

# The Black Posthuman Transformer: A Secularized Technorganic

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This essay introduces the Black posthuman transformer. It is a shift in cartographic understandings of the Black body, reimagining it through simultaneously existing multiplicities of bio-technologically infused possibility. In doing so, it wrestles with the waning utility of the cyborg in futuristic discourse, in light of what the author perceives as an inability of the cyborg to speak squarely to the complex entanglement of embodiment. Currently, the cyborg sits as the archetypical construction of transhumanist and posthumanist physicalities. Connected to the transhuman or posthuman human entity, the cyborg has been presented as a beautiful trope of compartmentalization, progress, and futuristic modes of embodiment (Butler, 2018). Therefore, part of defining the Black posthuman transformer will be raising key considerations for speculative understandings of Black embodiment (Anderson, 2016). As a new speculative cartography, the Black posthuman transformer offers bleeding edge technological imaginations and the potential for deeper conceptualizations of the ways in which biology, culture, identity, art, history, technology, futures, and society collide/coincide - in a transformative fashion (Inayatullah, 2008). After a brief critical engagement of the cyborg, this essay seeks to set the Black posthuman transformer as a speculative mode of embodiment capable of describing the increasingly complex modes of Black existence in relationship with the infinitely complex environments human entities inhabit.

Cyborgisms, such as Tiffany Barber's grammatical interpretation of Wangechi Mutu's *Non je ne regrette rien*, Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto", or Marilou de Haan's *I Am a Cyborg*, each maintain that cyborgs are "boundary creatures, not only human/machine but creatures of cultural interstice as well" (Stone, 1995 p.178). As a speculative device, critical discourse has called upon the cyborg to navigate the unclear boundaries of identity. Most prominently, the cyborg has been used to situate a feminist metaphysic. For instance, Barber's grammatical interpretation of Black female identity, which is in conversation with Mutu's *Non je ne regrette rien* highlights the rupture in Black female identity. Here Barber points out that Mutu's work illustrates the woundedness of Black female existence while emphasizing the need for intentionally piecing together personal understandings of identity. For Barber, the intentionality of personal identity formation becomes an empowering feminist framework for Black females in light of denigrating sociopolitical impositions of brokenness (Barber, 2016 p.18). Haraway's cyborg utilizes the narratives of oppression and reconfigures them to "reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities [to]...subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture" (Haraway, 1991 p.68). Thus, through an acknowledgment of the complex systems formative in its existence, Haraway's cyborg is constructed to usurp dominant socialities. Even more so, within Haraway's work, the Black woman's existence is the most cyborg-like, due to her phenotypical, social, and cultural distance from proto-normative human embodiment. In a similar vein, de Haan's cyborg, looks at boundaries through socio-culture complexity and the blurriness of interdependent relationality regarding the body and the material world. de Haan's cyborg is not an exploration of femininity, but possibility. de Haan alludes to the technological means through which personal agency may eventually lead to cyborg bodies that were once human, and how these body's cyborg status increases with each human part it discards, replaces, or augments

(de Haan, 2013). The crux of each philosophical or artistic iteration suggests that nothing is purely human, and that the distance one is believed to be removed from humanity constitutes one's cyborg nature.

Still, through cyborg logic nothing can be considered pure (societies, bodies, plants, animals, etc.). And since nothing can be considered pure, the cyborg has had an inverse relationship with humanity. In an effort to highlight the reality that the entire world is an amalgamative mess, the cyborg stands as a decolonial tool that reconfigures the places of oppressed bodies in order to help them reclaim their own subjectivity and complexity within the world. In this regard the cyborg has been a useful tool for recapitulating the subjective world. However, its innovative capacities are limited, primarily because of its emphasis on boundaries, or compartments. Compartmentalizing can be understood as a remnant of European thinking which attempts to neatly categorize deeply entangled components. The historical proclivity of European humanism to isolate and abstract through compartmentalization has often led to insufficient critique, or simply an erasure of that which is integral to delineating thorough analysis. Whether posited as a space of unclear boundaries or of complete fractured bodies the amalgamative inferences of the cyborg begin to fall short, because no one is completely/perfectly fractured at all times. Even murky boundaries which bleed into other parts of one's existence suggests at some point that "this part" is "this part", and "this part" is connected to "that part", BUT what is lost is how an easily identifiable part is NOT ONLY connected to its immediately adjacent parts. The cyborg does not relay the dynamic entanglement of parts that are seemingly untethered to another part's existence. Even the dynamics of being fractured or ruptured requires a weight to the degree of one's fracturing, and the subsequent ebbing and flowing of one's parts to be more present at any given moment.

