

Inchoative Apocalypses of the Human at the Time of the Anthropocene

Orsola Rignani

University of Parma, Parma, Italy

In the Apocalypse, the chiliastic-eschatological meaning has been superimposed on the original literal meaning of dis-velation. A phenomenon, this one, seems to have favored the formation of neuralgic force fields between the end, the beginning, which in some way refer to each other, and precisely dis-velation. If the whole of history seems to be disseminated and sometimes informed by these fields, the Anthropocene temperament certainly does not seem to be an exception. The apocalyptic Anthropocene interstitial spaces are particularly crowded and lively and, among the many voices animating them, those of Serres, Latour, and the posthumanist perspective, to which the one and the other, so to speak, wink, are of particular interest. What the Serresian-Latourian posthuman apocalyptic Anthropocene force-field seems to be reviving is, so to speak, a new recognition of the *already-since-ever-been*, i.e. the recognition that the human has always been inchoative in and with the world in becoming in relationship, that the *post* has always been an engine, resistant to repetitiveness, obviousness and habit, that the new is this very recognition, and that the recognition of the *already-since-ever-been* is precisely action, dynamism, a process of construction (of human in and with the world).

Keywords: Apocalypse, human, posthumanism, Bruno Latour, Michel Serres

Introduction

Perhaps no theme is as much of an evergreen as Apocalypse, in which, moreover, the chiliastic-eschatological meaning has been overlapping with the original literal meaning of dis-velation. A phenomenon, this one, on closer inspection, seems to have fostered the formation of neuralgic force fields between end (i.e., *post* and *trans*), beginning (i.e., inchoation), which in some ways refer to each other, and precisely dis-velation.

The Apocalyptic Challenge of the Anthropocene

If all history seems littered and sometimes informed by these fields, the temperament that, with a good degree of ambiguity, approximation, reductionist simplification, sense of responsibility mixed with anthropocentric pride, and binary recrudescence, we call the Anthropocene (Parikka, 2018; Marchesini, 2021; Cimatti, 2021) certainly seems to be no exception.

The apocalyptic Anthropocene interstitial spaces are particularly crowded and lively, and among the many voices animating them, those of Michel Serres¹ (Moser, 2016; Dolphijn, 2019; Watkin, 2020; Rignani, 2014;

Orsola Rignani, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Industries, University of Parma, Parma, Italy.

¹ As regards the themes of this contribution, on the thought of Michel Serres I recommend Moser, 2016; Dolphijn, 2019; Watkin, 2020; Rignani, 2014; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022a; 2022b.

2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022a; 2022b), Bruno Latour² (Bonato & Orsenigo, 2020; A ĩ-Touati & Coccia, 2021; Manghi, 2022; Corr  a & Magnelli, 2021), and the post-humanist perspective³ (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018; Rosendahl Thomsen & Wamberg, 2020; Baioni, Cuadrado Pereyas, & Macelloni, 2021; Ferrando, 2019), to which the one and the other so to speak wink⁴ (Rignani, 2012; 2014; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022a), particularly attract my attention.

“If we are really going through a crisis, in the strong medical sense of the term, then a return backwards is no good” (Serres, 2009, p. 10), Serres vehemently asserts in response to the contingency of the 2008 financial earthquake, but with a broad gaze that extends to our overall relationship with the world, which has become a primary actor on the political scene. The posthuman, then, for its part, affirms the urgency of becoming aware of objective newness as one with the urgency of the construction of the new itself, in the sense notably of the urgency of becoming aware of a new human as the urgency of its realization (new way of being in the world and of putting oneself in correspondence with it) (Rignani, 2022a). And Latour, for his part, in recognizing the necessity of the return to apocalyptic language in order to become aware of earthly rootedness again, warns, “*To live in the time of the end* is first of all to accept the finitude of the time that passes and to put an end to negligence” (Latour, 2015, p. 286).

