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12 Death in life and life in death

Forms and fates of the human

Connor Graham and Alfred Montoya

Introduction

This chapter traces the origins, meanings and characteristics of "the human" in recent time – its *forms*. The chapter contends that, instead of being immutable, "the human" has taken different forms, been ascribed different meanings, and exhibited different characteristics over time. Our approach to "the human" contributes to this volume on digital existence, which confronts existential questions centered on being and technology, with historical and anthropological awareness. We aim to show, through Foucault's (1971) insistence upon the *forms* of subjectivity as opposed to its substance, how understandings of "the human" are subject to change and transformation. Exploring these diverse understandings helps us to capture how human beings have related to each other and the world, and understood themselves at different points in time. This exploration also shows how human beings' relationships have developed in conjunction with new configurations of politics and technology.

To achieve our goal, this theoretical essay aims to carefully distinguish the concept of "human-as-is," the being, concrete, existing, mortal instance of a human being, from the concept of "human-as-category," the enframing, abstract, general, human being in discourse as an object. In embarking upon an exploratory project to map "the human," we hence define the "human-as-is" as referring to the real, living, thinking, walking creatures we are, whereas the "human-as-category" refers to conceptualizations of human beings (e.g., by anthropologists, politicians and philosophers). Thus, "human-as-is" persists despite the worlds of discourse and language that "human-as-category" depends on. "Human-as-is" is what "human-as-category" refers to and claims to know and thus our project here is to explore the exact relational nature of this reference and precisely how "human-as-category" describes and corresponds to "human-as-is." We wish to show, more generally, how the existential questions confronted in this volume are embedded in the worlds in which they are asked (and indeed enframed). We argue these worlds both assume and produce particular versions of "human-as-category" that exhibit family resemblance and have particular relations to "human-as-is."

Through this exploration we will ultimately confront the question of the possible fates of "the human," its forms and the reality in which it is embedded, with regard to life and death, in a technology-shaped future. For example, Denisa Kera explores how new scientific understandings and technologies have exposed the human being as a "configurations of the 'network'," a barely-contained riot of diverse organic and inorganic elements seeking "to return to their inorganic past and future" (2014, pp. 185, 191). Under these conditions, death is simply the body losing control over its various components, a natural tendency toward entropy disintegrating the human being, understood as a temporary entanglement of elements. How might an examination of such a posthuman "human-as-category" inform and relate to the generalization of existential questions centered on "human-as-is"? More boldly, what might the limits of our existential preoccupations be in light of recent technological and scientific developments, and how might they be acknowledged and compensated for?

We argue, drawing on Foucault (1971), that a consideration of the "human-as-category" enlarges the scope of contextual elements enabling assertions about what the human being is or might become, placing these forms squarely within certain historical moments, and certain configurations of politics, economics and technology. Many reflections on individual existence, or propositions concerning the "human-as-is," such a "Man" and the "Human," are the products of particular times and places, providing windows through which to frame and view "human-as-is" in discourse. Some of these reflections and propositions concerning the "human-as-is," what we call its forms or the "human-as-category," appeared quite recently, the products of elite or expert discourses. And such *forms* will continue to appear for as long as we human beings exist and have the desire and power to reflexively consider ourselves, other human beings and the world in which we live. Though "the human" is colloquially deployed interchangeably with "people" and "persons," and typically conceptualized as a timeless given, often by elites, scholars have recently been pointing out the historical and contingent nature of this object. "The human" in human rights, for example, is of quite recent invention (Moyn 2010).

How then is "the human" enframed, defined, understood and given meaning in relation to digital technologies of the modern era and in the new debate about existential media? And exactly which human beings are involved in this enframing, understanding and meaning making? How effectively can they speak for all human beings? As John Durham Peters has argued, "The world and the human condition are pervaded recursively by human hand and crafting" (in Lagerkvist 2017, p. 100). That is, human beings fashion the world they inhabit, both conceptually and practically, generating the tools for, and ways of knowing about, that world and themselves. This may have happened in an everyday sense through history as human beings have lived their lives. But is the relationship between all human beings and technologies throughout time the same? How does the human-technology relationship

in-the-world correspond to different worlds of discourse and who has had a voice in these worlds?

