Article:

Goodley, D., Lawthom, R. and Runswick, C.K. (2014) Posthuman disability studies. Subjectivity, 7. 342 - 361. ISSN 1755-6341

https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2014.15

++++

Posthuman disability studies

Dan Goodley*, Rebecca Lawthom and Katherine Runswick Cole****
* University of Sheffield, School of Education, 388 Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2TA
** Manchester Metropolitan University, Department of Psychology, Gaskell Campus, Hathersage Road, M13 0JA.
Correspondence: d.goodley@shef.ac.uk; r.lawthom@mmu.ac.uk; k.runswick-cole@mmu.ac.uk

Dan Goodley is Professor of Disability Studies and Education at the University of Sheffield. Recent texts include *Dis/ability Studies* (Routledge, 2014) and *Disability Studies* (Sage, 2011). His work engages critical studies of ableism and disablism to interrogate the gains and losses of those working at the dis/ability complex.

Rebecca Lawthom is Professor of Community Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her work engages at the intersections of feminism, disability and migration. Publications include *Community Psychology* (Wiley Blackwell, 2011, with Kagan, Burton and Duckett) and *Qualitative Methods in Psychology: A research guide* (Open University Press, 2012, with Banister, Bunn, Burman, Daniels, Duckett, Parker, Runswick Cole, Sixsmith and Goodley).

Katherine Runswick-Cole is Senior Research Fellow in Disability Studies and Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Her research and publications focus on the lives of disabled children and their families, this includes *Disabled Children's Childhood Studies* (2013, Palgrave, edited with Tillie Curran) and *Approaching disability: Critical issues and perspectives* (2014, Routledge, with Mallett).

Posthuman disability studies

Abstract

This paper explores the human through critical disability studies and the theories of Rosi Braidotti. We ask: what does it mean to be human in the 21st Century and in what ways does disability enhance these meanings? In addressing this question we seek to work through entangled connections of nature, society, technology, medicine, biopower and culture to consider the extent to which the human might be an outdated phenomenon, replaced by Braidotti's *posthuman* condition. We then introduce disability as a political category, an identity and a moment of relational ethics. Critical disability studies, we argue, are perfectly at ease with the posthuman because disability has always contravened the traditional classical humanist conception of what it means to be human. Disability also invites a critical analysis of the posthuman. We examine the ways in which disability and posthuman work together, enhancing and complicating one another in ways that raise important questions about the kinds of life and death we value. We consider three of Braidotti's themes in relation to disability: I. Life beyond the self: Rethinking enhancement; II. Life beyond the species: Rethinking animal; III. Life beyond death: Rethinking death. We conclude by advocating a posthuman disability studies that responds directly to contemporary complexities around the human whilst celebrating moments of difference and disruption[i].

(1) Introduction: Have you ever been human?

> 'Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history (Braidotti, 2013: 1).

This quote kick-starts Rosi Braidotti's text and initiates a key task of her book: to target/secure the problem/possibility of the post/human. The human, as it is classically understood, is a self-aggrandising, abstract ideal and symbol of classical humanity that was born in Europe 'predicated on eighteenth and nineteenth-century renditions of classical Antiquity and Italian Renaissance ideals' (Ibid: 13) and shaped, more recently, through modernist and capitalist mouldings. 'Humanity' Braidotti (2013: 24) notes, 'is very much a male of the species: it is a he'. Moreover, 'he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied' (Braidotti, 2013: 24), 'an ideal of bodily perfection' (Ibid: 13), 'implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognised polity' (Ibid: 65), 'a rational animal endowed with language' (Ibid: 141). This means that while all citizens are humans 'some or more mortal than others' (Ibid: 15) and, conversely, some are more disposable than others. This *humanism* has a Eurocentric core and Imperialist tendencies, meaning that many of those outside of Europe (including many in the colonies) became known as less than human or inhuman.

To this, of course, critical disability studies scholars would add humanism's convenient relationship with medicalisation and psychologisation as colonizing tendencies of the body and psyche. 'The disabled' and the 'Non-Europeans' (grouped as homogeneous categories) become known in terms of what they are not. Humanism's arrogant centering of classical 'man' fitted directly with what Lacan (1977) would term a mis-recognition of self-determination and authority. And this authoritative humanist ideal is one that people rarely match up to you. Nevertheless, Braidotti acknowledges a number of emancipatory offerings of humanism. These include civil rights based upon definitions of humanity; normative legal systems respecting the right to live as a human being and pan-national declarations cherishing this phenomenon called the human. We could cite here, for example, the opportunities for humanist recognition offered by the ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*****.** Braidotti does, though, remain antagonistic towards humanism's rigidity and narrowness, which invites some into its fold whilst banishing others. We share this view. She aligns herself with poststructuralists (like Foucault and Derrida), postcolonialists (Fanon and Shiva) and feminist philosophers (including Irigaray, Kristeva and Butler) and shares their deconstructive desires to destabilise humanist man. One way in which she differs from these thinkers is her tendency to think affirmatively rather than negatively. Instead of identifying hopelessness she asks; what productive alternatives might emerge in response to the oppressive nature of humanism? Deconstructing existing frames of humanity need not lead to despair nor nihilism but an affirmative positionality. This stance is rooted in her accessible and politicised use of Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. 1987) and carried forward in reference to (and dialogue with) contemporaries such as Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz and Achille Mbembe. Braidotti acknowledges risks but also, crucially, identifies theoretical, political and artistic opportunities. She is clear, humans are not so easily recognisable today; they have to find their selves in the 'complexity of contemporary science, politics and international relations' (p2) which include debates, developments and controversies relating to 'robotics, prosthetic technologies, neuroscience and bio-genetic capital … [through to] fuzzier new age visions of trans-humanism' (Ibid: 2). Like it or not; new technologies mean that we live in very different times to those of our ancestors. These new times we might define as 'the posthuman condition', times that 'urge us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming' (Ibid: 12). This condition, she accepts, 'provokes elation but also anxiety … about the possibility of a serious decentring of 'man'; the former measure of things' (Ibid).