For Serres (2009), crisis is a peak, imposing a choice and a bifurcation: either death or novelty, either we die, or we set out in a new direction. For Latour (2015), the gaze we and Gaia give each other is apocalyptic: Gaia’s is a challenge, but it makes it possible for us to be what we really are, that is, Earthbounds. For Serres (2009, p. 25), the world becomes the global reference of current changes and imposes itself in our political relations. For Latour (2015, p. 244), we must dwell in this world, not beyond the Apocalypse but on Earth and in this time, as Earthbounds who know and face planetary frontiers, sensitive to mortality, finitude, and the “difficulty of being of this Earth”. For Serres (2009), the crisis requires us to return to living symbiotically with the world in Biogea (the union of life and earth), the “new and ancient human home” (p. 32) that moreover we have always inhabited, “before history, wars and hatreds, cultures and languages separated us” (p. 32), and that “makes us forget our thousand networks of separation” (p. 32). For the posthuman, becoming more aware of our hybrid dimension can enable us to rediscover the value of relationship and continuity with the non-human in a more-than-human context.

Apocalypses and New Beginnings of the Human

In short, the general message that passes under the surface in these observations is that of the end of the world as the end of a world, that is, as the end of a certain way of inhabiting the world and perceiving ourselves in relation to it. That is, to use the metaphor with which Latour expresses the spirit of Serresian reflection with admiration and adherence, it is a matter for the human to (re)begin to act as the soundtrack to the film that is the world (Latour, 1988, p. 97).

² On the thought of Bruno Latour, in relation to the topics discussed in this contribution, I recommend Bonato & Orsenigo, 2020; A ĩ-Touati & Coccia, 2021; Manghi, 2022; Corr  a & Magnelli, 2021.

³ For an overview of the various orientations within the Posthumanism, I refer to some recent manual and glossary contributions as well as to the bibliographic references contained therein: Braidotti, Hlavajova, 2018; Rosendahl Thomsen, Wamberg, 2020; Baioni, Cuadrado Pereyas, Macelloni, 2021; in addition, a synthesis of all these topics is provided by Ferrando, 2019.

⁴ Regarding, in particular, Serres’ posthumanism or non-posthumanism, even though I have always doubted the heuristic usefulness of ascertaining it, especially given the fluidity of the posthuman and the intellectual independence of Serres himself, I have nonetheless identified and shown reciprocal isomorphisms in relation to the conception of the human and the interface between the human and the world. I have illustrated and developed these positions specifically in Rignani, 2012; 2014; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022a.

The end of separations, barriers, dualisms, and reductionisms, the beginning of the recognition of irreducibility, multiplicity, *mêlange*, ties, and relations as categories of existence, and the un-veiling of these same categories as *already-since-ever-been*, thus appear to be the forces that constitute the Serresian, Latourian, and posthuman apocalyptic Anthropocene force field, in my view expressible, on the linguistic level, as I will say below, through a neo logistic combination of prefixes/prepositions and inchoatives (Rignani, 2022a). That is, of those parts of speech that, as Serres has always argued, open or mark relationships, passages, possibilities, weave a web of meaning, spatial, temporal, and semantic, and mark the beginning of a process⁵, which are also the constitutive elements of trans- and post-humanism.

Post returns the idea of the permanence of a phenomenon in time under new forms and thus expresses an effect/reaction, while *trans* says a change, a moving beyond, an overcoming. Around the former has precisely articulated the posthuman as posthumanism, postanthropocentrism, and postdualism, that is, as an effect/reaction to humanism based on the idea of male, white, Western, schooled man and on the concept of the ontological, ethical, and epistemological centrality of the human species and its separation from and superiority to other species and the rest of the world. Ideas to which it precisely reacted with the proposal of a conception of man not attributable to one gender, one race, or one geographical *context*, and of an acentric conception of the human species in continuity and hybridization with other species and the world (Rignani, 2022a).

Instead, around the second has declined transhumanism as a proposal for the improvement/enhancement of the human species in the expectation of its overcoming at the turn of a meta-biological condition of immanent immortality (Sorgner, 2020; 2021).

Therefore, if post and trans humanism have been coming to stand on positions that are not easily reconciled (in the face of the acentric, relational, and hybridizing humanism of the former, the latter actually advocates a transcendence of the human), what I think it is important to keep in mind here, however, is the original instance, common to both, of rethinking and repositioning the human. Hence, *post* and *trans* can be combined “synthetically” to express, in an “apocalyptic” sense, effect/reaction, and change together, that is, permanence (in the present case of the human/humanism) in new forms according to a transformation and passing over, which although in renewing itself indefinitely, does not tend toward nor arrive at transcendence (of the human/humanism itself).

