

Fabienne Collignon

The Posthuman as Inhuman: To Lend an Ear, to Fall

There is, as it were, a tier of interests, occasioned by James Burton's contribution, "Posthuman or Postandroid? Philip K. Dick's Androidization", itself much more closely obedient to Philip K. Dick's work, latent below, as if forming, in a Lovecraftian sense, a "boundless vista of an inner world" (2007: 31). PKD exists, here, as swarming, diffusive presence to which I bend an ear/this writing. A reflective, oblique piece, its energy is as much creative as it is critical; it also moves beyond, as it inhabits, the subject, namely the concept of obedience to messages, sounds passing further than what is actually heard, the ability to listen to addresses that are "inhuman", and/or exiled, "nocturnal" (Lyotard 1991: 179).

A tier, then, composed as follows: the 'human' as always already technologized, the inextricability of the so-called human and technicity, and, bringing with it, questions of value or of irreparable damage inflicted, because the discourse of value (what is the value of a life?) assigns 'worth' to some lives over others. A response that is loosely structured around these mooring-points, and which derives from Burton's observation that "[b]ecoming-android, or being androidized" is a process of 'becoming predictable, obedient': the programmable object, captured, disposable, exhausted. Burton raises issues, as mentioned above, to do with the politics at work in acts of valuation—urgent questions, considering the ubiquity of such concepts of 'value', inscribed or subsumed into the logic of the market, which 'values' nothing other than productivity and consumption. The market is not attentive to the lives, as such, their 'whatever' singularities (Agamben 2009), it supposedly 'values', but only to lives made 'useful'.¹ Value only exists there, where the market 'invests' it.

The proximity between the so-called human and the technological invariably throws up issues about the instrumentalisation of life. Hence, perhaps, those defences put up against 'our' inhuman (in the sense, too, of residing within) dimensions and the efforts to monumentalise the

¹ On this note see Kathryn Yussof's, "On the Valuation of Nature" (2011). Other recent scholarship includes Sam Ladkin, Robert McKay and Emile Bojesen's *Against Value in the Arts and Humanities* (2016). The book presents a genealogy of value, concentrating on a politics of harm perpetuated by ostensibly 'positive' values, such as transparency, commitment, future, growth.

'human' as apart, a rhetoric that, as Alastair Hunt (2011), following Hannah Arendt, shows, is bound up with producing rightlessness: there is an order of knowledge, mechanisms of recognition, necessary to be considered 'human' (and at the expense of all non-human others). *Entpersonalisierung*, after all, comes at a cost, and it is in those terms that 'becoming-android', as Burton demonstrates, is often understood. The consequences of de-subjectifying processes have to remain at the heart, the ethical centre, of any analyses that investigate or otherwise explore the possibilities of what Deleuze calls a "minoritarian-becoming" (2012: 4), bearing in mind that such a process – if occurring as a critical project intent on dismantling the verticality of the subject, its false autonomy and immunity – tends to be the dream or prerogative of the privileged, those already attributed with a recognizable subjectivity, in the sense, or eyes, of the law, the *polis*. This acknowledged subject is, by no means, a singular entity; Deleuze's insistence on multiplicity, on the 'subject' as "collective assemblages of enunciation", as "populations" rather than "[specificity]" (2012: 21), has become the "*mot d'ordre*" (Deleuze 2012: 11) of late consumer capitalist culture. The mythical being of the impermeable ego (no option, either, to stand against the supposedly joyful dissipation of the consumer-capitalist 'entity'), though, certainly does not need safeguarding, rescuing, or protecting, and, at any rate, the rhetoric of protection and security makes me gag. *Geborgenheit durch Sicherheit* is itself, of course, the *mot d'ordre* of the state of exception, a cocooning examined, amongst others, by Eyal Sivan and Audrey Maurion's 2004 film *Aus Liebe zum Volk*, shown in an exhibition, in May 2016, called *Nervous Systems* at *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin: the film is based on the personal testimony of a Stasi officer.²

I would, then, at this point, and on the back of the previously raised concerns occurring in Burton's piece, proceed with a reflection on obedience – thereby returning to the starting citation of the present contribution: 'becoming-android' as associated with submission, through the act of hearing, being interpellated as a particular 'subject' (slave-thing) before the law – by making reference to Jean-François Lyotard's argument, about obedience, in *The Inhuman*:

Auf jemanden hören, to listen to someone, to lend one's ear to someone, *das ist gehorsam zu sein*, is to be of obedience (I'm inventing the German—[Emmanuel] Swedenborg's *Treatise [of Representations and Correspondences]* is written in Latin).

