

REVIEW ARTICLE

Man-Clone Proxemics: Changing Perspectives from Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein**) to Kate Wilhelm (*Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang***)

Maria-Ana Tupan

Doctoral School of Alba Iulia University, Romania.

*Corresponding Author: Email: m_tupan@yahoo.com

Abstract: The present paper addresses a question that was born simultaneously with the emergence of a non-organic factor in the generation and utopian projection of human beings. The organicist view of romanticism perceived the animating effect of Luigi Galvani's experiment, according to Mary Shelley's ground-breaking scientific romance *Frankenstein* (1818), as disquieting as humanist Horatio's response to Old Hamlet's ghost in Shakespeare's 1600 tragedy. Horatio's qualification of the ghost as "a mole in the eye" renders exactly the sense of an impurity that does not fit among the familiar phenomena of the known world. Mary Shelley too envisioned the role of technology in the future projects of biologically and intellectually enhanced human beings, leaving behind humanistic notions of *natura naturans*, or projects of improvement of the biological given through education or acculturation creating a second nature. Looking at several rival versions of utopianism, the present paper has opted for the Maturana and Varela model of evolution ("autopoiesis") which biologizes the order of artifacts, redefined as a living system growing out of itself and only revealing capacity of evolution through creative and revisionist incorporation of tradition. In light of their theory, an influential book on post human proxemics, such as Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1974), is a hallmark of postmodern post humanism to the extent that it manages to transform in a significant way its early nineteenth-century precedent – *Frankenstein*.

Keywords: *Post humanism, Proxemics, Hybrid spaces, Futurity, non-Human others, Distributive cognition.*

Article Received: 01 Nov. 2018

Revised: 21 Nov. 2018

Accepted: 12 Dec. 2018

Introduction

The eighteenth century, or rather its earlier half, was the climactic point of the western civilizations' self-complacency and satisfaction with the way things are. One must have felt perfectly at ease with one's condition to assume the model role of harbinger of civilization to the rest of the world; perfectly at ease with one's knowledge and cognition to claim the possession of the key to the universal laws of the physical universe; perfectly at ease in relation to divinity to claim the privilege of living in the best of all possible worlds, as God is allegedly present within each monadic individual.

Irrespective of the true cause behind the onset of an age of fear, anxiety, uncertainty and despondency in the twilight of the century – whether the horrors of the French Revolution or the crisis of knowledge induced by the invalidation of some of Newton's

theories – the ideology of the Enlightenment came under stress in the metropolitan centres of the West with the consequential birth of utopian projects supposed to offer solutions and remedies. Frankenstein's failed project of creating a perfect and immortal human race in Mary Shelley's homonymous novel was one of the narratives which heralded the departure from the spirit of modernity, its critique building an arch between romanticism and postmodernism. Published in 1974, Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* them at iz es the creation of non-human others as part of a melo-dist agenda in the changing context of post humanism, whose foci of concern are summed up by N. Katherine Hayles as "futurity, non-human others and distributed cognition" [1]. Similarities between the two fictional plots can be identified with respect to two of the issues on the Hayles list of post

human hallmarks. Prefigurative societies see the future in terms of the human subject's conditioning. Biology cannot jump beyond its shadow, therefore enhanced physical and cognitive capacities of human bodies can only be expected from the technology producing "non-human others". Frankenstein's dream of his mother's corpse is a symptom of his distrust of natural filiation and a symbol of his choice of an alternative.

In Wilhelm's novel, the body fails both biologically and socially. Humans degenerate, bodies cannot survive the multiplying and new forms of diseases, while moral taboos inspired by a healthy instinct of the preservation of the race, such as incest, are overlooked. The new element in the picture of this latter scientific romance is what Hayles – a reputed author of interdisciplinary studies in literature with emphasis on epistemology – calls "distributed cognition". Frankenstein's creature fills in the gap separating him from the canonized human being at that time whose "facial composite" included acculturation. He becomes familiar with the epoch's favourite readings by eavesdropping on conversations, lessons, and by doing some reading himself.