But, as I have said, the Serresian, Latourian, and posthuman apocalyptic Anthropocene force field is also constituted by the inchoative force effectively expressed by the Serresian neologism *hominescence*, which conveys the idea of the beginning of a process of humanization ushering in new relations of man with his own body, with his fellow human beings, and with the world (Serres, 2001, p. 21).

Therefore, proceeding precisely along the path of neologisms and enacting, as anticipated, a synthesis operation intended to combine and complete the individual components (*post*, *trans*, and inchoative) in a new relationality, I try to call such a field of forces *postranshominescent*, with the intention of expressing a change plus a transformation plus a new beginning, always however of the human and in the human (not beyond it) according to a recovery of forgotten and/or removed nexuses and relations, which is therefore at the same time also a dis-velation (Rignani, 2022a; 2022b).

⁵ “Placed first”, prepositions have for Serres the crucial function of dynamically and inventively relating elements that are part of a multidimensional space and are not mutually exclusive, taking, in languages such as French or Italian, the place, so to speak, of declensions. They alone, therefore, are sufficient to weave a network of meaning, spatial, temporal, semantic, a state of things in motion and in power.

End, beginning, and dis-velation, the apocalyptic *postranshominescent* force field thus emerges as a past/present/future of relations, of federative and inventive ties, and thus, almost Chinese-box-like, as a kind of systemic-ecological-transversal-inclusive work/task on the human. In it there is effect/reaction, change, relation, transformation to fluidize, to hybridize, to contextualize and relativize definitions, categorizations, partitions, periodization, obsolescent in their claims to absoluteness and exclusivity. Hence, it is a matter of thinking and returning, eco(nto)logically, to a human in relation to a relational world from which he has, so to speak, self-excluded himself; that is, to de-anthropocenter the world, in order to grasp or to let emerge from within, the principles common to all entities and their interrelationships. It is no longer possible to admit the separation, the distinction, the hierarchy between subject and object, and thus not even the idea of an active subject acting autonomously on an inert objective context; just as it is no longer possible to disavow the world and its multiplicity (Rignani, 2022a).

And here resonates the *re-en-contre* that Serres disassembles to bring out the constitutive prepositions in their charge of possibility and reassembles in a synthesis exceeding the sum of the parts, understanding it as the bumping into, the falling against, the contingency as the contact between two things, the sudden shock producing discard and novelty, the *carrefour*, the stochastic crossroads, trigger of change, in which precisely the world is at stake. In a perspective in which the *contre* can play its part only in combination with the *re* and with the *en* and in which the *contre* is not *against* but *in-within*, that is, *avec*, precisely subjective-objective, human-other-than-human, in the common context of Biogea, the union of the earth and the living (Serres, 2010).

This suggestion of a renewed awareness of the connections between things finds effective expression, for example, in the perspective indicated by Serres in the *Parc National des Pyrénées* (Serres, 2007), in which the park is seen as a space open to free relations, that is, a space in which human interactions play to the full with the interactions of living beings and things with each other, and which, therefore, is the “realization”, to be understood proactively as a program of change, of this mutual interweaving of relations. In the park, the *mêlange* takes place, that is, the end of all separation, the consideration of the community of living things and things in a specific biotope, the coexistence of all species in an open context, which is added with the multiple relationships entertained by humans and non-humans. Indeed, a collective decision leaves flora and fauna to their relationships and environment, that is, to their interactions, ending the ancient/modern separation and asymmetry between subject and object, culture, and nature, in favor of a mutual interweaving of relationships. In essence, the Pyrenees are a reminder for humans to “return” to the Earth and self-limit in favor of the Mountains.

Already-Since-Ever-Been?

What has been said so far thus leads me to point out that the apocalyptic *postranshominescent* forcefield, in marking the end, so to speak, of dualist anthropocentrism, revives a broader humanism (already) since ever under construction and to be constructed for and in inventive relation to the world. A humanism for which the human is new with respect to the white, male, Western, acculturated Man; and this newness is essentially the rediscovery and restoration of co-belonging with respect to the world in its perennial relational change; an acquisition of awareness that, for that matter, is at one with the urgency/challenge of the ever further realization of this condition.

