



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Modernism and posthumanism

**Citation for published version:**

Adkins, P 2022, Modernism and posthumanism. in S Herbrechter, I Callus, M Rossini, M Grech, M de Bruin-Molé & CJ Müller (eds), *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*. Palgrave Macmillan.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42681-1\\_31-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42681-1_31-1)

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1007/978-3-030-42681-1\\_31-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42681-1_31-1)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



## **Modernism and Posthumanism**

Dr Peter Adkins (Independent Scholar, Canterbury, UK, peteradkins349@gmail.com)

### **Abstract:**

This chapter makes the case for the importance of the early twentieth century in the emergence of posthumanism. Beginning by tracing two of the earliest examples of the word 'posthuman', the chapter explores the social movements, philosophical departures and technological developments that encouraged writers to reassess the category of the human during this period. Exploring how a wide range of modernist writers reimagined the human through innovations in both form and content, it looks at the refiguring of life that we find in writers such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence, as well as the celebration of machines and technology that we find in Italian Futurism. Showing how for a range of modernist writers, posthumanism was associated with masculinity and even misogyny, the chapter sheds light on how for other writers posthumanism was used to feminist ends. Looking in particular at the feminist manifesto and poetry of Mina Loy, alongside the feminist essays and fiction of Woolf, the chapter suggests we find a form of posthumanism that foreshadows contemporary posthumanist feminism in certain ways, but which, in other respects, makes clear the difference between modernist thought and contemporary posthumanist theory. The chapter concludes by documenting the influence of modernism on the development of critical posthumanism and its potential to influence ongoing debates and discussion around what it means to be human.

### **Keywords:**

Modernism, modernity, futurism, vorticism, the posthuman

Main Text:

It might reasonably be argued that posthumanism was an invention of modernism. Although it is certainly the case that posthumanist ideas predate the twentieth century, it was, nonetheless, during the first half of the previous century that the word *posthuman* began to be used, accompanied by an increasing sense that a new era in human life had arrived. Moreover, even at its point of origin, the concept of the posthuman was multiple, controversial and contradictory. Two examples will illustrate the point: the first recorded usage of the word 'posthuman' and a letter by James Joyce in which he uses the term to explain the intentions of his modernist epic, *Ulysses* (1922). The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the first occurrence of the word 'posthuman' to *Poverty and Social Progress*, a 1916 sociological study written by the pioneering (and now largely forgotten) American criminologist Maurice Parmelee. In a chapter on eugenics that looks at whether improvements in the 'human breed' might bring about the end of poverty, Parmelee suggests that there is a certain type of eugenicist who believes in the possibility of a scientifically constructed 'utopia based solely on perfected human character'. These improvements, Parmelee continues, would 'bring into being an animal no longer human, or for that matter mammalian, in its character, for it would involve the elimination of such fundamental human and mammalian instincts and emotions as anger, jealousy, fear, etc.'. The result would be a 'post-human animal' (Parmelee, 1917, pp.318-19).

Joyce, on the other hand, offers a more metaphysical, arguably mystic, gloss on the word when writing to his patron Harriet Shaw Weaver (who had bankrolled him during the writing of *Ulysses*). Discussing the final chapter of the novel, 'Penelope', which presents the internal monologue of Molly Bloom, the wife of the novel's principal character Leopold Bloom, Joyce explained that his intention was not verisimilitude, in the sense of an attempt to capture the real inner workings of a female human mind. Instead, he had 'rejected the usual interpretation of her as a human apparition' and in 'conception and technique [...] tried to depict [her as] the earth which is prehuman and presumably posthuman' (Joyce, 1957, p.180). Molly, as he explained in an earlier letter to his friend

Frank Budgen, represents ‘the huge earthball’; she speaks as a kind of posthuman Mother Earth, a symbolic figure of material and linguistic fecundity (Joyce, 1957, p.170). As Jean-Michel Rabaté has observed, Joyce’s use of the term ‘posthuman’ suggests an ambition to make Molly ‘as generic and universal as possible’ by ‘push[ing] her character beyond any human psychology’ and opening up an entirely new way of conceptualising the human (Rabaté, 2016, p.39). Instead of resembling the kind of realistic individualised character we might expect to find in a novel, Molly is an earth goddess, a disembodied voice of female sexuality and a Dublin housewife all at once. This posthuman technique, which Joyce would go on to further utilise in *Finnegans Wake* (1939) where characters incessantly transform and merge, explodes the idea of the human as a discrete unit and points to a way of thinking about human life as always multiple and continuous with inhuman material processes.

Comparing these early occurrences of a posthuman vocabulary brings to light two related but divergent trajectories within modernist posthumanism. While Parmelee’s quotation reflects an increasing technological and social control over bodies, Joyce’s text registers a growing willingness to reimagine human life. Although one might seem to move towards a narrowing down of what it means to be human while the other is premised on opening up the category, both find their origins in the ongoing reverberations of evolutionary theory, technological advances and an increasing sense that the post-Enlightenment idea of the human was no longer tenable. In recent years critics have increasingly come to see modernism in terms of a period of intense posthumanist activity and the location of what Jeff Wallace describes as a ‘certain inaugural moment of the posthuman’ (Wallace, 2017, p.41). As Ruben Borg argues in his monograph *Fantasies of Self-Mourning: Modernism, the Posthuman and the Finite* (2019), posthumanism is the ‘conceptual grammar by which modernism thinks through some of the contradictions inherent to its historical moment’ (Borg, 2019, pp.5-6). Borg lays out a helpful set of theoretical co-ordinates through which we can understand modernism’s relationship to posthumanism. These include modernism’s interest in subjectivity and affect, an understanding of materiality as vital and lively, a critique of organic unity, and an anxiety around the possibility of absolute knowledge of life itself (Borg, 2019, p.6). Dissolving the axiomatic binaries along

which life had long been understood, such as subject and object or body and mind, the human was, as architectural historian Michael K. Hays writes in one of the earliest accounts of modernism's posthumanist aesthetics, 'no longer viewed as an originating agent of meaning, but as a variable and dispersed identity' (Hays, 1992, p.5).

Yet where Hays argues that the human is 'constituted in social practice' (Hays, 1992, p.5) more recent posthumanist accounts of modernism have paid equal attention to both social structures and the organic and inorganic materiality that constitutes and subtends the human, or what Donna Haraway calls the 'material-semiotic' entanglement of life itself (Haraway, 2016, p.13). These studies have included accounts of modernism's preoccupation with corpses as things that transgress the boundary between life and non-life (Edwards, 2018), its interest in cyborgs (Borg, 2019), its figuring of materiality and animality (Ryan, 2014), its intuition of the implications of emergent scientific theories (Wallace, 2005), its predilection for weirdness and excess (Jaffe, 2016), its anxiety around human-animal relations (Rohman, 2009) and its casting of art and performance as shaped by more-than-human actants (Rohman, 2018). In understanding how modernism's renewal of aesthetic form worked towards a 'displacement of anthropocentrism' (Wallace, 2017, p.48), posthumanist readings of modernism have often suggested new ways of understanding its ethical and political commitments. A 2015 special issue of *Twentieth-Century Literature* edited by Derek Ryan looked to bring to light how 'modernism's experimental style' was a key part of its attempt to articulate a non-anthropocentric ethics, unsettling the 'perceived hierarchy between human and nonhuman' (Ryan, 2015, p.300, p.295). Similarly, although preferring the term anti-humanism to posthuman, the 2020 special issue of *Textual Practice* on 'Anti-Humanist Modernism' edited by Guy Stevenson looked at how modernism's 'brutal' rejection of the sentimental baggage that had crept up around humanism during the nineteenth century, paradoxically, worked towards 'socially humanistic ends' (Stevenson, 2020, p.1406). In understanding modernism's latent posthumanism these accounts suggest we might better understand the period and, what is more, engage with some of the theoretical and aesthetic questions that continue to preoccupy posthumanist theory today. This chapter looks at why it was

during the early twentieth century that we find a certain vocabulary of the posthuman beginning to take hold, how it shaped the trajectory of modernism, and, furthermore, how later theories of posthumanism were themselves developed through an engagement with modernism's posthumanist dimensions.