In this chapter we use a broad definition of (digital) media as "vehicles that carry and communicate meaning" (Peters 2016, p. 2). We also conceive contemporary technology as "an existential and ambivalent terrain" (Lagerkvist 2017, p. 103). By drawing on prior work from outside existence philosophy, we aim to contribute further to the mapping of that "terrain," primarily by understanding the relationship between "human-as-category" and "human-as-is" in recent time. This mapping concentrates on how worlds of discourse account for *and*, more provocatively, in this act of 'accounting for,' might shape the very existence of human beings. This is a "terrain" and a moment that has been called the "epoch of equipment" (Dreyfus 1992, p. 175) because of the ubiquity of technologies of different kinds that frame human perception, action and existence. We believe it is important for the analysis of existential media to reflect upon how its discourse centered on digital media (re)conceives of "the human." In other words, inspired by the approach of Foucault, we interrogate the relationship and correspondence between the forms and reality of "the human," clarifying the grounds from which new forms of "the human" are emerging, and what these forms emphasize. We consider that these are necessary steps toward imagining new futures, relations and vulnerabilities for human beings, including considerations related to mortality. This approach carefully recognizes the distinction between the very real existence of "the human" and the different worlds of discourse, worlds that neither fully construct human beings nor are independent of them.

Our starting point for discussion is Amanda Lagerkvist's recently posited figure of the "exister" (Lagerkvist 2017, p. 101). This "exister" is grounded in and enframed by technology, insofar as humans and technology have always co-produced one another.

> The exister is mortal. She is a struggling, suffering and relational human being. Her intermediary position as a conscious (yet often clueless) embodied being provides for her the only known 'entry point' to navigate and craft the world into which she is thrown.
>
> (p. 101)

The exister moves through the world relying on her "tools of everyday existence", including digital media, to make sense of her "digital throwness," taking up the necessary task of making meaning under these new technological conditions (Lagerkvist 2017, pp. 99, 97). This provocative new figure is, in our terms, a conceptualization of a specific form of human being that is conceived from a particular historical moment and a specific configuration of technology, politics and ethics. It is a figure that has been elided in many studies of digital media due to a focus on a particular, modern imagination of progress. The "exister" is derived from concepts that emerged from

a particularly productive and powerful mid and late nineteenth and early twentieth century thinking centred on human mortality, alienation, meaning and freedom. These concepts and concerns were impelled and nourished by widespread social and economic reorganizations in the wake of rapid European industrialization and urbanization, the imperial expansion that drove both, and the dislocations generated by the World War I and World War II.

The "exister" is also a particular, if expansive, proposal for "human-as-is," a figure rooted in earlier conceptions of human beings in existence philosophy such as *Dasein* (p. 100) that precede the digital. It is pre-cultural, and beyond race, class or gender specificity, "stressing the hardship and struggle of any human life whether in scarcity or post-scarcity cultures" (p. 100). The "exister" designates the experiential or existential infrastructure shared by all human beings. Like its contemporary and cousin, the "Human" in "human rights," it emphasizes precarity, vulnerability and suffering, and claims for itself all human beings across time and space, and difference. The concept of the "exister" is a critical intervention that draws much-needed attention to embodied vulnerabilities. It is particularly useful for taking up all media as "existential media," producing new existential problems and offering new spaces for the consideration of old concerns (Lagerkvist and Anderson 2017, p. 2). It supports a diagnosis of the possibilities and challenges faced by those human groups for whom the ubiquity and penetration of digital media and ways of being have blurred the old categories of on- and off-line. Our analysis takes this figure, the "exister," up as addressing both "human-as-is" and "human-as-category."

This chapter presents its exploratory argument first by identifying and briefly contextualizing two treatments of "the human," those of Foucault and Virilio, identifying key transitions and examining the characteristics of each of these proposed forms. Both theorists reference human beings' vulnerabilities, including mortality. We draw on Foucault's observations on the origins of Enlightenment-era "Man," the living, laboring and speaking subject and object of knowledge, the more recent "Human" of human rights discourse, and Virilio's "terminal citizen," the connected, extended and disembodied victim of mediated urban life.