Like poststructuralists and postmodernists before her, Braidotti is clear: the old modernist idealisation of the unitary, rational, independent, dislocated, solitary, able-bodied human subject has been revealed as a fiction. The self, subject, person, citizen, the human – each of these individualised entities – is now firmly interconnected, plugged into and caught up in the ever growing whirlpool of capital, technology, communication that shift us through real and virtual places and spaces. The 21st Century citizen is a 'knowing subject' with the potential to 'free us from the provincialism of the mind, the sectarianism of ideologies, the dishonesty of grandiose posturing and the grip of fear' (Ibid: 11). A recurring anxiety expressed by Braidotti, throughout the text, is that social theory is in danger of lagging behind the many posthuman transformations already occurring everyday across the globe. And they all leave from a point of departure: humanism.

Braidotti (2013: 29) acknowledges that 'one touches humanism at one's risk and peril' (Ibid: 29) and 'rejecting the enlightenment legacy would be inherently contradictory for any critical project (Ibid: 36). Humanism, she acknowledges, has supported liberal notions of autonomy, responsibility, self-determination, solidarity, community-bonding, social justice and principles of equality (Ibid: 29). These practices remain important, especially for those groups of society who have, in the words of Braidotti, never been known as human. Disabled people have historically been excluded from the category of the human and continue to demand inclusion into this category. Hence, we are not suggesting in this paper to give up on the functional utility of human rights nor the social justice of liberal principles of equality in our fight to challenge disablism (the exclusion of people with impairments from mainstream society). There is of course a time and place for humanism: especially when such a register remains the commonsensical and dominant way of thinking about the human. We will return to this consideration later on in the paper. We also recognise, though, that these humanist offerings come at a price: they are hegemonically enshrined through a marking of those that count as human and those that do not. This epistemic violence of humanism, which reduces certain non-Western others to sub-human status, 'is a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social dehumanization' (Ibid: 28). It is also a common practice of Global North social scientific research (Teo, 2010). 'Humanism's universalism, primacy of rationality, the unitary subject' (Braidotti, 2013: 31) is the white man's burden where women 'were assigned to the pole of un-reason, passions and emotions, keeping them in the private sphere' (Ibid: 34). The humanist subject defines himself as much by 'what he is excluded from' and defends himself through a violent and belligerent reaction to 'the sexualised, racialised and naturalised others that occupied the slot of devalued difference' (Ibid: 144). For some of these others (or perhaps we should say Others), being human already feels alien; 'because my sex, historically speaking, never quite made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted' (Braidotti, 2013: 81).

We see similar parallels with the historical disavowal of disabled people. 'For me', Braidotti reflects, 'it is impossible, both intellectually and ethically, to disengage the positive elements of Humanism from their problematic counterparts: individualism breeds egotism and self-centredness; self-determination can turn to arrogance and domination; and science is not free from its own dogmatic tendencies' (2013: 30). We seek to take up the challenge set by Braidotti's (2013:153) to 'find the courage to move beyond an exclusive concern for the human … and to embrace more planetary intellectual challenges'.

This not only means shifting how we understand the human but also rethinking our relationships with our environments, our world and human and non-human inhabitants of our planet. And doing this rethinking through disability. The shift back and forth between humanism and anti-humanism has endlessly occupied theorists and activists. Instead, Braidotti demands, we need to think again: to desire 'posthumanism as a move beyond these lethal binaries' (Ibid: 37). Posthuman ways of being and becoming reshape the identity of humanistic practices by 'stressing heteronomy and multi-faceted relationality, instead of autonomy and self-referential disciplinary purity' (Ibid: 145). Disability, too, encourages such reshaping.

(2) The posthuman condition

> [T]he proper study of the posthuman condition is the posthuman itself. This new knowing subject is a complex assemblage of human and non-human, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires major re-adjustments in our way of thinking (Braidotti, 2013: 159)

Were one to take a glance across Braidotti's body of work (1994, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2013) a discernable philosophical contribution to social theory and activism resides in her willingness to remain upbeat and imaginative about a future post-human. The crisis of humanism (the realisation, as we see it, that we all fail to dance to the beat of the ableist drum associated with ideal/ised 'big Subject of Man') means that 'structural others of the modernist humanistic subject re-emerge with a vengeance' (Braidotti, 2013: 37). The great 'emancipatory movements of postmodernity' (Ibid: 37) have their 'fires stoked by structural others such as the pro-environment, anti-nuclear, anti-globalisation' and, we would add, disability movements. Each has the potential to engage in 'a radical estrangement from notions like moral rationality, unitary identity, transcendent consciousness or innate and universal moral value' (Ibid: 92). Let us now introduce three key theoretical moves of Braidotti's 2013 *The Posthuman*.