### **Modernism, Modernity and the Posthuman**

The terms 'modernity' and 'modernism' are as contestable as the term 'posthumanism', and questions of periodisation and geography have preoccupied modernist studies in recent years. While once modernism was considered to name the aesthetic revolutions that took place in a handful of metropolises at the turn of the twentieth century, now the topic of when modernism began and ended and where it was located are keenly discussed and debated, with definitions becoming ever more capacious and inclusive (Friedman, 2015; Mao, 2021). Yet, irrespective of how we historicise modernism, contained within the concepts of both 'modernity' and 'modernism' is an implied break with an earlier, pre-modern period; the internal logic of the terms pivot on a departure from an established order into new forms of lived experience, social relations and material conditions. Indeed, those who lived through the early twentieth century were aware that they had witnessed, and were continuing to witness, accelerated transformations in human existence. For Virginia Woolf, in an often-quoted passage from her essay 'Character in Fiction' (1924), such a transformation could be traced back to a particular moment: 'on or about December 1910 human character changed' (Woolf, 2009b, p.38). Woolf is being both sincere and ironic here. She recognises the absurdity in pinpointing a shift within human life to a single point in time, a tendency in a certain kind of historicism that insists rather too much on discrete units of cause and effect, adding in the following paragraph that she gives the date only 'since one must be arbitrary' (p.38). Yet Woolf also points to the evidence that proves such a shift has undoubtedly taken place. Relations between 'masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children' are to Woolf unrecognisable compared to how they had been during the

Victorian period, with concomitant changes in 'religion, conduct, politics and literature' also all pointing to the arrival of a new era in human life. Moreover, as critics have suggested, 1910 is not all that arbitrary within the history of modernism. It marked a key year in the British Suffrage movement, with mass rallies being held in central London. At one such rally on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1910, hundreds of female protestors were violently suppressed by the police, arrested and imprisoned. Subsequently known as 'Black Friday', it was a watershed moment in the rise of violent direct-action by Suffragettes (Goldman, 2006, p.12). A post-Enlightenment democratic ideal based on classical ideas of the human subject that historically excluded women (among others) was in the process of being overturned, although it would take a further eight years until *some* British women were given the vote. 1910 was also the year in which Roger Fry, Woolf's good friend and fellow Bloomsbury Group member, organised the first showing of post-impressionist art in Britain, with his 'Manet and the Post-Impressionist' exhibition shocking and scandalising certain sections of society with its experimental and avant-garde works by artists such as Edouard Manet, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. To look through the paintings listed in the exhibition catalogue is to be confronted with a formal departure from received ideas of how human bodies should look. Picasso's *Jeune fille nue avec panier de fleurs* (1905), from his Rose Period, presents its subject not only naked, but stripped of conventional qualities of beauty and female proportion. The stark primitivism of Gauguin's *Trois Tahitiens, ou Conversation* (1899) is similarly bold, perhaps more so, in its erotic treatment of Polynesian subjects (albeit, filtered through an Orientalist gaze). If, as Rosi Braidotti argues, the dominant humanist understanding of the human was encoded in Leonardo da Vinci's 1492 *Vitruvian Man* drawing, in which the human is implicitly aligned with a male, able-bodied and white subjectivity, then the first decade of the twentieth century saw political and aesthetic articulations of radically new ideas of how the human should be imagined (Braidotti, 2013, pp.14-15).

Indeed, Braidotti's argument finds precedents in the influential philosophy of the modernist period. Two philosophers in particular contributed to the posthumanist aesthetics of modernism: Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson. Nietzsche's overturning of certainties around knowledge,

ontology and morality in the final few decades of the nineteenth century in works such as *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), *Human, All Too Human* (1878) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1878) looked to strip away longstanding ideas of the human. As Wallace writes, the values most cherished by post-Enlightenment modernity, such as 'love, political democracy and progress, science, intellectual idealism, and even "truth"' were shown to be artificial constructs that restrain and even limit life. It is in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1892), Wallace argues, that we find Nietzsche's clearest expression of 'human overcoming', where Zarathustra descends from the solitudes of the mountains to share his wisdom, standing not as a Superman himself but, through his teachings, embodying the way in which the 'Superman is a concept or mode of thought'. The Superman, in this reading of Nietzsche, is understood as a rejection of the confining traditions that have been associated with the human, such as pious morality and unthinking acquiescence, replaced by an understanding of life in terms of pure potentiality, in which the human contains the promise of 'becom[ing] radically new, or other than itself' (Wallace, 2017, pp.41-42). Although Nietzsche died in 1900, his influence on modernism is well documented (Pines and Burnham, 2019). In Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance, Buck Mulligan needles Stephen Dedalus, an aspiring writer who desires to break from the stifling moral conventions of Irish society and Catholicism, mocking him for his desire to become 'the *Übermensch*' (Joyce, 1986, p.19). It is a moment that registers Stephen's ambitions to push beyond a conventional idea of human life and, simultaneously, presents the material difficulties and limitations in putting Nietzschean ideas into practice. Stephen, by the time the novel closes, will be no closer to attaining the posthuman autonomy he so desires. We see a similar interest in the disconnect between Nietzschean ideals and social reality play out again and again in modernist novels. In D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) Rupert Birkin's unhappy misanthropy derives from his thwarted ambitions to push beyond human conventions, while the Dionysian transformation of Gustav von Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) sees the protagonist succumb to the decay and disease that accompanies pursuits of divine amoral pleasure.



Like Nietzsche, Bergson also looked to break away from the conventional frameworks through which life had been understood in the nineteenth century. His hugely popular work *Creative Evolution* (1907) aimed to bring to light the radical implications of evolutionary theory. As Keith Ansell-Pearson points out, two key insights in this aspect of Bergson's thought were that one should not approach nature with 'a priori conception of what constitutes life, including how we delimit the boundaries of an organism' and that one must be wary of allowing 'our need for a unity of knowledge to impose itself upon the multiplicity of nature' (Ansell-Pearson, 2018, p.95). Breaking away from a dualistic understanding of matter and vitality, in which life is seen as the spark added to an otherwise inanimate substance, Bergson's concept of *élan vital* argued that vitality and materiality are bound up together and that their dynamic co-existence is what motors evolutionary change through time. Arguing that space had been privileged at the expense of time, Bergson's philosophy insisted on understanding time not as inherently quantitative (with 'clock time' being a spatial construct imposed on real time) but qualitative, experienced internally as 'the time of active living', or what he called *durée* (Gillie, 1996, p.11). As the modernist poet T.E. Hulme, who was one of the first English language writers to take up Bergson, wrote, Bergson's notion of *durée* positioned time as 'the essential form of our conscious existence. . . . Our mental experience, therefore, presents a real multiplicity of successive states' (Quoted in Ardoin, Gontarski, & Mattison, 2013, p.3, ellipses in original). As with Nietzsche, we find Bergsonian resonances across modernism, perhaps best represented in the preoccupation with subjectivity, intensity and multiplicity so often found in modernist texts. In *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), for instance, Woolf forgoes a stable narrative perspective and breaks with any residual notion of a Cartesian mind-body duality, turning to a free indirect third-person narration that seamlessly moves between interior subjectivity and exterior reality. The result is a novel that has an aesthetics of immanence in which life seems to emerge from the material network of London and remain intrinsically continuous with it and, which like Bergson's philosophy, insists on the vitality of materiality and the importance of duration.