Post-war cognitive psychology, however, has experimentally assessed the importance of the context of learning and of the information which the subject internalizes unconsciously from the environment. In a space saturated with technology, humans acquire knowledge automatically, simply through exposure since an early age. The case of children managing complex devices, setting programmes on TV and using applications on cell phones, without any previous instruction, spiting the elder members of the family, is a familiar one. In Shelley's novel, it is society that fails the creature's expectations, filling him with hate and desire for revenge. In Wilhelm's novel, the clones on the journey to previous sites of the old civilization, destroyed by technology and warfare, are exposed to the remedial and healing influence of nature and its romantic charm and beauty acquiring feelings and a sense of moral values in the process.

The present sense of there being continuity and mutual influence among humans, things and environment is part of our holistic worldview which has also bred a renewed interest in the way we experience and

organize space and spatial relationships. Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela use the same term "living systems" both for human beings and for artefacts which get woven into the changing structures of historical networks: A historical phenomenon is a process of change in which each change of the successive states of a changing system arises as a modification of a previous state in a causal transformation, and not *de novo* as an independent occurrence. Accordingly, the notion of history may either be used to refer to the antecedents of the given phenomenon as the succession of the events that gave rise to it, or it may be used to characterize the given phenomenon as a process.

Therefore, since an explanation is always given in the present as a reformulation of the phenomenon to be explained in the domain of interactions of its components (or of isomorphic elements), the history of a phenomenon as a description of its antecedents cannot contribute to its explanation because the antecedents are not components of the phenomenon they precede or generate.

Conversely, since history as a phenomenon is to be explained in the present as a changing network of sequentially produced events in which each event as a state of the network arises in it as a transformation of the previous state, it follows that although history cannot contribute to explain any phenomenon, it can permit an observer to account for the origin of a phenomenon as a present state in a changing network [3].

Versions of Millenarianism

The decline of the West, a topic of international concern in the early twentieth century, pitied the notions of culture and civilization against each other, while spiritual revival, even by exposure to materially impoverished but imaginatively developed societies, was seen as a solution by Oswald Spengler as well as by the American party: Henry Adams, Brooks Adams, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot. Writing about the global histories of American Brooks Adams, German Spengler, and English Toynbee that accompanied the rise of global economy, Petri Kuokkanen remarks: "Each sought escape from modernity in traditional or exotic religions, or in idealized versions of former or future civilizations: the martial and spiritual Middle Ages (Brooks Adams); the cultural

unity of the Florentine and Venetian city states (Oswald Spengler); or an emerging world government dominated by 'spiritual super minds' (Arnold Toynbee)" [3]. Contrariwise, present versions of global histories tend to treat humans in the context of other species and to study them through biological aspects such as feeding, leading to decline or even extinction. Historian and social theorist Jim Penman, the author of *Biohistory: Decline and Fall of the West* (2015) set out to research the decline histories of great civilizations of the past, singling out common patterns of behaviour, the conclusions making him wonder: "Could the key to history be not economics or politics but *biology*?" [4].

The author is persuasively arguing that "behavioural patterns such as nuclear monogamous families, slow breeding and 'hard work' are characteristic of animals in food-restricted environments, and also of civilized human societies", or that "limited food tends to produce the behaviour that helps animals prosper in these environments [and] human cultures, and especially religious systems, change temperament and behaviour in a way that mimics the effects of food shortage-even when food is not especially short". Rhizomatic all-connectedness in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari includes interactions between humans and animals, each member of the group/ community being swept into the other's terrain with hybridization effects: becoming-human, becoming-woman, becoming-animal...

This does not mean coming to be similar to animals but reversion to an immanent nature which is writtern over by the operators of each culture. Proximity engenders changes in the nature of the beings that come into contact. Fifty thousand sites were activated by our November 12, 2018 search in the internet of "the man-robot proxemics ", a defining concept for post humanism - the age of the Deleuzian man deconstructed to a "body without organs", a substratum or place of immanence, in the sense of the body's categorical indeterminacy preceding differentiation of portions into organs (inscription acts operated by a certain type of culture which arrest and harden the flux of matter and energy into a member of a class, gender, race or a temporary plateau called Renaissance, Enlightenment,

Modernism, etc): The neutral, undignified body is being subjectified, articulated into an identifiable social subject, but simultaneously subjected to the norms of an order of culture (The Law of the Father, of authority, as Lacan dubbed it): We come to the gradual realization that the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism.