The first relates to *life beyond the self* and the need for a new theory of the human subject that 'takes stock of the posthuman turn and hence acknowledges the decline of Humanism' (Ibid: 51). This decline should be celebrated because it opens up the self as an extended, distributed, interconnected and relational entity 'embodied and embedded' (Ibid: 51). A posthuman subject embraces 'affirmative politics' which combine 'critique with creativity' in the pursuit of alternative ways of living with one another. Continental philosophy of the late 20th Century is characterised by Braidotti as creating valued and othered versions of the self. The time is ripe for refiguring and reconfiguring the self. What it means to be a reflexive self seeks to end a 'parochial' notion of the self (born and bred in Western European and North

American, White Anglo Saxon Protestant contexts) and embrace 'renewed claims to community and belonging by singular subjects who have taken the critical distance from humanist individualism' (Ibid; 39). In emerging out of the confines of anti/humanism, Braidotti (2006, 2013) offers a *process-oriented political ontology*. Rather than conceptualising ontology as an internalised phenomenon of an individual subject, we are asked to think of the kinds of connection between and within one another. Hence, the posthuman turn is a move 'beyond lethal boundaries' (Ibid: 37). Here 'the crisis of humanism means that the structural others of the modern humanistic subject re-emerge with a vengeance' (Ibid: 37), creating 'other visions of the self' (Ibid: 38), 'experimenting with new models of the self', devising 'renewed claims to community and belonging by singular subjects who have taken critical distance from humanist individualism' (Ibid: 39), stressing a 'radical relationality, non-unitary identities and multiple allegiances' (Ibid: 144). This is a self beyond its traditional fixed moorings; a posthuman self.

The second, *life beyond the species*, directly contests anthropocentrism that puts humanist man (anthropos) before other species and the environment (as an egocentrism). Humanism situates anthropos as elite species, occupying a sovereign position. A posthuman turn challenges such elitism, reminding us that the superior human ideal is of course only that; a utopian ideal. Moreover, the pure organic entity that was anthropos has now been 'technological mediated to an unprecedented order' (Ibid: 57) subjected to 'the four horsemen of the posthuman apocalypse: nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science' (Ibid: 59). The human species has become expanded, meaning that 'the boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling down, in a cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspective …. relinquishing the demonic forces of the naturalised others' (Ibid: 66-67). These others include animals, insects, plants, environment and the cosmos as a whole. For Braidotti, posthumanity moves beyond the species (and the speciesism or anthropomorphism of humanism), freeing up solidarities with non-humans including animals and the wider natural environment. Post-anthropocentricism is the posthuman response. There is more to life than the human being.

Theme three, *life beyond death,* pushes Braidotti to consider the centrality of death to any theorisation of life. A posthuman analysis is mindful of the biopolitical apparatus that mobilise ‘not only generative forces but also new and subtler degrees of death and extinction’ (Ibid: 115). Here we can think of drug treatments, prostheses, genetic testing, and the human genome project that seek to enhance life but also are often working alongside death. Indeed, she notes, ‘a whole under-class of socially under-insured disposable bodies is engendered both within the Western world and in the emerging economies’ (Ibid: 118). The biopolitics of life now includes not simply ‘errant humans’ (think the mad, disabled, deviant) but the nonhuman (animal, mineral, machine). And key to the maintenance of a healthy population is the political, cultural and social necessity to identify those who are dying, unhealthy and facing degeneracy. Hence, biopower involves the management of lives that are living (Zoë-politics) and lives that are dying (necro-politics). We are, then, entering a time of thanatopolitics (Rose, 2001) in our late biopolitical times that raise huge questions around the kinds of living lives and dying lives that we denigrate or value. The posthuman condition, for Braidotti, is as much about death as it is about life: ‘bio-power and necro-politics are two sides of the same coin’ (Braidotti, 2013: 122). We need to value (our relationships with) death as much as we do life.

Let us now consider how these theoretical moves resonate and connect with our distinct political and theoretical interests, which we associate with critical disability studies.

(3) Enter critical disability studies

> The fast-changing field of disability studies is almost emblematic of the posthuman predicament. Ever mindful that we do not yet know what a body can do, disability studies combine the critique of normative bodily models with the advocacy of new, creative models of embodiment’ (Bradotti, 2013: 146).

Braidotti’s passing reference to disability studies recognises at least acknowledges the promise of disability to exemplify the posthuman. Our analysis fits well with the emerging scholarship and activism of the critical disability studies field which we read as questioning traditional and normative understandings of the human individual and, as way of response, offering new, collectivist and crip alternatives that fit well with the posthuman manifesto outlined by scholars such as Braidotti and Haraway (e.g. McRuer, 2006; Campbell, 2009;

Shildrick, 2009, 2012; Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009; Goodley, 2007, 2011, 2013; Kafer, 2013; Slater, 2013; Liddiard, 2012, 2014; Mallett and Runswick Cole, 2014; Feely, 2014). People with physical, sensory or cognitive impairments are plugged into a myriad of cultural, professional, disciplinary and political practices that shape their embodied selves and inter-relationships with the world. One common theme of critical disability studies is that disability necessarily demands and affirms *interdependent* connections with other humans, technologies, non-human entities, communication streams and people and non-peopled networks. Disability is but one cultural artifact that signifies the 'demise of humanism' (Braidotti, 2013: 151) precisely because disability demands non-normative and anti-establishment ways of living life. To use the language of McRuer (2006), disability *crips* what it means to be a human being. Quite simply, disability complicates the myopic perspective and non-representative nature offered by humanism. Our sitpoint is that disability is *the* quintessential posthuman condition: because it calls for new ontologies, ways of relating, living and dying. Posthuman and critical disability studies share an antithetical attitude towards the taken-for-granted, ideological and normative under-girdings of what it means to be a valued citizen of society.