Moreover, it was not just feminism, art and philosophy that were challenging old ideas of what it meant to be human. New and ascendent technologies were also hastening social and material change within human life. For imperial powers such as Britain, the abundance of materials being extracted from its colonies (including, increasingly, oil) and the availability of new materials such as plastics and rubber further drove the production and availability of new consumables. New technologies in the middle-class home and the workplace such as the telephone, the typewriter and the radio were changing daily life. At the same time, large-scale ecological changes were occurring: agriculture was becoming further mechanised with the invention of the tractor and new chemical pesticides, making the countryside an extension of the industrial production seen in cities, while new techniques and tools in mining were allowing deeper and trickier seams of coal and ore to be exploited (memorably represented in Lawrence's *Women in Love*, where the young colliery magnate Gerald Crich is able to extract coal unobtainable to his father before him). It was during this period that the invention of the internal combustion engine and the development of liquid fuels resulted in horse-drawn transport being rapidly phased out in favour of petrol- and, later, diesel-fuelled cars and buses, supplemented by electrified networks of trams in larger cities. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* captures the sense of shock that would have accompanied such technological novelty when Clarissa Dalloway, shopping for flowers for her party, jumps at the 'violent explosion' of a motor-car backfiring, believing at first it to be a 'pistol shot in the street' (Woolf, 2009a, p.12). Describing that most ubiquitous phenomenon of the modern city, the traffic jam, Woolf likens the 'throb of motor engines' to a 'pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body', with the vehicles taking on a kind of embodied autonomy that, in entwining the human and the machine, presents itself an assemblage of flesh and metal (pp.12-13). On leaving the shop, Clarissa is witness to the intrusion of another novel form of transport, as the 'sound of an aeroplane bore[s] ominously into the ears' of a transfixed crowd watching it spell out the name of a brand of toothpaste in the sky, signifying not only the way in which planes were redrawing transnational transport routes but also being put to use in the service of consumer capitalism (p.17). By the 1940s, these new modes of transport had become synonymous

not just with travel and consumerism, however, but also with a newly militarised reality. Amidst the aerial attacks of World War Two, the whining sound of plane engine no longer present a merely ominous timbre to Woolf's ear, but the horrifying 'zoom of a hornet which may at any moment sting you to death' (Woolf, 2009b, p.216).

The global conflicts of the first half of the century not only brought with them new forms of killing and death at a previously impossible scale, but also became catalysts for social and political change. Again, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* records the apparent suddenness of such change. Peter Walsh, returning to post-World War One London from British Imperial India, is presented as observing the rapidity with which society seems to be being reorganised:

Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected very important. *People looked different.* Newspapers seemed different. Now, for instance, there as a man writing quite openly in one of the respectable weeklies about water closets. That you couldn't have done ten years ago [...] And then this taking out a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff, and making up in public. (Woolf, 2009a, p.61, emphasis added).

Woolf captures the increasing sense that the world of the early twentieth century would have been unrecognisable to those living even just a few decades previously. Moreover, as Walsh's anthropological observation implies, the human did not stand outside of this accelerated trajectory of transformation. New forms of medicine, leisure, work and transport were all at work remoulding the organic life they came into contact with, making Walsh's experience of returning to London deeply disorientating. Approaching Regent's Park Tube Station, Walsh is disturbed by a sound 'bubbling up without direction [...] absen[t] of all human meaning' coming from a 'tall, quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump' (Woolf, 2009a, pp.68-69). Revealed to be a 'battered woman' singing for alms, she seems to Walsh both ancient, a feminine archetype that goes back 'a million years', and, at the same time, an uncanny extension of the technological apparatus of the tube station itself (Woolf, 2009a, p.69). It is an example of the way in which, as Alex Goody states, '[m]odern techno-culture

breache[d] the human subject', shockingly overturning the Cartesian idea that the human was a bounded organic subject, as 'technology [became] inextricable from any attempt to take the body as the stable origin of subjective articulation' (Goody, 2019, p.14). Any general consensus that "the human" was a self-evident or fixed category of being, which had been inherited (in however a distorted or simplified form) from the age of enlightenment humanism, was looking less and less convincing. As Paul Sheehan frames it, the period saw 'a turn away from the human as a *given* towards the human as a *problem*' (Sheehan, 2002, p.181, emphasis in original).

This perception of the modern human as a problem, in the sense of something that needed to be rethought and reconceptualised, including its relation to the social, political and technological networks in which it was embedded, became a recurrent site of preoccupation for a wide range of modernists. Yet, what set modernist writers apart from earlier and contemporaneous writers also writing about modernity was not just what they chose to write about, but how they wrote. Although definitions of modernism are, as above mentioned, increasingly open, the body of work that has conventionally come under the banner of modernist is not only historically determined, but aesthetically too. The sense that the newness of lived experience demands new forms of writing and an ambivalence towards (although not an outright rejection of) many of the literary traditions of the nineteenth century is repeated across modernist writing. In Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, for instance, it is as much her innovative use of free indirect discourse that can be seen to respond to the modernity of post-war London as her choice to write about new forms of technology, politics and social relations. As already discussed, Woolf departs from the convention of employing a stable narrative perspective, instead opting for a form of narration which seems to glide between internal subjectivity and external objectivity, suggesting the permeability of the two. Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is comprised of eighteen stylistically distinct episodes, goes even further. Switching between different types of narrative, including free indirect discourse, internal monologue (sometimes referred to as "stream of consciousness"), drama, and, even, omniscient narration, the novel suggests the absolute interchangeability of perspective and brings to light the way the human appears differently depending

on what narrative lens we perceive it through. In both Woolf and Joyce we find a clear example of what Sheehan describes as how 'in the modernist novel the struggle with narrative [...] is really a struggle with the human' (Sheehan, 2002, p.191). As Sheehan argues, if the dominant form of the realist novel had become synonymous with a humanist model of the human, tied to an idea of progress, perfectibility, rational causality, and coherent self-identity, then the experimental and often disorienting forms of the modernist novel were premised precisely on upending these ideas of what it means to be human.

Another striking example of experimentation with narrative as experimentation with the dominant idea of the human is D.H. Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow* (1915), which, like *Mrs Dalloway*, also uses the car as a symbol of new material relations between humans, machines and their environments. As Ursula Brangwen and her lover Anton Skrebensky race through the Nottinghamshire countryside in his motorcar, Lawrence describes how:

The wind blew in on Ursula's face, the mud flew in a soft, wild rush from the wheels, the country was blackish green, with the silver of new hay here and there, and masses of trees under a silver-gleaming sky. Her hand tightened on his with a new consciousness, troubled. They did not speak for some time but sat, handfast, with averted, shining faces. (Lawrence, 1995, p.283)

The shining faces of the passengers, the silver-gleaming sky, the metallic hay and the blackish-green sheen of the fields transform the bucolic into the machinic, the car not only accelerating through the countryside but seeming to transform and contaminate all that it comes into contact with. As I have written elsewhere, the scene is one of an unnatural nature, where humans, machines and the nonhuman have become fundamentally and irreversibly entangled (Adkins, forthcoming). Like Woolf and Joyce, Lawrence's novel departs from a stable or realist presentation of human psychology, opting for an experimental presentation in which there appears to be a material continuity between the human and the nonhuman, and the inner life of the subject and the exterior processes going on around

it. Writing to Edward Garnett in 1914, while working on *The Rainbow*, Lawrence explained how readers should not 'look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states' (Lawrence, 1932, p.198). As Wallace has argued, allotropy—the ability of certain chemical elements to exist in multiple forms—provided Lawrence with a metaphor for his idea of the human as unstable, porous and self-differentiating (Wallace, 2005, p.195; see also, Monaco, 2008, pp.54-87). For Lawrence, in his own words, 'that which is physic, non-human, in humanity, is more interesting [...] than the old-fashioned human element' (Lawrence, 1932, p.197).