In contrast to the cyborg's physical and existential compartmentalizations, the Black posthuman transformer is the complete merger of the human entity with nature (reconfigured as machine) at the cellular level. It is a technorganic entity (meaning its extra-human technology is infused at the cellular levels) grounded in human biotechnology. Previous iterations of the cyborg have hinted at a merger, but always in an amalgamative manner. Physically, one could consider the Black posthuman transformer as a genetically evolved entity whereby epithelial cells are infused with graphene, white blood cells are nanobots which can be reprogrammed by the will of the host entity, the appearance of a normal finger can suddenly shift into a machine gun, and a casual sneeze can carry nano-drones in each droplet of saliva. As a futuristic entity, it is a gender shifting complex autopoietic system of infinitely augmentable capability. Already the Black posthuman transformer is able to account for its own entanglement with biology, gender, sexuality, culture, identity, art, history, technology, futures, and society, simultaneously. Being an autopoietic system it acknowledges the manner in which it relies on its internal environment (biology, gender, sexuality, culture, identity, technology), and the relationship the internal environment has with the external environment (biology, culture, identity, art, history, technology, futures, society, etc.) to maintain itself and function with other entities within the environment. The complexity in which it resides requires a necessary awareness of the lack of order within its habitat. The nonlinearity and inherent uncertainty of physical existence requires a futuristic entity whose base existence is adaptation, (self)healing, and interdependence (Sardar, 2010). By this account one could re-interpret Mutu's *Non je ne regrette rien* as a snapshot of the Black posthuman transformer. Furthermore, one could argue Tiffany Barber might have rather had the Black technorganic conceptualization at her disposal. Nonetheless, the Black posthuman transformer's awareness of impending uncertainty and disorder within the infinitely complex environment is the foundation for its strength, which is expressed through infinite potentiality.

The Black posthuman transformer embodies the energy of the complexity of complexities and commits its life force to that which brings about freedom for those who reflect its existence. The complexity of complexity can be understood as that which provides infinite indeterminacy. Infinite indeterminacy can also be understood as movement. At the smallest levels of scale movement can

be seen. The indeterminate nature of sub-atomic particles points to their movement (Peat, 1990). But the configuration of particle movements combined with the movements of other entities along the various levels of scale in the whole of the environment suggests something much more complex. The complexity of complexity can only be described as the vital energy of intentional variability that undergirds existence. As such the Black posthuman transformer is powered by this force, committing its life towards the freedom its existence requires.

The Black posthuman transformer can be anything. It is not limited in its action, its oneness with nature, or its commitment to relative uncertainty which allows for an unbothered internal disposition. It is a spiritual being, committed to creating other transformers who are true to their individual complex relativities. It simultaneously houses its personal and collective narratives, but moves in the harmony of its increasingly complex internality. It does not give into the potential turmoil that increased internal complexity may create due to compartmentalization. In *Our Posthuman Future*, Francis Fukuyama's existential question reflects the Black posthuman transformer's tension with the current temporality, "Instead of taking these characteristics [pain, depression or loneliness, or suffering from debilitating diseases] and saying that they are the basis for 'human dignity,' why don't we simply accept our destiny as creatures who modify ourselves" (Fukuyama, 2002 p.6)?

As complex technorganic systems grounded in uncertainty and disorder Black posthuman transformers are constantly modifying themselves. The Black posthuman transformer that is not limited by the literal tendencies that reflect preoccupation with restrictive terms of exchange between a deity and the human, its privileged offspring (Fuller & Lupinska 2014; Pinn, 2015). The transformer refuses to operate within conceptions that require suspended disbelief. It appreciates the nonlinearity of its complex knowledge, and willfully participates in meaning making so that the narrative of its temporal existence and parameters of its epistemic conceptions reflect intelligible paradox. Through wrestling with intellectual paradox it is constantly reaching ideological coherence relative to its own subjectivity. To that end, its self-modifying personal enhancements are only limited by its imagination, manifesting as a cellular response to its creativity.

But what are the limitations of the Black posthuman transformer? How far away are we from their existence? What are the factors that need to converge so that it is more than just a speculative metaphor? Initially, moves towards the manifestation of the transformer might mimic capitalist maneuvers to secure entrepreneurial funding. However, neither loans nor venture capital alone would be enough (Gatune, 2010). It would take a societal shift where Black bodies converge upon the goal of personal enhancement with capacities for volitional metamorphosis at the cellular level. A shift in perception around the concept of human enhancement along with entrepreneurship, governance, an emphasis on technology education, and broader knowledge bases are imperative for this pursuit (Gatune, 2011). It might require a Wakandan-esque cultural embodiment that goes beyond nation-state boundaries and isolationist ethics for expansion. Mainly because one might question whether Black people will be left alone to undergo the process of engineering the transformer. It would also require a technologically mediated epistemology - where technology is re-centered as nature, and vice versa. Wearable technology could not be enough, as it would only be a semblance of a cyborg precursor. This is where Shuri and her lab might be situated in the physical manifestation of this once metaphorical milieu - as pre-cyborg. While the lab might be seen as an extension of Shuri's mind, making her part engineer, part princess, part architect, part kimoyo bead, etc., she would not be considered a clear lineation toward the transformer until her innovations were directed toward a symbiotic sub-atomic cellular fusion; where vitality, technology, and biology meet. Still, the process towards the Black posthuman transformer can no longer see technology as a protective cloak. It must be interwoven into the biological mainframe of Black personhood. Still, if one were to consider social and technological trends the transformer sits at the nexus of where sociopolitical freedom fighting aspires, and, where physical manifestation might arise as a

natural extension of necessity. Therefore the Black posthuman transformer is a stronger speculative cartographic concept for transhumanist and posthumanist dialogue.

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