Take for example McLaughlin *et al's* (2008) study of disabled babies and their families. All the babies represented had extensive relational networks, most starkly captured by the baby with the label of Down's syndrome who by the age of one had had contact with over 120 health, social care and educational professionals. When Braidotti (2013) calls for a politics of becoming predicated on 'interdependence with multiple other' (Ibid: 101) she could be speaking about those relationships demanded of and by those working at the face of the disability complex. If the posthuman condition is characterised by assemblages that connect the subject to her/his outsides (Ibid: 165) then disability allows us to think across binaries of self/other, nature/technology and human/machine. We do not readily nor unquestionably accept 120 professional-child connections. Instead, through recognising their interconnection, we consider the value and worth of these lines of interaction. Why are professionals tied up with children? To what ends and for what service? What kinds of desirous or disgusting offerings are opened up by these inter-relationships? What kinds of disciplinary practices are evoked? As Feely (2014) has demonstrated; turning our attention to the details of disability assemblages allows us to ask important questions about power, authority and resistance.

Occupying a posthuman position requires 'the knowing subject disengaging itself from the dominant normative vision of the self' becoming 'relational in a complex manner that connects it to multiple others' (Ibid: 167). Critical disability studies analyses have already made these conceptual moves though this has not come without debate[ii]. Who has the moral, political or ethical right to trouble the human? Should the activist or the theorist be leading these debates? What of those theorists that ignore the very fact that disabled people have never been permitted to occupy the category of the human? Does the posthuman advocate ignore the power of humanist ideals of independence, choice, autonomy and associated human rights at his/her peril? Is a turn to the posthuman yet another examples of a theoretical fancy on the part of an academic that is divorced from everyday fights with oppression (Graby and Greenstein, 2013)? Disability scholars and activists have long made the point that disabled people are denied access to being human: a reality for many of one Billion disabled people across the world. Indeed, people with the label of intellectual disabilities have long embraced People First as their slogan and disabled young people continue to fight under the mantra of independence; choosing to redefine rather than abandon this word (Slater, 2013). While beyond the scope of this paper, we want to acknowledge that many disabled people work either side of the dis/ability and posthuman/human binaries whilst enacting their politics (see for further discussion Goodley, 2014; Goodley and Runswick Cole, in press)[iii].

While these contrary tensions remain – and we would argue should remain as what Puar (2012: 50) terms points of friction – critical disability studies scholars have emphasised the ways in which disability urges us to think again, anew and afresh in productive ways about the (post) human. Indeed, families of disabled children have demonstrated the importance of collective support in enhancing the lives of children rather than dwelling on individualised autonomy (Ryan and Runswick Cole, 2008). While the political work of disability organisations such as People First – the international activist movement of people associated with the label of intellectual disabilities – has demonstrated that competence is a distributed phenomenon rather than an individualised trait (e.g. Williams and Shoultz, 1982). Disability, then, emerges in these contemporary (posthuman) times as a moment of relational ethics: urging us to think again about how we are all made through our connections with others *and* encouraging us to embrace ways of love and life that are not rigidly framed by humanistic values of independence and autonomy (exemplified we would argue in the recent work of Liddiard, 2012, 2014; Titchkosky, 2014). Critical disability studies projects are, we would suggest, entirely commensurate with theories of the posthuman. Our sense is that a careful, nuanced and adapted use of Braidotti can affirmatively articulate the ways in which we might become posthuman through disability. After all 'the human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity' (Braidotti, 2013: 26). And we organise our educational systems around the normative human (Boxall, 2013). Too often, families are fighting for their disabled children to be recognised. Families in search of community and educational inclusion call upon anti-discriminatory legislation, UN Rights, school policies and educational mandates. No doubt these fights will go on. Inevitably, because of an ever expanding form of globalised disablism, agitations around rights associated with anthropos will have to be made. The humanist human and his rights will be evoked. But alongside these battles are the other everyday negotiations, performances, lobbying, debates, embodiments, relationalities, emotionalities and recognitions that are enacted by families in their communities. These posthuman practices are equally of importance. They ask us to think again about the kinds of human beings we are and the kinds of humans we value, accept, include and permit to thrive. The posthuman is already there in our contemporary world, circulating in a general sense in 'our globally linked and technologically mediated societies' (Ibid: 5). Rethinking interactions between humans and non-humans on a relational and 'planetary scale' (Ibid: 6) with the potential for 'collectively shared, community-based praxis' (Ibid: 100), an 'accountable recomposition of a missing people' (Ibid: 100) fit with the tenets of critical disability studies.

(4) Three disabled posthuman possibilities

We now turn to three theoretical strands of Braidotti's (2013) book that illuminate key elements of a posthuman turn relating to the self, the species and death/life.

I. Life beyond the self: Rethinking enhancement

For Braidotti, (2013: 35) matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but continuous with them. Contemporary science and biotechnologies affect the very fibre and structure of the living and have 'altered dramatically our understanding of what counts as the basic frame of reference for the human today' (Ibid: 40). We have entered, she suggests, the epoch of 'panhumanity' where each and everything is technologically mediated. The question is not: should we be enhanced by technology, the question should be something along the lines of: what ontological, ethical and political questions are raised by our technological enhancement? When we think of enhancement we are plunged into the shiny, sexy world of sci-fi and cyborgs. Bio-techno worlds are, indeed, desirable utopias and, for many, everyday realities. As the British musician Damon Albarn recently observed, we are 'everyday robots', plugged into the global information superhighway by our smartphones and our relentless use of social media, rebooting our selves and our bodies. On the other side, we have the less desirable aspects of human enhancement, rightly tackled in the work of Wolbring (2009, 2012), who worries away at the ableism rife within the transhumanist movement:

> Disabled people using the latest assistive technologies, with their eyes fixed on medical progress, are a natural constituency for transhumanism. Disabled people in the wealthier industrialized countries, with their wheelchairs, prosthetic limbs, novel computing interfaces and portable computing, are the most technologically dependent humans ever known, and are aggressive in their insistence on their rights to be technologically assisted in fully participating in society … Probably the most prominent symbol of disabled transhumanist activism these days is Christopher Reeve, the former Superman actor who became a tireless campaigner for biomedical research after a horse-riding accident left him quadriplegic. Reeve has been especially important defending the use of cloned embryos in stem cell research, and his advocacy of cures for spinal injuries has made him controversial for the disability rights extremism who see a zero-sum trade-off between disability rights and cures for disabilities … But most disabled people are not Luddites. Most disabled people think parents should have the freedom to choose to have non-disabled children and that technology can be used to overcome or cure disabilities, while we fight for equality for people with disabilities. Just as we should have the choice to get rid of a disability, we should also have the right to choose not to be "fixed," and to choose to live with bodies that aren't "normal." The right not to be coerced by society to

> adopt a "normal" body is also a central demand of transhumanism (http://transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/communities/physicallydisabled/)

We share Wolbring's (2009, 2012) concerns about a movement that appears to want to wish away disability. But far removed from this techno-ableist speak, might disability force us to think of human enhancement in other, everyday, less sinister and more productive ways?

Let us reiterate and revisit Braidotti's desires for heteronomy: action of forces outside of the individual that shame and move the organism in powerful ways. Braidotti seeks a 'more complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities' (26)... 'the potential of the posthuman condition as conducive to human enhancement' (30). Taking up the relational subject as a core element of the potential of the posthuman condition to be conducive to human enhancement inevitably leads us, we would argue, to disability. The wheelchair user, the employer of a personal assistant, the blind woman walking down the street with the support of her guide dog, the augmentative and alternative communication user, the child labelled with Special Educational Needs who has the regular input of the classroom assistant, the tube-fed baby; all of these posthuman configurations of bio, techno, social, human, animal, community scream and boast of disability's posthuman condition. It is not simply the case, as Siebers (2006) puts it, that disabled people have always been cyborgs; more than that, disability has always demanded to be recognised not as lack but possibility; an enhanced humanity, a posthumanity far beyond the limited figuration of the cyborg (see Reeve, 2012). Consequently, it is only right that critical disability studies activists and scholars are at the heart of debates around transhumanism and human enhancement. Critical disability studies scholars must be present and engaged with wider ethical debates (and we would add questions of the human) that are raised when we think of bio-techno-human enhancement such as gene therapies, ante-natal interventions and normalising forms of surgery[iv]. Human and non-human linkages suggest complex interfaces between the 'wetware' of bodies and the 'hardware' of technologies (Braidotti, 2013: 145).

But we must also be careful not to be seduced by shiny technology when, on a more mundane level, we are already potentially enhancing our humanity through a myriad of inter-relationships. Indeed, the tied togetherness between the guide dog and human; or personal assistant and employer, demands us to think again about old humanist notions of agency, responsibility and subjectivity. Braidotti's Deleuzian tendencies explicitly emerge when she reminds us that a posthuman position can no longer assume a 'human, individualised self as the deciding factor of main subject' (45). Instead, we need to envisage 'a transversal inter-connection or an 'assemblage' of human and non-human actors' (45) all bound up in a project of 'pragmatic experimentation' (45). Let us pause here, for a moment, and think of the example of disabled child and mother and what each might do to one another, what they become together and the kinds of questions and lessons that result from their assemblage:

> You see, I can't keep chasing the normal. I mean I've done so much to try and make my son normal but I can't keep that up. ... I need to accept him in the ways that he is and just enjoy them and him. I must stop pressurising myself. (Rebecca Greenwood) (from Goodley 2007: 150).
>
> To be the mother of a disabled child is to be different – a mother because she undoubtedly has a child, yet somehow not a mother in terms of the conventional notions of motherhood that pervade our society (Gregory, 1991: 121: cited in Ryan and Runswick Cole, 2008: 203).

Disability, as a posthuman lever, shifts mothering into an enhanced postconventionalist space; from being to an *ethics of becoming*; 'an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others' (Braidotti, 2013: 49) by 'removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism'. Of course, parenting and mothering, each have the potential to dislodge a self-centred subjectivity. Disability too shares this potential for disruption and expansion. Like a fine recreational drug, the experience of parenting is enhanced further by disability, in ways that may feel heady, dizzying, confusing (and high). Braidotti (2013: 49) puts it more grandly:

> I define the critical posthuman subject within an eco-philosophy of multiple becomings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, … a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and embodied. Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality

> and hence community building … an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others' (Braidotti: 2013: 49-50)

Disability provides fertile conditions for thinking through the posthuman notion of 'the unfleshed, extended and relational self' (Braidotti, 2013: 90), a becoming machine that 'bears a privileged bond with multiple others and merges with one's technologically mediated planetary environment' (Braidotti, 2013: 92)[v]. Mirroring a feminist ethics of care literature, as disability often does (McLaughlin et al, 2088) 'the notion of codependence replaces that of recognition, much as the ethics of sustainability replaces the moral philosophy of rights' (Braidotti 2013: 94). Codependence is true enhancement because 'an ethics based on the primary of the relation of interdependence' (95) values life in itself: 'dis-unity points to over-abundance, not lack' (156).

II. Life beyond the species: Rethinking animal

If one of the exciting moments of the posthuman condition entails the 'displacement of anthropocentrism and the recognition of trans-species solidarity' (Braidotti, 2013: 67) then one need only to turn to the disability world. One of the most significant contributions of critical disability studies has been the dislodging and deconstruction of the fantasy of ableist human one-ness. Disability demands mutuality, support and interdependence. Such qualities are valued elements of Braidotti's posthuman 'not-Oneness, which is constitutive of the non-unitary subject anchors the subject in an ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others that are constitutive of that entity which, out of laziness and habit, we call the 'self'' (100). If becoming animal is about displacing anthropocentricism then Rod Michalko's beautiful 1999 text captures becoming animal and human together: a complex and affirming hybrid. Too often, Braidotti (2013: 668) writes, drawing in the work of Borges, we think of animals in terms of a taxonomy of three groups: those we eat, those we watch TV with and those we are scared of. We confine animals into a host of instrumental, Oedipal or phantasmagorical relationships. But how might we think again about our alliances with animals? One answer, clearly, is through our interconnection and vitality of bond associated with us sharing a planet. 'This vital interconnection posits a qualitative shift of relationship away from species-ism and towards an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human, animal, others) can do' (Braidotti, 2013: 71). Shildrick and Price (2004/2005) demonstrate such as an appreciation.