Indeed, that Lawrence looks to science and technology for an aesthetic theory is not hugely surprising. Although the above quoted passage from *The Rainbow* (and the novel as a whole) registers disdain about the mechanisation of rural England, Lawrence's likely inspiration for the scene originated in a much more positive account of the possible relationship between humans and machines, especially cars. As he explains in the same letter to Garnett, at the same time he was writing *The Rainbow* he had been avidly reading the manifestos of the Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti and felt that there was something 'futuristic' in his own writing, albeit 'quite unconsciously so' (Lawrence, 1932, p.197). Marinetti had lit the fuse under the posthuman possibilities of avant-garde art when in February 1909 he published 'The Founding and the Manifesto of Futurism' on the front page of the French newspaper, *Le Figaro*. Opening *in medias res* with the proclamation 'We had stayed up all night – my friends and I – beneath mosque lamps hanging from the ceiling [...] illuminated [...] like our souls, by the imprisoned brilliance of an electric heart', the manifesto reads like a fever dream in which humans, machines and other nonhuman entities bleed into one another (Marinetti, 2005, p.3). Retelling the 'furious sweep of madness' during which he and his unnamed collaborators established the tenets of futurism, Marinetti describes racing through the streets in a car until, swerving to avoid two cyclists, he 'rolled over into a ditch, with my wheels in the air'. He continues:

Oh! Maternal ditch, nearly full of muddy water! Fair factory drain! I gulped down your bracing slime, which reminded me of the sacred black breast of my Sudanese nurse. . . . When I climbed out, a filthy and stinking rag, from underneath the capsized car, I felt my heart – deliciously – being slashed with the red-hot iron of joy. (Marinetti, 2005, p.4, ellipses in original)

The language and imagery is that of speed, intensity and overload, of the human subject becoming engorged and split asunder by a vortex of more-than-human forces. The primitive life-force (symbolised in the racist image of the Sudanese nurse who stands in for ‘the primordial elements’ of the human) and the ceaseless energy of the machine meet not through harmonious synthesis, but through a violent, searing and transformative encounter (Marinetti, 2005, p.4). The essay’s emphasis on movement, fragmentation, angularity and abstraction would also go on to be reflected in the visual works that came to be associated with futurist artists such as Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Gino Severini, as well as Marinetti’s own concrete poetry, in which the angular and fragmented arrangement of the typography is just as important as the semantic content.

For the futurists, then, technological acceleration provided both aesthetic form and content and, as Lawrence described in a letter to A.D. McLeod, succeeded in enacting a ‘purging of the old forms and sentimentalities’ and leading a revolt against ‘slavish adherence to tradition and the dead mind’ (Lawrence, 1932, pp.195-96). As Marinetti goes on to explain in an eleven-point list spelling out Futurism’s principles, the movement was motivated by ‘the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness’. Writing in a pre-World War One context, Marinetti could endorse the ‘glory of war’ as ‘the only hygiene of world’ and speak favourably of the destruction of ‘museums, libraries, academies of every sort’, positioning the Futurism as a clarifying agent of aesthetic violence that might cut through the ‘fetid cancer’ of a society bogged down in tradition (Marinetti, 2005, pp.4-5). Yet, Lawrence was not wholly sold on Marinetti’s ‘hymn’ to ‘the steering wheel’ (Marinetti, 2005, p.4), seeing aspects of Futurism as ‘the most self-conscious, intentional, pseudo-scientific stuff on the face

of the earth' and '[disagreeing] with them as to the cure and the escape' (Lawrence, 1932, p.196; see also, Harrison, 2003). And certainly, the horrifying realities of World War One and its aftermath would cast a retrospective shadow on the movement's early enthusiasm for violence as cleansing and invigorating, as would Marinetti's early endorsement of the Italian Fascist Party and friendship with Benito Mussolini in the years following. Yet, Futurism nonetheless had a decisive influence on what Wallace has identified as the 'Heroic-egoistic' mode of posthumanism discernible in the English language modernism of the 1910s. Lawrence, as already discussed, was reading and finding inspiration, however qualified, in the Futurists. Joyce, who lived in the Italian speaking city of Trieste between 1905 and 1915, the period during which he began planning and writing *Ulysses*, could not have avoided noticing that he was living in a Futurist hotspot and, as John McCourt has argued, it likely had a significant influence on his developing style (McCourt, 2000, pp.151-174). That later, deep into the writing of *Ulysses*, Joyce was enthusiastically lending out a book he owned by the Futurist painter Bocconi adds ballast to the idea that Futurism had, in some way, fundamentally shaped the writing of a book that he would later describe as being, in its final moments, posthuman (Budgen, 1972, p.198). Perhaps the clearest influence on English-language modernism is discernible in the publication of *BLAST* in June 1914, a magazine edited by Wyndham Lewis and featuring writers such as Ezra Pound, Ford Maddox Ford and Rebecca West. Despite its disavowal of what it calls 'Marinetteism', its opening salutation to the Vortex wears its Futurist influence on its sleeves (Lewis, 1914, p.8). The Vorticist movement, associated with Lewis and Pound, endorsed, like Futurism, a bruising anti-sentimentality, clear-cut imagery and impersonal poetics, producing an aesthetic that was hard, angular and cut through the false idea of humanity they saw in the 'slush of the late nineteenth century' (Stevenson, 2020, 1405). While in Lawrence and Joyce, we find aspects of Futurism (especially its upending of human subjectivity) being repurposed to reinvent the novel and become attached to a different set of political and social coordinates, the Vorticists were much closer to the Futurists in looking to take a scalpel to the deadened idea of the human and, through poetry and the arts, violently open up new



vistas of a technologically mediated existence. As its manifesto declares, Vorticism is 'Chaos invading Concept and bursting it like nitrogen' (Lewis, 1914, p.38).

### **Feminist Aesthetics and Modernist Posthumanism**

As the previous section has made plain, much modernist posthuman discourse had a masculinist, even misogynist, trajectory. Cutting away at what they considered to be the flabby sentimentality surrounding the human and embracing a technologically mediated ontology often meant disavowing qualities conventionally considered feminine, such as nature, love and sentiment. As Bonnie Kime Scott writes, Vorticists such as Pound and Lewis rejected literary and philosophical associations aligned with 'decadence and the feminine' preferring metaphors taken from '[s]cience and mechanics, including the engines of war' (Scott, 2012, p.14). Marinetti, in his manifestos was even more direct. In the 'Founding Manifesto', 'contempt for women' is listed among the eleven tenets of Futurism and although, as he would explain in a subsequent essay, this was closer to a rejection of femininity, which he associated with characteristics that were inherently weak, rather than an outright attack on the female sex, he also described the demand for suffrage as an 'infantile enthusiasm for the miserable, ridiculous right to vote' and a misdirection of energy (Marinetti, 2005, p.9). Yet alongside what we might rightly see as a quagmire of toxic masculinity, another strand of modernist posthumanism was developing along an explicitly feminist trajectory, even within Futurism itself.