It is true that Artaud wages a struggle against the organs, but at the same time what he is going after, what he has it in for, is the organism: The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs. Organism it never is. Organisms are the enemies of the body.¹¹ The BwO is not opposed to the organs; rather, the BwO and its "true organs," which must be composed and positioned, are opposed to the organism, the organic organization of the organs [5]. The earth inhabited by a community is such a body which the members are charting, signifying, organizing.

The organization of space and of relationships within it is emancipated to an ontogenesis of the group's collective identity. Each individual is forced into the text of some identity card: Let us consider the three great strata concerning us, in other words, the ones that most directly bind us: the organism, significance, and subjectifi-cation.

The surface of the organism, the angle of significance and interpretation, and the point of subjectification or subjection. You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body-otherwise you're just depraved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted-otherwise you're just a deviant.

You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement-otherwise you're just a tramp. To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulation (or n articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification). What does it mean to disarticulate, to cease to be an

organism? (Ibid.) However tempting, the attempt to break away from the meanings that tie us down to a certain reality, of “opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions” (p. 160) through daring experimentation can end up in self-destruction or in “falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death” (Ibid.).

The charting of our social space should be undertaken, we are warned, “with the craft of a surveyor”. The wise decision is to limit experimentation with new possibilities, find potential movements away from the present organization, signification and subjection, but not without any continuity and the precaution to abide by just “a small plot of new land at all times”. How disruptive of our inherited organization is the prospect of artificial life?

If proxemics designates universal physical distances around and between the subjects of a communication, proxemics studies their psychological and culturally embedded doubles, i.e. the way distances among individuals are perceived from a person’s intimate space to the family circle, institutional environment (school, workplace), and finally to the public space open to everyone. Invented by Edward T. Hall in 1963, the term was first applied to animal communication and then extended to non-verbal inter-human communication. By being applied to the context of relationships between humans and robots, the concept completes the deconstruction of the identity model attributed exclusively to the human being.

In *Physical and Psychological Distancing in Human-Robot Interaction* (1210), Jonathan Mumm and Bilge Mutlu of Wisconsin University prescribe recipes of robots design ensuring their effective communication with their human inventors. Experimental studies reveal, for example, that the fixed look of a robot, unlike that of a human partner, awakens in man a reaction of distancing and withdrawal within himself, which does not happen if the interlocutor is female. We can see here how the affiliation to a certain gender (+ Male / +Female) becomes detached from the generic feature [+ Human], as if the “subject, the historical, social, or individual person” [5] were being disarticulated into autonomous and indifferent bits of being.

At the other end of the argument, anthropologist Niklas Luhmann (*Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 1933) dematerializes human communities (Deleuze would see in it the emptying out of the social body’s organs) which he reduces to interrelationships among individuals. For those in which members feels self-sufficient (un-subjected), living on their own beliefs, Luhmann uses the expression “segmented societies”, these being considered closer to the archaic, primitive condition of the evolution of society as a system.

On the contrary, evolved societies are stratified, operating, not at the level of individuals, but of their relationships reified in commonly shared narratives. The individual body is absorbed into their organized and signified corpus, being attuned to a higher level of signification. Steering a middle way between the promoters of post/transhumanism and the metahistorians of cultural narratives, N. Katherine Hayles rediscovers humanity’s dream of immortality quickened in times of old by the alchemists’ search for the elixir of life but now tainted by post-Husserlian awareness of subjectivity’s dependence on forms of embodiment: Futurity in post humanism finds its most extreme version in transhumanism, the philosophy articulated and embraced by an international movement that holds human evolution is not complete and that it is our duty – to ourselves, our ancestors and our descendants – to further human evolution to its ‘post biological’ phase, when the human species will be technically able to escape the limitations of embodiment, particularly mortality.

At the other pole of the theory evolved by enemies of technology who consider that civilizations characterized by rapid and audacious progress do not last longer than about five centuries, with notorious examples such as Tyre, the successive kingdoms of Egypt, Greece, Rome etc., while ethnicities moving at a slow pace are more stable, N. Katherine Hayles grants gates of entry to the future of an excessively technologized era only to advanced peoples: The post human singularity shares aspects with premodern versions of apocalypse, along with significant differences. Like the apocalypse, not everyone will advance to the next level; only those right-thinking individuals with access to high technology will make the transition

successfully. Tran humanism consequently emphasizes the individual, especially the extraordinary person with the foresight and resources to prepare for the singularity and with the will and determination to help bring it about. (Ibid.).

