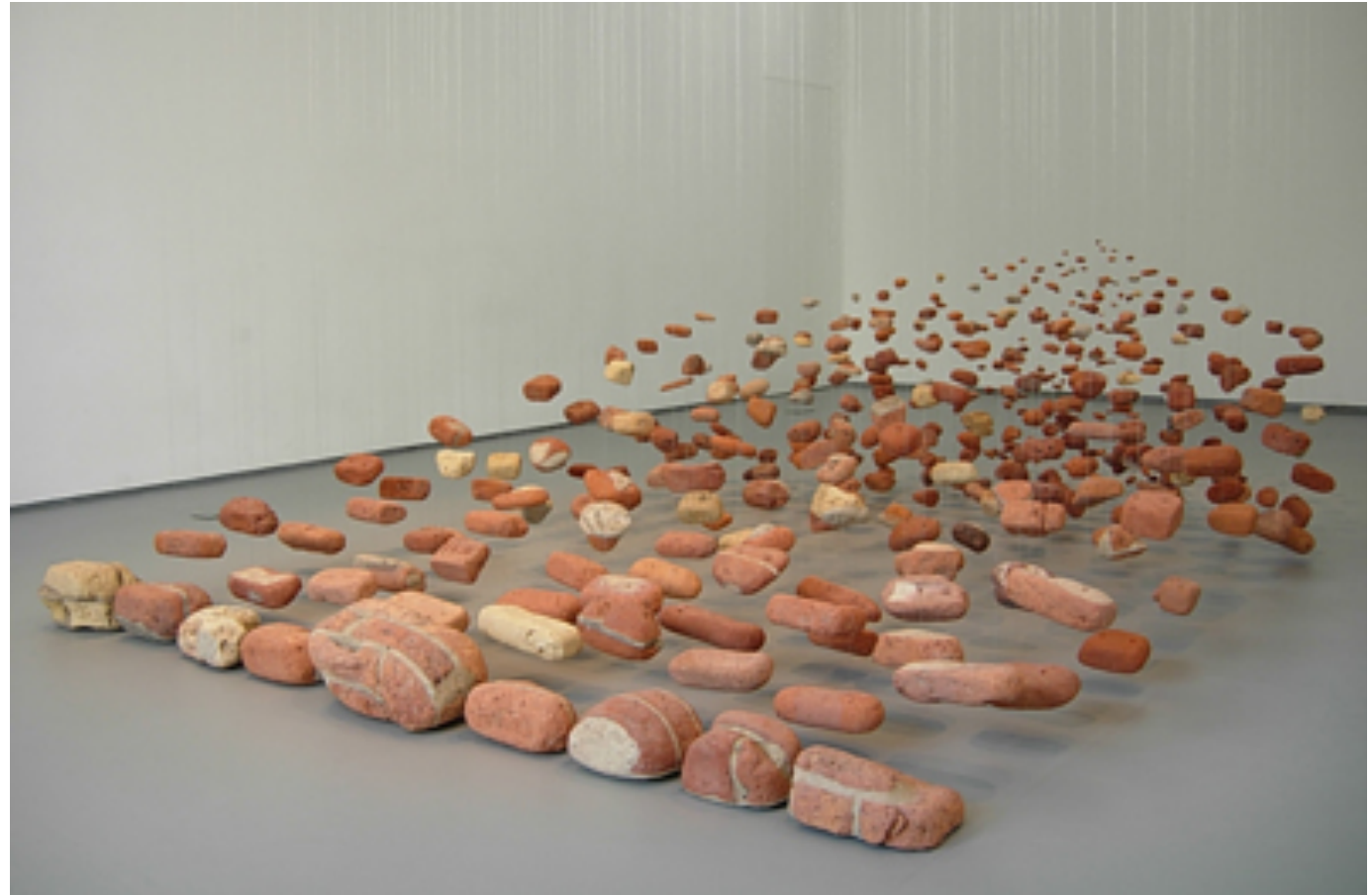


A Kogi Indian in a
scene from *Aluna*

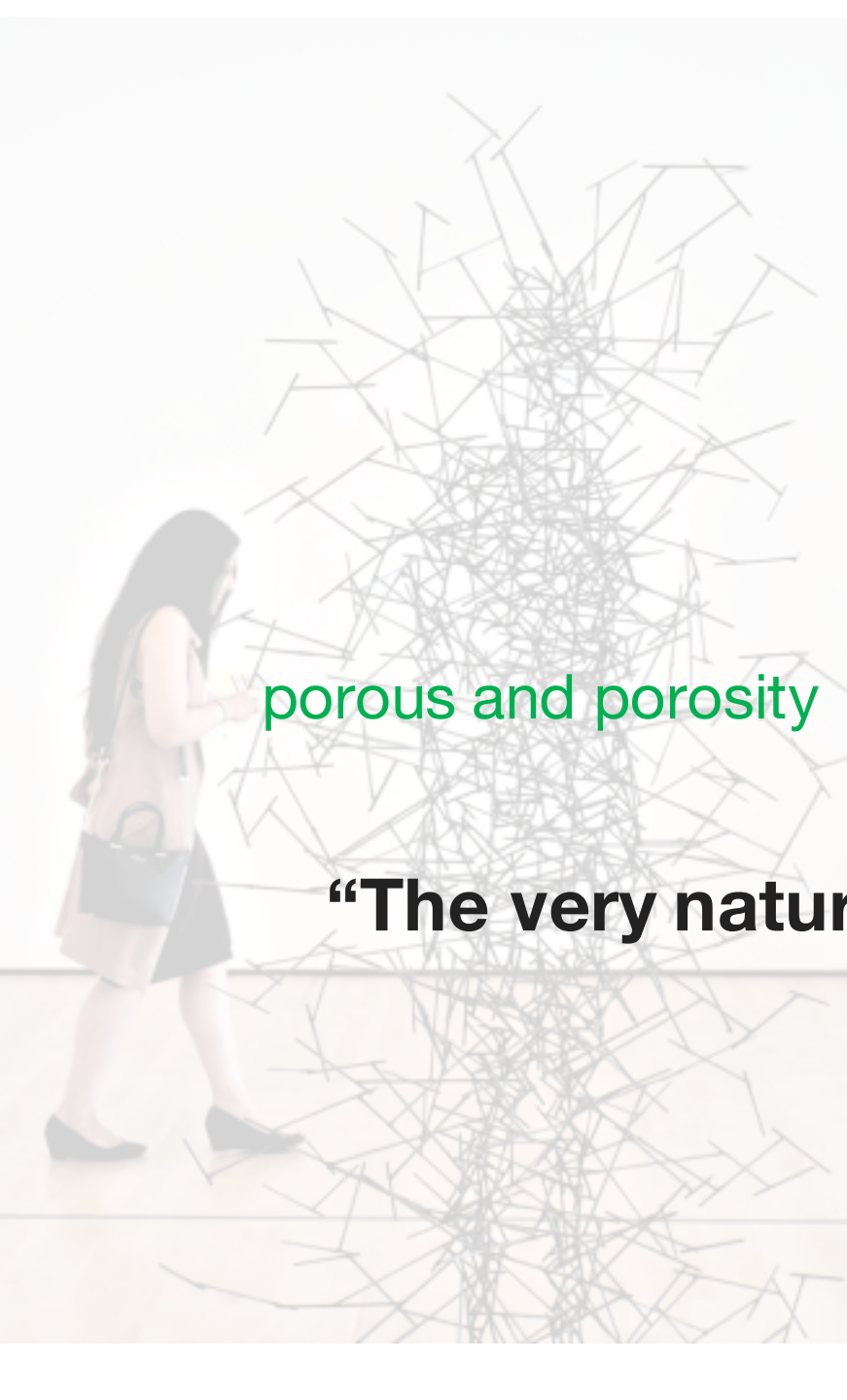
New Materialism



“Vibrant Matter”



Neither From Nor Towards (1992) – Cornelia Parker



porous and porosity



boundaries and borders



flow and fluidity

“The very nature of materiality is an entanglement...”

open v closed

system | cybernetics

Brittle Star

the nonhuman turn

emerging philosophies seeking to
decentre the human – emphasising the
agency of the nonhuman world

The brittlestar is an animal without a brain. It does not suffer the Cartesian doubts of an alleged mind/body split. Knowing is entangled with its mode of being. Brittlestars don't *have* eyes. They *are* eyes.

That is, it is not merely the case that its visual system is embodied. Its very being is a visualizing apparatus. Its morphology – its intertwined skeletal and diffuse nervous systems, its very structure and form – forms a visualizing system.



Brittle Star (ophiura ophiura)

Agnieszka Kurant



chemical garden (2021)

Collective Intelligence explores the artist's work over the last ten years, examining her interdisciplinary practice, which focuses on collective intelligence—a phenomenon observed in bacteria, animals, social movements, internet, cities, and inside our brains—where novel forms emerge in unpredictable ways out of interactions among thousands of elements or agents in a complex system.

Anicka Yi

on
nonhuman ecologies
and
embodied machines



Biologizing the Machine (tentacular trouble), Anicka Yi, Biennale 2019

Anicka Yi

Biologizing the Machine (terra incognita), 2019.

Installed at the 58th
International Art Exhibition –
La Biennale di Venezia.



Biologizing the Machine (terra incognita), Anicka Yi, Biennale 2019



‘Becoming Plant’ - *Annihilation* (2018), Dir. Alex Garland – conceptual mutations of real-life Hox Genes into Sci-Fi Horror



Posthumanism

Posthuman or post-human is a concept originating in the fields of **science fiction**, **futurology**, **contemporary art**, and **philosophy** that literally means a person or entity that exists in a state beyond being human.

- post-humanism – after *humanism*...
- de-centering of **Man**
- convergence of humans and technology
- contrast with **transhumanism**

WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?