The writer and artist Mina Loy, born in 1882 in London but who lived in Florence from 1906 to 1916, was closely associated with a number of the Italian Futurists. Moreover, the work she produced during that period presents perhaps some of the clearest rejoinders to the limited space that women had been afforded in the emergent idea of a modernist posthumanism. Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto', written in 1914 but not made publicly available until 1982, is a radical vision of the possibilities that a technologically mediated future might offer women. Beginning, like Marinetti, with a disavowal of the woman's movement thus far, Loy declares the need for 'absolute demolition' of

the female sex as it currently stands, rather than mere 'reform' (Loy, 1997, p.153). Women, as Loy sees it, currently have two choices available to them, 'parasitism' or 'prostitution', that is, either dependency on male relatives if one is unmarried or reliance on one's husband (p.154). Marriage is understood in transactional terms, in which female sexuality is exchanged for social position and material subsistence. What women need is not the vote (since democratic politics is part of the bourgeois liberal order that Loy is rejecting), but to uncouple the female body, with all of its sexual potentialities, from its suffocating confinement within the dominant structure of the family unit, in which the roles it offers are limited to wife, daughter, sister, aunt (and so forth)—all of which are defined by, and depend upon, the male opposite of husband, father, brother, and so on. Loy not only diagnoses the problem but proposes a radical solution: 'To obtain results you must make sacrifices & the first & greatest sacrifice you have to make is of your "virtue"' (p.154, ampersands in original). Moreover, this is not just an abstract sacrifice, in which women are encouraged to shrug off traditions of virtuousness and the suffocating security it brings. As Loy explains, the 'first self-enforced law for the female sex, as a protection against the man made bogey of virtue' should be 'the *unconditional surgical destruction of virginity* through-out the female population at puberty' (pp.154-55, emphasis in original). The surgical removal of the hymen, the material signifier of female virginity, would disrupt the assimilation of sexuality within a patriarchal economy in which maternity and fertility determine the limit of women's identity and freedoms. As Goody writes in her study of the relationship between modernism, gender and technology, Loy was writing at a time in which new technologies were challenging the 'reductive somatic designations of women' and insisting on the importance of 'denaturaliz[ing] the female body' (Goody, 2019, p.114). This was a feminism embracing new medical developments that were enabling new freedoms through technological interventions in female sexuality. From the contraceptive diaphragm newly available to imagined surgical procedures of the future, we find the idea of the human as an organic-technological assemblage imagined in Futurist discourse being repurposed to feminist ends.

Loy's envisioning of the 'absolute demolition' of the female sex encapsulates both aspects of the modernist posthumanism with which this chapter opened: a utopian desire for a scientifically improved future humanity and a willingness to rethink the ontological foundations of the human itself. Indeed, for Loy our posthuman future will take us beyond an oppositional understanding of sex and sexuality, in which men and women occupy opposing sides of a binary divide, since '[f]or the harmony of the race, each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpenetration of the male & female temperaments' (Loy, 1997, p.155). This vision of an androgynous individuality, in which men and women embody feminine and masculine traits aided in part by developments in medicine and science, and in which both men and women can live their lives outside of the stifling reproductive expectations of marriage is, as Goody explains, evidence that modernist women writers were increasingly aware of the degree to which '[g]ender is invented by and with the technical' (Goody, 2019, p.21; also see Pilsch, 2017, pp.25-52). Predating Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) by more than sixty years, Loy's futurist feminism was already deconstructing the idea of there being such a thing as a natural female and instead showing how the sexed human body is always already entangled within more-than-human assemblages. Yet, as Loy's language in the above quotation also suggests, certain aspects of her manifesto are more problematical from a twenty-first century perspective. In addition to the suggestion of essentialism in the assertion of there being distinct 'male & female temperaments', the eugenicist overtones to Loy's investment in the 'harmony of the race' are a reminder of the period in which she was writing, when, in the decades before Nazism and the Holocaust made clear the outcomes to such discourse, there was keen interest in Social Darwinism and human genetic selection among individuals who held very different political positions. Indeed, any suggestion that Loy's discussion of 'race' might benignly refer to humanity as a whole is disproven by her insistence that, although she wishes to explode the bourgeoisie family unit, she nonetheless believes that '[e]very woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility, in producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex' (p.155).

Loy's poetry, much of which she wrote after her 'Feminist Manifesto', develops and complicates some of the more problematical aspects to her modernist posthumanism. The title of her 1923 collection, *Lunar Baedeker*, suggests both interstellar developments, but also the idea of life on Earth as seen through terms of estrangement and defamiliarisation. The poem 'Human Cylinders', for instance, presents 'the lucid rush of automatons', who coming together and '[r]evolving in the enervating dust' produce a 'little whining beast' (Loy, 1997, pp.40-41). Yet, as the poem makes clear in its opening line, this is not an imagined cyborg dystopia, but the events of 'a sunless afternoon' between two adult humans. It is a detached and cold image of the human as a 'cylinder' biologically programmed to reproduce, in which the idea that technological and scientific developments might somehow corrupt a natural order is shown to miss the point that we were always automatons to begin with. Less ambiguous in its meaning is 'Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots', where unmarried daughters and sisters gaze out from behind chained doors, watching 'men pass' and wasting their 'giggles' since they have 'no dots', another term for dowry. Although 'Virgin', they are nonetheless brimming with sexuality. Those without 'coins | For buying a purchaser', a deliciously ironic turn of phrase, are left 'behind curtains | Throb[bing] to the night' (pp.21-23). As Goody writes, the poem clearly indicts the 'myth of Romance which [the virgins] can never achieve' and 'virginity is revealed as the ultimate commodity fetish' (Goody, 2007, p.108). The title, reducing marriage and sexuality to a scientific equation, acts as a further means of reducing sexual relations to a set of coordinates, mirroring the cold observation of 'Human Cylinders'. Yet, in its conclusion, where it is the man who must now hurry home and lock his door against 'virgins who might scratch', the poem articulates the possibility of a different form of social relations yet to arrive, but surely on its way (Loy, 1997, p.23). This quality of potentiality and uncertain outcomes is mirrored in the poem's bold modernist form, where, like many of Loy's poems, white spaces break up lines and the reader is invited to pause and hesitate:

Men's eyes	look into things
Our eyes	look out

(Loy, 1997, p.21)

Structures of relation and the organic unit of the human individual are, like the syntax on the page, breaking down, fragmenting, and being recomposed in the service of a different future. Loy's poems, then, reflect her Manifesto in vehemently rejecting bourgeois ideals of tradition and convention in both form and content, speaking to the potential of posthumanist aesthetics for a radical feminism.