The two concepts of society - sharing in an intersubjective order of culture, or attempted escape to new strata of organization and signification – are interrogated in the two British novels on the topic of artificially created life, separated by over a century and a half: *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley and *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1974) by Kate Wilhelm. They are the landmarks of romantic humanism at its height and of the prospective decay of affect in the technological boom of the contemporary.

Mirror Civilizations

In itself, the idea of cloning and automation should not cause anxiety. If alienation due to sophisticated technology be their source, human society has already experienced the worst of it in its preference for what, in Introduction to his *Anthropology of Super modernity* (1992), Marc Augé calls non-places. Family gathering around the Christmas tree or on other religious holidays has been displaced by huge anonymous assemblies celebrating in public squares; social networks capable of overthrowing governments and heads of state have been compared by historian Niall Ferguson to the secret societies of old, as the users' identity is uncertain or unknown; labour migrations, homework, ephemeral contracts, virtual space games, etc. no longer connect subjects to organic human societies of affectively connected and historically legitimate bearers of identity marks. With media-induced tastes and behaviours, people resemble robots, consuming a mix of cultural clichés from all over the world. Super intelligent clones would not be novel either, humans being already classified according to Piaget's scale of intelligence qualifiers. A phenomenon, however, will be better understood yet if it is traced back to its origin. Cloning or something of this sort was the theme of the first science-fiction novel, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It is a scientific dystopia and a political allegory. The artificially created monster, possibly allegorizing the populace in Paris incited by Jacobins to commit massacres, calls to mind the failed project of the Republic of Fraternity and Reason from

which French revolutionaries recoiled in horror. Although Shelley had had a scientific support in Luigi Galvani's experiments, she deployed the plot through negotiations with influential contemporary discourses.

The creature is wrapped up in clichés of the French Revolution, configured after the same ideological programme, and criminalized, which was the fate of the Revolution during the Reign of Terror.

Of rousseauist inspiration is the good-natured creature turned monster by the scorn and ill treatment he gets from society. his formation, mediated by the education in a small-bourgeois family, on which he eavesdrops unobserved, includes the critique of the empires undertaken by count volney - the ideologist of the french revolution who was also read and alluded to by william blake - the critique of social inequity in *the sufferings of young werther*, by goethe, the meliorist agenda of the encyclopedists to create an educated society by expanding the empire of knowledge from the king's library to the common people's homes. the creature is not, however, accepted by a superficial and biased society.

His good deeds are not recognized to him. it is not the cloning programme that fails, but the society of people who do not accept him, the lack of a name being the sign that it does not associate him with the order of logos. paradoxically, the science-fiction novel published by wilhelm in postmodernism pleads for a society that is rebuilt from the ground, the demonic history of the last century inspiring the author's apocalyptic scenario. technology has led to pollution and climate change, to the depletion of natural resources, which add up to the incidence of incurable diseases, and infertility in humans and animals. a traditional family like the de laceys in *frankenstein* retreat to the valley of a river, in a still living land, even if flooded by torrential rains, where they build a hospital in order to get cloned and survive in that form. as in *frankenstein*, clones plot against their creator, and unite to take his place. being identical images, they give the donors the confusing spectacle of their own figure at different ages. the clones reject elderly company, go all the time in groups, their artificial generation lending them a sense of their own insufficiency. motivated, disciplined like soldiers, capable of

remarkable performance in learning, but lacking inner life and affection, they make up a fearful army. until one day when some of them decide to leave the artificial eden and head down the Shenandoah river to Washington. on this occasion, they find out about the end of the old world, the wars that had left cities in ruins such as dresden or hiroshima, and which had not spared the capital of the world. symbolically, all that is left of the lincoln monument is a fragment of "the pledge of allegiance" on the pedestal: *one nation, indi ...* the fragment seems to allude to the Indians vanishing under the image of "one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all". the departure of the explorers is an occasion for celebration, the chief clone mapping out their progress, purpose, and ethos - all of them having been generated by their "dna" which is not the double spiral of biological life but information: roger, the eldest of them all, was the master of ceremonies. he said, "a toast to our brothers and our sister who will venture forth at dawn to find-not new lands to conquer, nor adventures to prove their courage, nor riches of gold or silver, but rather that most priceless discovery of all-information.