> The disabled woman who relies on an assistant or carer to help her prepare for a sexual encounter – be it in terms of dressing appropriately, negotiating toilet facilities, or requiring direct physical support in a comfortable sexual position – is not different in kind from other women, but simply engaged more overtly in just those networks that Deleuze and Guattari characterise as desiring production. Similarly a reliance on prosthetic devices - the linkages between human, animal and machine – would figure not as limitations but as transformative possibilities of becoming other along multiple lines of flight (Shildrick and Price, 2005/2006, np).

Back to Michalko (1999), and his ethico-political account of life with a guide dog and companion animal, we are encouraged to ask; what do we ask of animals? What are our ethical rights to do so? How do humans and animals become together? Such questions resonate with a posthuman view of 'subjectivity as an assemblage that includes non-human agents' (Braidotti, 2013: 82). Human-animal relationships are inherently touching (Shildrick, 2009) and they function to 'break up the fantasy of unity, totality and one-ness' (Braidotti, 2013: 100). Animal rights, Green and Disability Politics meet in a 'post-anthropocentric space, recognising the 'inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each' (79). We are faced, as Michalko (1999) alerts us to, matters of slavery, abuse and work that animals are subjected to which contrast markedly with the touching moments of human-animal interconnection (articulated well by Shildrick, 2009).
Braidotti (2013: 89) argues that 'the crisis of humanism inaugurates the posthuman by empowering the sexualised and racialised human 'others' to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of master-slave relations and this includes naturalised others such as animals'. She continues, 'this hails a post-anthropocentric period of time in which alliances are made between humans and non-humans; 'between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems' (Ibid: 89).

So let us think again about the animal/human relationship and, indeed, our deployment of the term 'animal' as constitutive of the human; precisely because the animal is Other to human. Recently, the right wing British tabloid newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, reported the following about the shocking abuse cases at Winterbourne View residential hospital, in Bristol;

> *Whistle-blower at centre of 'barbaric' care home abuse exposé raised alarm last year - but was ignored by regulator*
> The Government has ordered a report into how warnings of systematic abuse towards vulnerable adults at Winterbourne View residential hospital, in Bristol, were not acted upon by local authorities and England's social care regulator the Care Quality Commission (CQC) ...
> Care workers dragged vulnerable patients around like animals at the Winterbourne View private care home in Bristol
> http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1393324/Care-homes-face-dawn-raids-Winterbourne-view-abuse-exposed.html

Winterbourne shocks because humans were treated like they were animals. One assumes it would be doubly shocking to treat non-disabled people as if they were animals? It would appear that there is an unconscious human desire to view animals as less than human and in some cases treats certain categories of human as if they were not (i.e. Non-human = people with learning disabilities). This anthropocentric position upholds 'transcendental human exceptionalism' (Braidotti, 2013: 86) and has the potential to expel those others that fail to match up to its standards (whether they be animals or those considered lesser humans, akin to animals). We need a qualitative shift of our collective imaginings, or a 'shared desire for transformations' (Braidotti, 2013: 89). The problem is not that some categories of human are treated like animals; the problem resides in the unconscious desire of the human condition to treat animals in inhumane ways; and treat some humans as if they were animals. We think that reinvigorating discussion around human/animal relations around disability might provide the necessary conditions and impetus for revaluing animals and humans as sharing a posthuman space of becoming.

III. Life beyond death: Rethinking death

> At the heart of my research project lies an ethics that respects vulnerability while actively constructing horizons of hope (Braidotti, 2013: 122).

In a recent research project, we were fortunate to talk with some young disabled people who were living with life limiting and life threatening impairments (LL/LTIs)[vi]. Their perspectives on the value of their (short) lives were incredibly productive. They shared with us their concerns, worries and their sadness. They told us of how difficult their families found their prognoses. But crucially they also told us jokes, shared familial narratives, ambitions and exciting projects they were involved. They demanded that we rethink how we put together words such as 'valued', 'quality', 'life' and 'living'. They also asked us to revisit our unproblematic and inherently deficit-leaning thoughts around death. Their approach to life and death shared much with the affirmative approach of Braidotti's posthumanism. They got us to think about how we might speak positively, affirmatively and productively about death, disability and short lives.

Jasbir Puar (2009: 165-166) proposes that *all* contemporary global citizens are 'living in prognosis with their own debility'. Perhaps, nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of children and young people with LL/LTIs. If social theory, professional practice, community discourse or social policy speak of these young people at all then this tends to be in terms of tragedy, negativity and sadness. In contrast, recent developments in feminist, queer, postcolonial, disability and death studies have provided new vocabularies for speaking of and celebrating the lives and death of 'non-normative' human beings (e.g. McRuer, 2006). Being disabled is not a tragedy but a possibility, an affirmation, a 'queer' or 'crip' space for rethinking what it means to be human, to live a quality life and a life with quality. Death *is* a difficult subject and discussing the death of a child is more difficult still. Social embarrassment around death and disability means that a silence is often imposed upon families. However, we need to talk about death before *and* after a child dies. In what ways can we promote valued understandings of real bodies facing death? How can death, disability and short lives be conceptualized in less liminal and pathological ways that honour the contributions of children with LL/LTIs? How can social sciences articulate the ways in which medicine and palliative care value short lives and transform services for children with

LL/LTIs and their families? To what extent does a consideration of death, disability and short lives extend social and natural science understandings of well being and humanity?