And it was not *just* bourgeois patriarchy that Loy was willing to criticise. The limited gender politics within Italian Futurism were also the subject of her poetic irony. 'The Effectual Marriage, or The Insipid Narrative of Gina and Miovanni', for instance, draws on Loy's relationship with the Futurist Giovanni Papini and lambastes the difference between the radical message Futurism broadcast in its manifestos and the domestic realities underpinning it:

In the evening they looked out of their two windows  
Miovanni out of his library window  
Gina from the kitchen window  
From among his pots and pans  
Where he so kindly kept her  
(Loy, 1997, p.36)

To Giovanni, Gina is less a 'palpable' being than 'Mollescent irritant of his fantasy' who 'had her use' (p.36). Not only chauvinist, but self-involved and pompous, when asked what time he would like his dinner, Miovanni responds with a dismissive 'Pooh' and reminds Gina that he, as an intellectual engaged with the latest scientific and social theories, is '[o]utside time and space'. It is precisely this idealism, played for comedy, that Loy presents as not only restricting the possibility for female participation within Futurism, but for the movement to make good on its radical aims to reject tradition and embrace a future in which human potential is open and unknown. As Loy writes, 'Miovanni remained | Monumentally the same' (p.39).

We find a similar condemnation of gendered double-standards and the limitations that compulsory domesticity offers women in another work of feminist modernism, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), a work more implicit in its posthumanism but just as invested in the

relationship between women, technology and the future. In the fifth chapter of her book-length feminist essay, Woolf outlines a fictitious contemporary novel titled *Life's Adventure* in which two women, Chloe and Olivia, share a laboratory together 'mincing liver, which is, it seems, a cure for pernicious anaemia' (Woolf, 2015, p.63). The fact that their relationship is forged in a laboratory is not incidental, but 'will make their friendship more varied and lasting because it will be less personal' (p.63). Female friendship in the laboratory is both professional *and* personal, both public and private. These women, although wives and mothers, nonetheless are afforded a space in which their identity is not defined by domestic relationships. Taking women out of the domestic context that they are usually found within in fiction, Woolf argues, enables new ways of understanding the female sex. Imagine if 'men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers; how few parts in the plays of Shakespeare could be allotted to them; how literature would suffer!' (p.63). This is not just about giving women the representation that men have historically been afforded within both literature and the professions, but rather giving freedom to the potential of the female as sexual subject, too. In Woolf's statement that 'Chloe liked Olivia' there is an insinuation of a more-than-platonic attraction, an insinuation that is further developed in the description of how female friendship as a topic in fiction remains underexplored and brims with potential, 'all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping' (p.63). The described imagery of 'light[ing] a torch in that vast chamber', reminiscent in some respects of the metaphor of 'a match burning in a crocus' for the female orgasm in *Mrs Dalloway* (Woolf, 2009a, p.27), is that of sensuous, subterranean exploration, with the laboratory serving as a trope not only for scientific advancements, but developments in human sexuality beyond the limited gender roles that Loy had also identified as holding women back. As Derek Ryan writes, drawing on Rosi Braidotti's nomadic feminism, the relationship between Olivia and Chloe is important since, in departing from the tradition of defining women through their relationship to men, it foregrounds 'the differences *between* women and *within* each woman' (Ryan, 2013, p.64). Braidotti's anti-essentialist feminism, which has become more

explicitly posthumanist in her more recent work (discussed below), explodes the notion of a binary opposition between men and women, instead attending to differences between the sexes, differences within the female sex and differences within each woman. For Ryan, throughout *A Room of One's Own*, we find a 'situated and materialist, model of sexual difference' in which desire and difference between and within women are foregrounded, and, importantly, in which the deconstruction of the binary between the male and female sex extends to the human and nonhuman (Ryan, 2013, p.63).

As Ryan points out, Woolf ends *A Room of One's Own* by 'pointing towards a materiality that is more than human' (Ryan, 2013, p.75). Her invocation to see 'human beings not always in relation to each other but in relation to reality' (Woolf, 2015, p.86) serving to demonstrate how untethering sexual difference from the limited gender roles that have historically determined human identity 'challenges the boundaries between nature and culture, nonhuman and human' (Ryan, 2013, p.75). Prior to Woolf's feminist polemic, the laboratory of fiction (as opposed to the laboratory in fiction) had enabled her to test out and experiment with the way in which male and female relationships might be reimagined through the refiguring of the boundary between the human and the nonhuman. What Aaron Jaffe discerns as an interest in *A Room of One's Own* in 'possible modes of extrasubjectivity [...] at impersonal, even inhuman scales' (Jaffe, 2016, p.493) can be discerned, for instance, in Woolf's 1917 short story 'The Mark on the Wall'. The story is set in both the private and public realms, in the human and nonhuman, with the female narrator searching for 'something definite, something real' and venturing out into the 'impersonal world which is proof of some existence other than ours' (Woolf, 2003, p.82). Such a description makes the story sound like a quest narrative and it *is*, albeit of an unconventional type. Ostensibly about an unnamed woman sat in her living room who upon noticing a mark on the opposite wall attempts to work out what it is, the story follows the associative trajectory of the woman's mind as her 'thoughts swarm upon [the] new object' (Woolf, 2003, p.82). Indeed, although the woman remains in her chair, the story is characterised by speed, velocity, ephemerality and becoming as the narrator's mind races through questions of modernity, nature and life itself, with the mark both shaping her thoughts and her thoughts shaping

her perception of the mark. The quest narrative becomes at points a ghost story, when reflecting on how although technologies such as 'underground railways' are transforming the social order they have not succeeded in wholly dislodging earlier conventions, especially around class and gender, which persist as 'phantom[s]' haunting 'men and women' (Woolf, 2003, pp.79-80). Woolf encourages men to imagine existence 'should you be a woman', since the 'masculine point of view' remains the norm and continues to 'govern our lives' (p.80). Elsewhere, the narrator entertains another kind of ghostly realm, as she imagines existence 'after life' where '[t]here will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct colour' in which 'one won't be in a condition' to distinguish between 'trees, and [...] men and women' (p.78). This ambiguous realm of materiality untethered from everyday conventions of human perception (including sexed identity), in which matter and meaning stand in a dynamic uncertain relation to one another, is a vision of life in which the human is no longer at the centre, presiding over the value of the things around it. 'The Mark on the Wall' is a story that liquidates many of the binaries that upheld modernity: male and female, human and nonhuman, materiality and immateriality, solidity and fluidity, permanence and transformation. Instead, the human is caught up in nonhuman assemblages of technologies, inhuman materialities and, since the mark is revealed to be at the story's end a snail, nonhuman animals.

Throughout Woolf's writing we find evidence of objects and subjects co-shaping each other. In her story, 'Solid Objects', Woolf writes of how 'any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it' (Woolf, 2003, p.98). Dramatizing this idea, 'Solid Objects' presents the character of John, an aspiring MP, who becomes transfixed with a fascinating lump of opaque green seaglass that he finds on a beach and which seems to cast a power over him. It sparks an obsession to find other similarly fascinating objects, ultimately leading to his shrugging off all the conventions of civilised life and political ambitions as his house becomes a menagerie of strange lumps of matter. For Bill Brown, in an influential 1999 article which would become a pivotal text in the



development of Thing Theory, Woolf's story is about the 'fluidity of objects', showing the reader how nonhuman things 'assume lives of their own', squirming out of their conventional usages and associations (Brown, 1999, pp.3-7). As in 'The Mark on the Wall', the story provincializes human concerns as political ambitions and social events are set against the long *durée* of inhuman time. At the close of 'The Mark on the Wall', the narrator's husband interrupts her expansive thoughts of time and space with the remark that he is going out to 'buy a newspaper' (Woolf, 2003, p.83). A similar dynamic plays out at the end of 'Solid Objects'. When John is told by a friend that his political ambitions have 'not a ghost of a chance now', he disagrees, although appears to have misunderstood the point being made. With a 'fixed and distant' expression on his face, John instead appears to have tapped into a higher plane of existence than he had enjoyed while narrowly focusing on winning election to parliament.