Information we all need information that will make it possible for us to erupt into a thousand blooms, a million! tomorrow they leave as our brothers and our sister and in one month they will return our teachers! jed! ben! harvey! thomas! lewis! molly! come forward and let us toast you and the most priceless gift you will bring to us, your family!" molly receives a waterproof beg for her sketch pads, pencils and pens, but they will not serve for jotting down insensitive "information".

Molly and other clones are transformed by the experience of travel which occasions different perceptions and evolutions in the previously indistinct minds. their problematic nature, newly acquired feelings nurtured by the magic of nature prove to be embarrassing and unsettling for the conditioned brains they encounter when returning to the "family" at the hospital. what transforms molly is that, having the task of plotting the map of the territory in the interest of science, she begins to draw the faces of her companions, and the exercise of creating a representation imposes, as plato writes in *cratylus*, a difference from the real prototype, a symbolic representation which is

a *paradeigma*, not a perfect copy, for, as socrates says in plato's homonymous dialogue, if the figure and the representation coincided perfectly, then there would be two cratyluses instead of one. the signifying practice engenders a kind of subjectivity capable of personal organization or interpretation of the environment which, as deleuze says, is the premise of escape from subjection. the doctrine that everyone's destiny is subordinated to the interest of the community is rejected by mark, one of the clones, who will succeed in escaping and establishing a family by patterns learned from readings in the old farm's library about life lived in communion with nature-the unspoiled nature of the one-time indians. the novel proposes a solution along existentialist lines, of human nature being acted/performed into being by each individual, irrespective of generation - natural or artificial.

Kate Wilhelm takes advantage of the increased potential of narrative refinement provided by the genre of speculative fiction, cultural allusiveness expanding the frame of the plot. As in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, cloning is the promise of humanity's progress and immortality. A character, Hilda, irritated at the similarity between herself and her clone kills her.

Her name echoes that of Hildebrandt from *Hildebrand lied*, a companion of Theodoric, who murdered his son. The famous popular song, *Oh, Shenandoah*, is reminiscent of the European colonization of the Indo-American land. The author quenches the anxieties looming round artificial life by setting the topic in an existentialist perspective. It is not biological generation that determines the process of individuation, but experience, the way of being in the world.

The infinite connections with the environment (the natural and symbolic ones replacing the technological as sources of cognition), explorations, curiosity and the desire for unpredictable adventures into new lands create distinct individualities, the frozen paradise of the clones disappearing with the mill that generates their energy. The mill is the emblem of empty spinning, of the repeated replication of information in cloning whose consequences can only be entropy and exhaustion. Neither novel is explicitly rejecting the idea of cloning or of the use of automata by liberal humans who

abide by moral values understood in the Kantian rather than latitudinarian way as being ingrained in the human unconscious and consequently enjoying universal validity and recognition.

References

1. Hayles N Katherine (2010) "After Shocks: Post human ambivalence". *Post medieval: a Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 1:262–271. doi:10.1057/pmed.2010.28.
2. Maturana Humberto R, Francisco J, Varela (1989) [1972]. *Autopoiesis and Cognition. The Realization of the Living*. With a preface to 'Autopoiesis' by Sir Stafford Beer. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company. HRI '11 Proceedings of the 6th international conference on Human-robot interaction. Lausanne, Switzerland — March 06 - 09, 2011. 331-338. Published by ACM New York, NY, USA . doi>10.1145/1957656.1957786. <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:rZSQ6nVyv1MJ:www.cs.cmu.edu/~illah/CLASSDOCS/p331-mumm.pdf+&cd=2&hl=ro&ct=clnk&gl=ro>.
3. Kuokkanen Petri (2003) *Prophets of Decline. The Global Histories of Brooks Adams, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee in the United States 1896-1961*. Academic Dissertation. Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 924. Tampere: University of Tampere. Web: <file:///C:/Users/user/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/Temporary%20Internet%20Files/Content.IE5/OOS4ZOK5/951-44-5643-2.pdf>.
4. Penman Jim (2015) *Biohistory: Decline and fall of the West*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
5. Deleuze Gilles, Felix Guattari (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus*. Tr. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
6. Hall Edward T (1966) *The Hidden Dimension*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
7. Mumm Jonathan, Bilge Mutlu (2011) "Human-Robot Proxemics: Physical and Psychological Distancing in Human-Robot Interaction".