We then analyze more recent scholarship on human mortality and technology. We have selected works which seem to make a proposal for a "human-as-is," attempting to identify in these proposals the specific characteristics ascribed to the posited figures of "the human," or those characteristics assumed by their authors, with particular reference to "Man," "Human," and "terminal citizen." We have attempted to consider the relations with and correspondence to these three figures in these contemporary writings through particular attention to "classical existential themes": "Death: our finitude and the digital afterlife" and "Being there: presence and absence" (Lagerkvist 2016, pp. 103, 105). In this analysis, we identify the extent to which "Man," "Human," and "terminal citizen" retain coherence as figures with fixed sets of attributes. We also wish to consider the extent to

which they exert influence into the present and even potentially might shape our near future understandings of what it means to be "human." Through returning to the "exister," we end by considering how "human-as-category" might infect and inflect "human-as-is," the existence and living reality of human beings, both today and in time to come.

We take seriously Lagerkvist's assertion that "Questions concerning digital technologies are questions concerning human existence," and her analysis of the sets of new (digital) conditions not all of our own making, but not entirely deterministic either, into which we are "thrown" (2017, pp. 96, 97). Our machines, she writes, "have evolved into environmental and wearable tools of existence" as we have become "Reliant on devices that enable our lives" (2017, pp. 97, 98). We may agree with Peters who argues that "it is in the elusive and recalcitrant that we find the homeland of media, and thus the heart of what humans have wrought" and that "media, like human beings, are always in the middle between sea, earth and sky" (2015, p. 12). However, the recent reach, extent, agency and even intelligence of digital media and machines raise the possibilities of not only a reciprocal relationship between 'fleshy' and 'digital' existence, but of new forms of life (and death) that reach beyond a new instance of "human-as-category." As we hope to illustrate, in these prospective forms and fates of "the human," digital media is not only 'in between' or "a terrain" but integral to "human-as-is."

"Man" and "the Human"

We human beings are self-aware. We human beings have generated systematic religions and secular thought throughout the ages, seeking to make sense of ourselves, our condition and our vulnerabilities, driven by a profound knowledge of our own finitude. Existentialist thought, with its emphasis on being and its relationship to the world, is a modern attempt to grapple with such enduring sense-making. But can this discourse make general propositions about all of humankind? How do the largely privileged writings of European elites from the mid-nineteenth to the mid twentieth century connect with the experience and futures of the full range of urban human beings alive today? How might we theorize a global "human," past or future, and should such a figure exist?

The regimes of digitalization that permeate our contemporary world may seem to generate similar, if not identical dilemmas, for peoples across cultures and socioeconomic situations. Certainly, the concept of the "exister," and other propositions for "humans-as-is" aim to provide a lens or a framework for an exploration of these commonalities. However, internet penetration, for instance, is profoundly uneven across the planet. In 2017, the International Telecommunications Union, a UN body, estimated that while 84.4 percent of households in developed countries had internet access in some form, only 42.9 percent of households in developing countries, and only 14.7 percent of households in least developed countries did so (ITU

2017). The report also indicates a gender gap of about 12 percent world-wide in terms of relative access to the internet ween males and females (ITU 2017). Apart from these empirical issues, there are also problems of language: how does any concept speak for both the general human being and the subaltern?

In order to begin to take these questions seriously we draw a distinction between the "human-as-is" and "human-as-category." "Human-as-is," in line with existential writings, describes the being, concrete, existing, mortal instance of a human being in reality, the primal creature that lives, breathes and walks outside any conceptualization if itself in discourse. "Human-as-category," on the other hand, captures the enframing, abstract, general human that has been proposed in discourses of different kinds for different purposes (e.g., "Man," the "Human," etc). It draws our attention to the total-izing or globalizing "humanity projects" (Rees 2014) of various academic and political actors who have made proposals concerning the "human-as-is" over time and generalized it. Its aim is to provide a second order observation (Luhmann 1998) or analysis concerning human beings. Each of these human versions have different instances, and they can inform each other. So, for example, the existential acuteness of certain kinds of human beings' experi-ence, such as suffering, illuminated through the "human-as-is" term, can be understood and responded to through a "human-as-category" instantiation, that of the "Human" in human rights.