Woolf's novel *Orlando* (1928) presents one of her clearest forays into what I have been calling modernist posthumanism and, of all her texts, might be considered the most important in terms of directly contributing to contemporary posthumanist philosophy. A novel about an English aristocrat, Orlando, who lives for three centuries and undergoes a change of sex mid-narrative, starting the novel as a boy in the sixteenth century and finishing as a woman in the early twentieth, its premise is more explicitly fantastic and satiric than Woolf's previous novels. *Orlando* is loosely based on the Sackville family and inspired by Woolf's love affair with the writer Vita Sackville-West, who grew up at the family seat at Knole but was unable to inherit the family title and house because of her sex. The narrative, however, is more than just a fantastical comedy of human change and development through the ages. Rather, it insists on locating its protagonist as bound up within more-than-human processes of material change. As the novel charts the changing English landscape, from early modernity to industrialisation, with attendant changes in class relations, housing, diet, natural resources, wildlife and, even, climate, the novel presents, as Ryan argues, an 'entanglement between human bodies and nonhuman environments' (Ryan, 2013, p.107). Ryan identifies a radical materialism in *Orlando*, in which the vitality of life that flows within us is neither discrete nor self-contained but connects the

human to broader nonhuman patterns of becoming, shaped and hastened by desire and sexuality (Ryan, 2013, pp.102-07; also see Borg, 2018, pp.112-22). Moreover, the plotline involving Orlando's change of sex is not incidental to this radical material vision of the universe in which the human is decentred. I have argued elsewhere that Woolf's description of how 'Nature ... has played so many queer tricks upon us' (Woolf, 2018, p.72) suggests that we should be alert to the way in which the novel's upturning of the binary between the human and the nonhuman also has binary ideas of sex, gender and sexuality in its crosshairs (Adkins, forthcoming). Woolf's queer materialism in which bodies and landscapes and social structures and politics and climate are all constantly transforming and influencing one another resolutely undoes the idea of there being an essential ontological foundation at the bottom of things. Moreover, for Rosi Braidotti, whose theory is often drawn upon by scholars applying a posthumanist framework to modernism, *Orlando* itself, along with Woolf's love letters to Sackville-West, provides material for posthumanist philosophy. As she writes in *Transpositions* (2006), Woolf's texts 'enact a flow of positions, a crossing of boundaries, an overflowing into a plenitude of affects where life is asserted to its highest degree' (Braidotti, 2006, p.188). Woolf's characters exemplify what Braidotti understands to be the way in which the human subject is an 'ecological entity [...] plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces' (p.41). The undoing of heteronormative and sexist categories is just as important to Braidotti's reading too, identifying in *Orlando* the presence of desire as 'a sort of geometry, a geology and a meteorology of forces that gather around the actors [...] but do not fully coincide with them' (p.191). As Braidotti lays out, in *Orlando* we find a radical corrective to the humanist idea of the sexed, gendered subject. Rather than a self-identical being, Woolf presents the human as an 'assemblage of forces' and offers a way of thinking about feminism that is not constrained by a framework of sex, gender and sexuality inherited from humanism (with its built-in bias towards the male and the masculine) (Braidotti, 2006, pp.190-91). Like Loy, who takes Futurism's posthumanist ideas, scrapes away its masculinist principles and repurposes it to feminist ends, Woolf's reimagining of humans, objects, animals and environments,

both topples humankind from its self-ordained position at the centre of the universe and remains politically engaged with questions of what is at stake for women when we reimagine life itself.

### **Conclusion: Thinking with Modernist Posthumanism**

Rosi Braidotti's engagement with Woolf in *Transpositions* speaks to her sustained interest in the writer. Appearing as a keynote speaker at the 2018 Annual International Virginia Woolf Conference at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England, Braidotti spoke of a life-long passion for Woolf's writing and a continuing engagement not only with the themes and issues that preoccupy her texts, but her sensibility, intuition and intensity (Braidotti, 2018, see also the forthcoming special issue of *Comparative Critical Studies* on Woolf and Braidotti). Throughout Braidotti's work we find evidence of her thinking with Woolf, which is to say, not just reading Woolf, but entering into a dialogue with the ideas and concepts she finds in the modernist writer's texts. As Braidotti has stated, she finds that Woolf's 'extensive corpus constitutes a singular example of an intensive genre that cuts transversally across a number of established literary forms to constitute a qualitative mode of its own' (Braidotti, 2008, p.45). Woolf's writing advances 'post-identarian positions', Braidotti argues in *The Posthuman* (2013), showing us how to think about the subject as always-in-becoming and to see the relation between life and death not in terms of division but ontological continuity, part of the way in which the material vitality of life is always more than the 'I' of the subject (Braidotti, 2013, p.129). The influence of Woolf on Braidotti's philosophy points to the importance of seeing modernism not only as providing a historical record of posthumanism's emergence in the early twentieth century, but also its continuing ability to speak to and shape contemporary posthumanist thought. In this short concluding section, I am going to briefly explore this important aspect of modernism's legacy and continuing influence, looking at the crucial role modernism played in developing posthumanist thought in the second half of the twentieth century and where it might take us in the decades to come.

In his preface to *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), Cary Wolfe outlines how the poststructuralist philosophy of the 1960s, 70s and 80s laid the ground for much contemporary posthumanist theory insofar as its deconstruction of 'many of the major concepts, texts and figures in the Western philosophical tradition' implicitly worked towards the decentring of the human and revealing the porous relationship between the human and the nonhuman (Wolfe, 2010, pp.xix-xx; see also Braidotti, 2013, pp.16-31). These progenitors of poststructuralism that Wolfe outlines include Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Félix Guattari and Jacques Lacan. What Wolfe doesn't mention is the degree to which the writers I have discussed as developing a modernist posthumanism had a decisive influence on these figures. Derrida, for instance, when ostensibly conducting doctoral research on Edmund Husserl at the Widener Library in Harvard between 1956 and 1957 spent more time reading Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* than he did Husserl (Rabaté, 2013, p.181). It would show, too, when in the publication of his first book, based on his doctoral research, Derrida would cite Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as evidence of why Husserl's 'demand for univocity' did not account for the equivocating nature of language itself (Derrida, 1989, p.102). Joyce would continue to play an important role in the development of Derrida's thought, becoming the subject of several essays in their own right and, along with Woolf and Lawrence, providing material for analysis in Derrida's final seminars (posthumously published in two volumes as *The Beast and Sovereign* [2009-11]) which, in looking at questions of animality, sovereignty and biopolitics, are among his most directly posthumanist works. Lacan, like Derrida, would also find Joyce's writing a productive source of thought and, also like Derrida, was invited to provide a keynote address at the International James Joyce Symposium (Lacan in 1975, Derrida in 1984). Indeed, Lacan's influential concept of the 'sinthome' (which argues that symptoms make themselves understood through a semantic process similar to language) was developed during seminars that elaborated the idea by way of recourse to *Finnegans Wake*. The idea that modernism provided concepts was also key to Deleuze and Guattari's collaborations, where they would turn to Woolf and Lawrence when elucidating ideas such as becoming, intensity and multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari, 2014). As Stephen Ross has argued, post-war theorists and philosophers were 'reading and

thinking about modernism' and we should understand modernism and poststructuralism as 'mutually sustaining aspects of the same project', interested in re-evaluating aesthetics, ontology, politics, and epistemology, among other areas of enquiry (Ross, 2009, p.13; p.2).