While this is not the place (and there is not the space) to adequately answer these questions, we might be able to sketch out a theoretical landscape that encourages productive answers. Our concern relates to the common assumption that disabled children with LL/LTIs are occupying a borderland between life and death, between the human and the inhuman. Like asylum seekers and refugees, these children risk being cast out as 'disposable humanity' or 'undignified monuments of posthuman inhumanity' (Braidotti, 2013: 127). In contrast, then, what we require is a politics of becoming (rather than an assumed positionality of necro-political destruction) that 'thinks *with* rather than *against* death' (128, our italics). Children with LL/LTIs may be seen as pioneers of a posthuman approach to death that redraws the parameters and criteria of what counts as a valued life and death. They conspicuously hit us with the reality, held by all members of contemporary society, that 'we live to recover from the shocking awareness that this game [life and living] is over even before it started. The proximity to death suspends life, not into transcendence, but rather into the radical immanence of 'just a life', here and now, for as long as we can and as much as we can take' (Braidotti, 2013: 132). Traditional notions (or notions obsessed with 'Zoë' rather than thanatos) such as 'quality of life', 'living a full life', 'filling a life before death' are reappraised not only through children with LL/LLIs. 'Death is the event that has always taken place at the level of consciousness ' (that is we are always thinking of death when alive) and 'life is passing and we do not own it; we just inhabit it, not unlike a time-share location' (133) (living is constantly in flux and movement). Death and short lives are pulled from a depressive human position into a productive posthuman space because 'posthuman critical thought does not aim at mastery, but at transformation of negative into positive passions' (p134). It can be argued then that 'life as Zoë also encompasses what we death. As a result, what we humans most deeply aspire to is not so much to disappear, but rather to do in the space of our own life and in our own way' (p135).

Unsurprisingly, children and young people with LL/LTIs have plenty to say about how they would like to die, how their funerals should be planned and the hopes they have for how they are remembered. This latter point hints at their capacities for what Braidotti (2013: 137) terms 'becoming-imperceptible' 'part of the cycles of becoming, yet another form of interconnectedness, a vital relationship that links one with other multiple forces' (137). We do connect even when we are no longer physically around. Add to this the reality that many children with LL/LTIs are plugged into a host of human and non-human assemblages – at times test-cases for new medical and technological interventions aimed at preserving life or aiding a death with dignity – then our young people are swept into the growing population of dynamic non-unitary assemblages. Children-with-LL-LTIs-as-cyborg assemblages are very real living examples of posthuman social theory. Death and short lives are no longer read in terms of lack nor figuration but in terms of plenitude, desire and possibility: over-flowing with hither to unknown future inter-relationships and connections with others. This is not to deny the tragedy of young people dying far too early. But it is about inviting an alternative conceptualisation of life and death. If we can affirm death, one could argue, we can affirm anything. In between the binaries of life and death we find affirmation. This is a matter of life and death emboldened by 'relational vitality' (188).

(5) Conclusion

Braidotti (2013: 104) suggests that 'thinking is about the invention of new concepts and new productive ethical relations. In this respect, theory is a form of organised estrangement from dominant values'. We share this view and would add that disability captures the productive possibilities of the posthuman condition. Disability brings something politicised and critical to posthuman theory. Our sense is that disabled people will continue to fight to be recognised as humans (in the humanist sense and register of humanism) but equally (and simultaneously) are already enacting forms of activism, art and relationality that push us all to think imaginatively and critically about a new epoch that we might term the posthuman. Disability politics will continue to weave in and out of human and posthuman possibilities (Goodley, 2014). Disability disavows the human: it desires and rejects it and in this dynamic, necessarily contradictory play with the human. Disability allows us to think again about our selves, our relations and our politics. Posthuman disability studies capture the now and future of our activism and our thinking.

References[vii]

---

[i] We would like to take this opportunity to thank the anonymous reviewers for the generosity of time they gave to responding to our original paper with constructive and hard-hitting critique. Thanks also to Isabel Waidner for support with the rewriting of the paper.

[ii] Useful overviews of the emerging field of critical disability studies (and related themes and debates) are provided by Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009), Shildrick (2012) and Goodley (2013).

[iii] Indeed, this paper emerges in part from our discussions with research partners of organisations of disabled people and their allies who are involved in a current Economic and Social Research Council funded project 'Big Society? Disabled people with learning disabilities and civil society, (ES.K004883.1)', http://bigsocietydis.wordpress.com/. One key question to emerge for us is: what kind of idealised citizen lies at the heart of current policy making by the British government? Clearly questions about citizenship parallel debates about the human.

[iv] The Academy of Medical Sciences (2012) publication 'Human enhancement and the future of work', reported on a joint workshop hosted by the Academy of Medical Sciences, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society. The disability scholar Jackie Leach Skully is referred to in the report as raising a number of ethical dis/ability issues in relation to the use of enhancement technologies.

[v] An example of a disability assemblage - spanning children and parents – is beautifully but also tragically captured by the Blogspot http://mydaftlife.wordpress.com/

[vi] RES-062-23-1138 Economic and Social Research Grant, 'Does Every Child Matter, Post-Blair? The interconnections of disabled childhoods'. http://www.rihsc.mmu.ac.uk/postblairproject/

[vii] Boxall, K. (2013). *In defence of normal.* Keynote presentation to Normalcy 2013, Theorising the mundane, 7 – 8th September 2013, Sheffield Hallam University.