In the *Order of Things*, Michel Foucault traced the emergence of the Enlightenment figure of "Man," in our terms, a novel eighteenth-century proposition concerning the "human-as-is." In the Classical Age, according to Foucault, human beings did not consider themselves makers or artificers, but were simply agents of clarification and classification, through clear and certain ideas, of the world created by God. This relied on the assumption that the medium of representation, language, was reliable and transparent. The human being merely gave artificial description to an order that already existed through language and a conventional ordering of categories and resemblances (Foucault 1971; see also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). Human beings could not enter the Classical scheme as both ordering subject and posited object (Foucault 1971). "Man as that being who gets the whole pic-ture as well as gets into the picture is unthinkable in the Classical episteme" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, p. 27). For Foucault, it was not possible for human beings' existence to be called into question on its own account at this point in history, "since it contained the nexus of representation and being" (Foucault 1971, p. 311).

A new figure leaps into being at the end of the eighteenth century, a time of transition between craftsmanship and industrialization (Dreyfus 1992, p. 174). This figure, "Man," once merely one more creature amongst the others, albeit with a special role of clarifying God's creation, now finds itself a subject among objects, albeit one with a peculiar problem. Not content to understand only the objects of the world, "Man" turns the powers of reason

onto itself. "Man" becomes both subject and object of its understanding, an understanding now limited by a new conceptualization of language not as a timeless, transparent, God-given system, but as a web of meaning with its own history and mechanisms (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, p. 28). "Man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator, he appears in the place belonging to the king" (Foucault 1971, p. 312). "Man," following Foucault's analysis, is in our terms, a "human-as-category," situated in discourse at a particular historical juncture. The "human-as-is" here is understood as corresponding to "human-as-category" which, in turn, brings "human-as-is" into being: relations are collapsed and the thinking, reasoning human being is celebrated. "Man," after all, is both subject and object, capable of reason and therefore responsible for conjuring up a representation of itself through specific ways of knowing and speaking about that self. "Man" is also an instance of "human-as-category," a set of relations and ways of knowing that are taken up by human beings and which shape the experiences and expectations of those human beings.

Having lost the ability to rely on a transcendental subject to guarantee the order of the cosmos and the transparency of the mode of representation of that order, "Man" is thrust back on its own limitations. "Man's finitude is heralded – and imperiously so – in the positivity of knowledge," writes Foucault (1971, p. 313). Human limitations are transformed by Enlightenment thinkers and scientists into the very basis of all positive empirical knowledge within what Foucault calls an analytic of finitude. Foucault famously predicted the end of "Man," as the fragmentation of language and the sudden opacity of representation that gave birth to "Man" at the end of the Classical Age was likewise losing out in a contemporary world. In this world "language is now emerging with greater and greater insistence in a unity that we ought to think but cannot as yet do so" (Foucault 1971, p. 386). "Man" was, he suspected, nearing its end. For our purposes, the "human-as-category" instance "Man" begins to seriously consider the very subjectivity and mortality, vulnerability and limitations of "human-as-is" as the means by which it produces knowledge about itself and the world. This gives rise to the empirical sciences and technological progress. Human vulnerability and limitations are no longer simply burdens, but are taken up as the very means of understanding and overcoming the vagaries of the world and human beings through specific linear, modern notions of progress. Such a system no longer needs be guaranteed by God.