In short, what the apocalyptic Anthropocene Serresian Latourian posthuman force field seems to me to be reviving is, so to speak, a new recognition of the *already-since-ever-been*, that is, the recognition that we have always been inchoative in and with the world in becoming in relation, that the *post* has always been an engine, resistant to repetitiveness, obviousness and habit, that the new is this very recognition, and that the recognition

of the *already-since-ever-been* is precisely action, dynamism, a process of construction (of the human in and with the world).

It seems to me in conclusion that I can rightly speak, with an oxymoron precisely only apparent, of inchoative apocalypses of the human.

References

- A ĩ-Touati, F., & Coccia, E. (Eds.). (2021). *Le cri de Ga ĩ. Penser la terre avec Bruno Latour*. Paris: La D ĩcouverte.
- Baioni, E., Cuadrado Pereyas, L. M., & Macelloni, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Abbecedario del Postumanismo*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Bonato, A., & Orsenigo, G. (2020). La sfida di Gaia e del popolo a venire. Scoprire l'etica dell'alleanza di fronte alla fine del mondo. *In Circolo*, 9, 49-70.
- Braidotti, R., & Hlavajova, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Posthuman glossary*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Cimatti, F. (2021). *Il postanimale. La natura dopo l'Antropocene*. Rome: DeriveApprodi.
- Corr ĩa, D. S., & P. Magnelli, A. R. (2021). L'apocalypse de Gaia: la cosmopolitique pour l'Anthropoc ĩne de Bruno Latour. *Nature Sciences Soci ĩs*, 28(3-4), 314-322.
- Dolphijn, R. (Ed.). (2019). *Michel Serres and the crises of the contemporary*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ferrando, F. (2019). *Philosophical posthumanism*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Latour, B. (1988). The enlightenment without the critique: An introduction to Michel Serres's philosophy. In J. Griffin (Ed.), *Contemporary French philosophy* (pp. 82-98). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Latour, B. (2015). *Face ĩ Ga ĩ. Huit conferences sur le Nouveau R ĩgime Climatique (Facing Gaia. Eight lectures on the new climatic regime)*. (C. Porter, Trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Manghi, N. (2022). *Dopo la natura. Pensare con Gaia*. Retrieved from <https://equilibrimagazine.it/clima/2022/12/19/dopo-la-natura-pensare-con-gaia/>
- Marchesini, R. (2021). *The virus paradigm. A planetary ecology of the mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moser, K. (2016). *The encyclopedic philosophy of Michel Serres. Writing the modern world and anticipating the future*. Augusta: Anaphora Literary Press.
- Parikka, J. (2018). Anthropocene. In R. Braidotti & M. Halvajova (Eds.), *Posthuman glossary* (pp. 51-53). London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Rignani, O. (2014). *Emergenze "post-umaniste" dell'umano. Prove di analisi storico-comparativa dal presente al passato e ritorno*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rignani, O. (2016). *Emergenze "post-umaniste" del corpo. Una prova di analisi "orizzontale" via Michel Serres*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rignani, O. (2018). *Metafore del corpo post-umanista: Michel Serres*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rignani, O. (2019). Toward a posthuman humanism: Serresian federative humanism between natural contract and political ecology. *Philosophy International Journal*, 2, 1-6.
- Rignani, O. (2020). The relevance of Michel Serres's idea of bodily hominescence for a convergence of posthumanism and transhumanism: A trans/posthuman body. *Philosophy Study*, 10(2), 119-126.
- Rignani, O. (2022a). *Umani di nuovo. Con il postumano e Michel Serres*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rignani, O. (2022b). A reflection on the posthuman human: The postranshominescent. *Philosophy Study*, 12(8), 465-474.
- Rosendahl Thomsen, M., & Wamberg, J. (Eds.). (2020). *The Bloomsbury handbook of posthumanism*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Serres, M. (2007). *Parc National des Pyr ĩn ĩes. L'ordre de grandeur*. Toulouse: ĩditions Privat.
- Serres, M. (2009). *Temps des Crises (Times of crises: what the financial crisis revealed and how to reinvent our lives and future)*. (A.-M. Feenberg-Dibon, Trans.). London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Serres, M. (2010). *Biog ĩe (Biogea)*. (R. Burks, Trans.). Minneapolis: Univocal.
- Sorgner, S. L. (2020). *On transhumanism*. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press.
- Sorgner, S. L. (2021). *We have always been cyborgs. Digital data, gene technologies and an ethics of transhumanism*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Watkin, C. (2020). *Michel Serres: Figures of thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.