In tracing this genealogy, we can chart a clear line of influence that runs through modernism, poststructuralism and posthumanism. Yet, as this chapter has suggested, modernism's importance lies not just in the historical fact of its having asked questions around the uncertain relationship between the human and the nonhuman, as well as the growing imbrication of the organic and technological, but also the way in which these texts retain a capacity to intervene in contemporary debates. When we read works of modernism we find in their experimentation with form and content questions being asked that remain just as pertinent now as they did in the early twentieth century. Whether in the radical vital materialism that we find in Woolf's writing, the challenges to a narrowly liberal feminism that we find in Loy, or the more general sense of disorientation and defamiliarisation when we encounter the human form in modernist works of fiction and poetry, modernism gives us material that can spur and shape our thoughts. We can also learn from its missteps. The explicitly eugenicist origin of the term with which I opened this chapter, and which can be seen to haunt everything from Futurism to modernist feminism, is a reminder of the necessity of a critical mindedness towards the recent resurgence of interest in eugenics within the sciences and social sciences. Modernism, as such, reminds us that when we discuss technology, biology and politics, the ideologies underpinning such categories should be always at the forefront of our analysis.

Yet, perhaps most exciting, is the potential for our understanding of modernism and posthumanism to expand and grow akin to the expansion witnessed within the New Modernist Studies, where, as explained above, a greater range of writers and texts are being explored for how they responded to the conditions of modernity. While this chapter has largely focused on canonical modernist writers, work remains to be done on those cultural figures who have not always been as well represented within the field of modernist studies. For instance, the African-American writers

associated with the Harlem Renaissance, whose innovations in poetry and prose drew on jazz and blues traditions as well as engaging with an aesthetics of fragmentation and defamiliarisation seen in other modernist works, might be read for what they tell us about how technology, materiality and ontology intersect with race and racism. Such research would point to not only the racist blind spots in early posthuman thought but contribute to the ongoing re-assessment of how race has played a part in the construction of 'the human' as a category (Jackson, 2020). Similarly, critics might be increasingly willing to explore both canonical and non-canonical modernism through theoretical frameworks outside of the modernist-poststructuralist-posthumanist genealogy I have sketched out in this conclusion. As has increasingly been shown to be the case, posthumanist theory has much to gain from non-Western epistemologies, especially indigenous thought (Povinelli, 2016). And wouldn't breaking away from the linear trajectory of posthumanist theory as it has developed thus far be the ultimate modernist gesture? In Ezra Pound's instruction to 'Make It New', often appropriated as encapsulating the spirit of modernism, we might be reminded that not only were the modernists of the early twentieth century committed to reassessing what it meant to be human but were willing to depart from received wisdom and intellectual conventions when doing so. Accordingly, our approach to criticism, aesthetics, ontology and epistemology might also be willing to suspend predispositions and established way of doing things and risk understanding things afresh.

#### References:

Adkins, P. (Forthcoming). *The Modernist Anthropocene: Nonhuman Life and Planetary Change in James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ansell-Pearson, K. (2018). *Bergson: Thinking Beyond the Human Condition*. London: Bloomsbury.

- Ardoin, P., Gontarski, S. E., & Mattison, L. (2013). "About the year 1910": Bergson and Literary Modernism. In P. Ardoin, S. E. Gontarski, & L. Mattison (Eds.), *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism* (pp. 1–8). London: Bloomsbury.
- Borg, R. (2019). *Fantasies of Self-Mourning: Modernism, the Posthuman and the Finite*. Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi.
- Braidotti, R. (2006). *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Braidotti, R. (2008). Intensive Genre and the Demise of Gender. *Angelaki*, 13(2) 45-57.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Braidotti, R. (2018). Woolf, Immanence and Ontological Pacificism [Keynote Address]. 28<sup>th</sup> Annual International Virginia Woolf Conference, Canterbury, UK.
- Budgen, F. (1972). *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses' and other writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2014). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi). London: Bloomsbury.
- Derrida, J. (1989). *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (trans. John P. Leavey). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Edwards, E. E. (2018). *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Friedman, S. S. (2015). *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gillie, M. A. (1996). *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press.

- Goldman, J. (2006). *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goody, A. (2007). *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goody, A. (2019). *Modernist Poetry, Gender and Leisure Technologies: Machine Amusements*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Harrison, A. (2003). *D.H. Lawrence and Italian Futurism: A Study of Influence*. Amsterdam: Brill.
- Hays, K. M. (1992). *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer*. Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press.
- Jackson, Z. I. (2020). *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jaffe, A. (2016). Introduction: Who's Afraid of the Inhuman Woolf? *Modernism/Modernity*, 23(3), 491–513.
- Joyce, J. (1957). *Letters of James Joyce* (S. Gilbert, Ed.). New York: The Viking Press.
- Joyce, J. (1986). *Ulysses: The Corrected Text* (H. W. Gabler, Ed.). London: Penguin Books.
- Lawrence, D.H. (1932). *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (A. Huxley, Ed.). London: William Heinemann.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1995). *The Rainbow* (M. Kinkead-Weekes, Ed.). London: Penguin Books.
- Lewis, W. (Ed.). (1914). *BLAST*. London: John Lane.
- Loy, M. (1997). *The Lost Lunar Baedeker Poems* (R. L. Conover, Ed.). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.



- McCourt, J. (2000). *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste, 1904-1920*. Dublin: Lilliput Press.
- Mao, D. (Ed.). (2021). *The New Modernist Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marinetti, F. T. (2005). Contempt for Women. In L. Rainey (Ed. & Trans.), *Modernism: An Anthology* (pp. 3–6). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Marinetti, F. T. (2005). The Founding and the Manifesto of Futurism. In L. Rainey (Ed. & Trans.), *Modernism: An Anthology* (pp. 3–6). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Monaco, B. (2008). *Machinic Modernism: The Deleuzian Literary Machines of Woolf, Lawrence and Joyce*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Parmelee, M. (1917). *Poverty and Social Progress*. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- Pilsch, A. (2017). *Transhumanism: Evolutionary Futurism and the Human Technologies of Utopia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pines, B., & Burnham, D. (Eds.). (2019). *Understanding Nietzsche, Understanding Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Povinelli, E. A. (2016). *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rabaté, J.-M. (2013). Two Joyces for Derrida. In A. J. Mitchell & S. Slote (Eds.), *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* (pp. 281–298). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Rabaté, J.-M. (2016). *Think, Pig!: Beckett at the Limit of the Human*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Rohman, C. (2009). *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rohman, C. (2018). *Choreographies of the Living: Bioaesthetics in Literature, Art, and Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Ross, S. (2009). Introduction: The Missing Link. In S. Ross (Ed.), *Modernism And Theory: A Critical Debate* (pp. 1–18). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ryan, D. (2013). *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ryan, D. (2015). Following Snakes and Moths: Modernist Ethics and Posthumanism. *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 61(3), 287–304.
- Scott, B. K. (2012). *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Sheehan, P. (2002). *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stevenson, G. (2020). Introduction: Anti-Humanist Modernisms. *Textual Practice*, 34(9), 1405–1418.
- Wallace, J. (2005). *D.H. Lawrence, Science and the Posthuman*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Wallace, J. (2017). Modern. In B. Clarke & M. Rossini (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (pp. 41–53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolfe, C. (2010). *What Is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Woolf, V. (2003). *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction* (S. Dick, Ed.). London: Vintage Books.
- Woolf, V. (2009a). *Mrs Dalloway* (D. Bradshaw, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woolf, V. (2009b). *Selected Essays* (D. Bradshaw, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woolf, V. (2015). *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (A. Snaith, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