However, the twentieth century, driven by tumultuous violence and scientific and technological developments, also proposed its own responses to the question of what human beings are today. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt identified a paradox concerning the figure of "Man" and its heir, the "human-as-category" instance we call the "Human." This "Human" is the object at the center of a global discourse and apparatus referred to as "humanitarian," or the figure we talk about when we talk about "human

rights." "From the beginning," Arendt writes, "the paradox involved in the declaration of inalienable human rights was that it reckoned with an 'abstract' human being *who seemed to exist nowhere*" (1962, p. 291, italics added). This was an especially serious issue in the context of the refugee crisis driven by the rise of European fascism and the violence of World War II. For Arendt, the stateless refugee provoked an immediate and serious crisis for the domain of knowledge, discourse and practice then attempting to consolidate itself around this abstract "Human." This "human-as-category" had little practical correspondence to certain real human beings and their vulnerabilities. For instance, refugees, no longer part of a nation-state and who had recourse suddenly only to their status as human beings, found quickly that these lofty ideals provided little benefit or security:

> The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human. And in view of objective political conditions, it is hard to say how the concepts of man upon which human rights are based . . . could have helped to find a solution to the problem.
>
> (Arendt 1962, p. 299)

The "Human," through the latter half of the twentieth century, provided part of this solution. It emerged as a site of contestation, giving weight to itself primarily through elaboration of the rights said to be proper to it, and consequently, of the risks it acquired because of these rights. Thus this instance of "human-as-category" became populated and defined through an understanding of "human-as-is" as encompassing particular experiences and vulnerabilities and engagement with the world and other humans beyond self-knowledge. During the Cold War, the competing interests and ideological positions of the United States and the USSR, from the time of the UN commission that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), contributed to shaping this figure. These interests provided it with rights emphasized by the Soviets (social and economic rights, concerned with access to economic resources and communal obligations/protections) and those stressed by the United States (civil and political rights, concerned with individual freedoms, free speech, etc.) (Johnson and Symonides 1998, p. 43). The new figure's ill-defined "abstraction," its status as a pure instance of "human-as-category," perfectly positioned it to accept these diverse new elements that took the form of rights and risks, giving it rhetorical power and allowing it to function as a cypher upon which a new universality could be projected. Far from being a handicap, the self-evidential but ambiguous nature of the "Human" became an essential aspect. The drafting committee of the UDHR, after its arduous deliberations, asserted, "we agree about the rights but on condition no one asks us why" (Hunt 2007, p. 20). Explanations and exactitude could in fact undermine the "Human's" force. As Hunt noted, "An assertion that requires argument is not self-evident" (2007, p. 20).

At the same time the twentieth century also produced new scientific theories through which human beings sought to gain some purchase on new instances of "human-as-category" relating to the kind of creature we were or were fast becoming, operating somewhere between "Man" and "Human." Freudian psychoanalysis, positing a developmental theory of the unconscious, circumvented if not undermined the prevailing theories explaining personality (race, heredity, etc). The truth of "human-as-is" could now be sought in the messy libidinal undercurrents that were said to underpin human experience. So provocative and compelling were these theories that, as well as entering popular discourse, and claiming exact correspondence with the essence of "human-as-is," great care was soon taken by its established authorities to further reify these insights as an instance by standardizing and policing the training of analysts in the psychoanalytic method. A sense of professionalism was also maintained through a close association with the medical field (Kerr 2004). Thus efforts were made not only to respond to the vulnerabilities that this account of the "human-as-is" provided, but also to establish and give credence to it. This movement is worth nothing here because, despite the antagonisms that may exist between psychoanalytical and existential thought (e.g., Sartre 1962), they both have a preoccupation with individual, reflexive and human-human interactions and human-world relations.

More recently new technologies have generated new notions of "where" human beings reside or how they may be defined, populating and extending the "Human" instance of "human-as-category." Some of these do so, once again, by acknowledging and emphasizing the experiences and vulnerabilities of the "human-as-is." According to Tobias Rees, bioscientists and health humanitarians are increasingly defining human beings biologically, in inclusive, global terms, beyond the confines of the social and the "national society-fostering logic" of the nation-state that defined twentieth-century humanitarian thinking (Rees, 2014, p. 470). For these actors, the nation-state is "a failed humanity project, precisely because the humanity that the nation-state secures is always an exclusive one, one focused on the nation – on the national society – only" (p. 270). In this radical perspective, and contra-Arendt, statelessness "appears in a different, (almost) positive light"; this "positivization of the stateless" representing a "major mutation of the 250-year-old space that has opened up the possibility of humanity" (p. 471).