² For further information: <http://www.aus-liebe-zum-volk.de/> as well as https://hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2016/nervoese_systeme/nervoese_systeme_start.php

To obey is *gehörchen*. *Gehören* is not far, to pertain to, to depend on an agency, to fall into a domain, under an authority, a *dominus*. And *zuhören*, to lend one's ear. There is an inexhaustible network linking listening to belonging, to the sense of obligation, a passivity I should like to translate to *passibility*. (Lyotard 1991: 178)

Passibility, Lyotard writes earlier, has to do with being receptive, and, in a sense, with losing propriety, that which is 'proper' to the game being played, the activity solicited by a (computer) programme (cf. 1991: 117). Lyotard starts his inquiry about the inhuman, encompassing efforts to somehow think the unthinkable, that which might "forbid interrogation, suspicion" (1991: 1), or that which, in a Lovecraftian way, is unnamed, unnameable – Lovecraft, similarly, speaks about "obeisance" to unsuspected orders (2007: 24) – with a paradoxical premise, "two sorts of inhuman" (Lyotard 1991: 2). The first, still prone to sheltering a humanist ideology, used by talking about the 'inhumanity' of the system, presupposes that the 'human' is that which nurtures, gives care, bestows the 'gift' of life; the second is the one I'd like to think through: the proposition, by no means 'new', that what is 'proper' to me is an inhabitation by the inhuman (cf. Lyotard 1991: 2), as that which decentres ontological certainty, to which I am/become obedient, or lend an ear.

To perform, then, without trying to lose sight of my own position of privilege, a reading of a 'becoming-android' against value, read bio-capitalisation, and against the 'negative' value of obedience, not with the objective to redeem the 'bad', and make it 'good', e.g., into a nominal good on which the logic of the market depends, but to encourage a "power of disquiet" attributed to thought (Lyotard 1991: 74). Lending an ear means taking a call, which includes the possibility of taking a call from the SS, to gesture towards Avital Ronell's work (1989) on Heidegger, or the Cthulhu, that ancient "polypous thing" (Lovecraft 2007: 44) that masters dreams in Lovecraft's fiction, to being summoned to a 'festival' by ancient, unmentionable writings (Lovecraft 2007: 31); it means taking a fall, too, "[falling] into a domain" (more references to horror, here, to Lovecraft, to Poe), that abyss thought might lead to, to letting myself drop (is this an act without appropriation, without will?); to an effort to listen to the machinations inside me, that, in fact, constitute 'me'. "Becoming-android", as such, is linked to love, affinity, complicity, to lending an ear, waiting to hear (a suspension that could never end), to leaving a blank, if also to unthinkable horror (where is this horror emanating from, a residual humanism? some sort of indication of what is 'proper', after all, to what 'belongs' to me at the expense of jettisoning the other?). But, in lending an ear, how the 'subject' is formed to begin

with, there remains an excess, because, as Judith Butler argues (1997), the communication received is also 'turned', repeated, thereby changed. A remainder, of a message received and exceeded – there is no absolute fidelity, as Derrida shows (1992), to the work or words of the other – is, in a sense, visible or audible, in Lyotard's quotation above. Reading Swedenborg – the act of reading as obedience to another spirit, yielding "a convocation by another voice" (1991: 178) –, Lyotard is also 'inventing' German, an inaudible thing which nonetheless, somehow, reaches his ear: an obedience that is, also, following Derrida, a betrayal. If becoming-android, perhaps, after all, just another name for becoming-subject – the curious paradox of the process of subjectification is its concurrent de-subjectification – is linked to obedience, then it also comes with the possibility to, in the act of hearing, fall into a 'domain' disturbed by that very act: a space of dependency and, yet, indetermination, in terms of the unintentional, incalculable things I might hear and which could, in turn, lead to any number of radical, dangerous intimacies.

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