Braidotti, R. (1994) *Nomadic subjects: embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Braidotti, R. (2002). *Metamorphoses: Towards a materialist theory of becoming.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Braidotti, R. (2003). Becoming woman, or sexual difference revisited. *Theory, Culture & Society, 20*(3), 43-64.

Braidotti, R. (2006). Posthuman, All Too Human: Towards a New Process Ontology. *Theory Culture Society* , *23 (7-8)*, 197-208.

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. London: Polity.

Campbell, F.K. (2009). *Contours of Ableism: Territories, Objects, Disability and Desire*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.

Feely, M (2014). *A DeleuzoGuattarian assemblage analysis of the treatment of sexuality within the specific material-semiotic context of a particular intellectual disability service*. University of Belfast: Unpublished PhD thesis.

Goodley, D. (2007). Becoming Rhizomatic parents: Deleuze, Guattari and disabled babies. *Disability & Society, 22* (2), 145 – 160.

Goodley, D. (2011). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction*. London: Sage.

Goodley, D. (2013). Dis/entangling critical disability studies. *Disability and Society, 28 (5),* 631-644.

Goodley, D. (2014). *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising ableism and disablism*. London: Routledge.

Goodley, D. and Runswick Cole, K. (in press). Becoming dishuman: thinking about the human through disability. *Discourse: A cultural politics of education*.

Graby, S. & Greenstein, A. 2013. Supported Autonomy: Disability and Assistance beyond Modernism and Post-modernism. Theorising Normalcy and the Mundane 2013. Sheffield Hallam University. Downloaded May 25th 2014 at: http://postpolitics101.wordpress.com/2013/09/27/supported-autonomy-disability-and-assistance-beyond-modernism-and-post-modernism/

Gregory, S. (1991). Mother's and their deaf children. In *Motherhood: Meanings, practices and ideologies,* ed. E. Lloyd. London: Sage.

Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist, Queer, Crip, Bloomington*. Indiana University Press.

Lacan, J. (1977). *Ecrits. A Selection*. New York: Norton.

Liddiard, K. (2012). *(S)Exploring Disability*. University of Warwick, Unpublished PhD Thesis.

Liddiard, K. (2014) The work of disabled identities in intimate relationships. *Disability & Society, 29 (1)*, 115-128, Mallett, R. and Runswick-Cole, K. (2014). *Approaching disability: Critical issues and perspectives.* London: Routledge.

McLaughlin, J., Goodley, D., Clavering, E. and Fisher, P. (2008). *Families Raising Disabled Children: Enabling Care and Social Justice.* London: Palgrave.

McRuer, R. (2006). Compulsory able-bodiedness and queer/disabled existence. In L. Davis. (Ed). *The Disability Studies Reader. Second Edition.* (pp301-308). New York: Routledge.

Meekosha, H. and Shuttleworth, R. (2009). What's so 'critical' about critical disability studies? *Australian Journal of Human Rights, 15 (1),* 47-76.

Michalko, R. (1999). *The Two-in-One: Walking with Smokie, Walking with Blindness.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Puar, J.K. (2009): Prognosis time: Towards a geopolitics of affect, debility and capacity, *Women & Performance: A journal of feminist theory, 19 (2),* 161-172 Retrieved 5th June 2013 http://www.socialtextjournal.org/periscope/2010/11/ecologies-of-sex-sensation-and-slow-death.php

Puar, J. (2012). 'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess': becoming-intersectional of assemblage theory, *Philosophia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, 2*(1), 49–66.

Reeve, D. (2012). Cyborgs, cripples and iCrip: Reflections of the contribution of Haraway to disability studies. In Goodley, D., Hughes, B. and Davis, L. (Eds). *Disability and Social Theory.* London: Palgrave Macmillan. (pp91-111).

Ryan, S. & Runswick‑Cole, K. (2008) Repositioning mothers: mothers, disabled children and disability studies, Disability & Society, 23:3, 199-210, DOI: 10.1080/09687590801953937.

Shildrick, M. (2009). *Dangerous discourses of disability, subjectivity and sexuality.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shildrick, M. (2012). Critical Disability Studies: Rethinking the Conventions for the Age of Postmodernity. In N. Watson, A. Roulstone and C. Thomas (eds). Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies. London: Routledge.

Shildrick, M. and Price, J. (2005/2006). Deleuzian Connections and Queer Corporealities: Shrinking Global Disability. rhizomes 11/12 fall 2005/spring 2006.

Siebers, T. (2006). Disability in theory: from social constructionism to the new realism of the body. In K. Davis. (Ed). *The Disability Studies Reader. Second Edition.* (pp173-184). New York: Routledge.

Slater, J. (2013). *Constructions, Perceptions and Expectations of being 'Young' and 'Disabled': a critical disability perspective*. Unpublished PhD thesis: Manchester Metropolitan University.

Teo, T. (2010). What is Epistemological Violence in the Empirical Social Sciences? *Social and Personality Psychology Compass 4/5,* 295–303.

Titchkosky, T. (2014). Monitoring Disability: The Question of the "Human" in Human Rights Projects. In C. Schlund-Vials and M. Gill. *Collection on Disability, Human Rights, and Humanitarianism.* Publisher: Ashgate Press.

Williams, P., & Shoultz, B. (1982). *We Can Speak for Ourselves*. London: Souvenir Press.

Wolbring, G. (2009). What next for the human species? Human performance enhancement, ableism and pluralism. *Development Dialogue* 54: 141-163 Aug

Wolbring, G. (2012) Expanding Ableism: Taking down the Ghettoization of Impact of Disability Studies Scholars. *Societies* 2: (3). 75 - 83.