Human and digital media

In the last section we have shown how, over time, "human-as-category" evolved both in terms of how it was defined and also in terms of its specific meanings. In this account we have illustrated how "human-as-is," specifically the human experience and vulnerability, helped to populate specific "human-as-category" instances. This section has also shown that, in the three examples we have considered, there are multiple, distinct accounts of "human-as-is"

with different emphases, claims about completeness of correspondence and engagement with notions of being and existence. These examples have illustrated that readings of "human-as-is" may or may not obtain and claim "category" status such that they can perform widely in discourse: being both abstract enough to operate across distinctly different ideologies and publics and specific enough to be meaningful for these ideologies and publics. These same examples have also shown how understandings of "the human" have shifted towards emphasizing a relationship with and knowledge of the self as a human being, as well as relationships with other human beings.

Until now, we have tiptoed around the term "technology" and how exactly it might connect with human beings, the world and the relationship between human beings and the world. Consideration of technology is essential to our "experiment" because it has increasingly enframed and organized relationships with the world, as well as with other human beings. The instances of "human-as-category" we have presented in the last section are certainly characterized by technologies in the worlds of distinct times.

In this section, we move towards a more explicit treatment of contemporary technology, namely digital media, and its association with "human-as-category" and "human-as-is" through considering the writings of the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio. We also probe how "Man" and the "Human" have persisted, receded and/or morphed in the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century, a time of changing forms of equipment (Dreyfus (1992, p. 175). In doing this, we also consider how such 'equipment' may be productive of certain vulnerabilities and even potentially transform mortality.

Virilio provides an alternative perspective to classical existential writings because of his largely overtly critical treatment of specifically modern technology, including digital media. His work does not assume particular "terrains" (Lagerkvist 2017), "groundedness" (Peters 2015), "equipment" (Dreyfus 1992), and "relations" (Ihde 1990) are neu~~tral~~. Instead it questions their politics, how they came to be, how they transform the body, and what they are productive of in terms of life and living, including vulnerabilities. Although recent philosophical and existential approaches to technology may grapple well with its role in human beings' experience and contribution to human beings' existence (Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015, p. 26), a common preoccupation is with mediation, relations and their possibilities. Questioning the *forms* of "the human" new technologies might produce is less common. A brief treatment of Virilio's work provides insights into such forms, allowing for a critical retreat from the enframing force of technology that is itself characterized as a form of "cybernetic control" (Dreyfus 1992, p. 175). Like Foucault, Virilio's work allows us to further demonstrate how particular formulations of "the human," "human-as-category" in particular, have emerged at specific times and places, and under specific conditions. This work also shows how these formulations have been informed by conceptions of "human-as-is."

Virilio (1997) presents the end of the twentieth century as an epoch and "terrain" of collapsed, space and time, of light speed enabled through technology, advances in transportation and telecommunication such as air travel and videoconferencing. He also articulates a precise transformation in human experience, specifically sensing capabilities and therefore relations with the world and other humans, conditioned and organized by optical media operating at light speed, through the concomitant "tactility at a distance" (p. 10). As a result there is a profound change in the human's "*animal body*" (p. 11, italics author's own) and "muscular strength" (19). This change started during the industrial revolution in Europe and accelerated after World War II with the creation of infrastructures of which digital media form a part, "large, force-amplifying systems that connect people and institutions across large scales of space and time" (Edwards 2003, p. 221). Space and the *individual* body are transformed through "'transfer machines'" (Virilio 1997, p. 19) such as computer-aided design, networks and artificial intelligence, resulting in a "'terminal man'" (11), surfacing distinct from urban space and the home. This "terminal man" is a simulation, persistently visually present given "the celebrated retinal persistence" enabled by the light speed of media. These media are dominated by images and enabled by "statistical imagery" (Virilio 1994, p. 75, cited in Armitage 2013, p. 67) or "artificial images that can only appear through fast computation, deciphering and analysis of the pixels a computer graphics system can show on a screen" (Armitage 2013, pp. 67–78). These same images "create 'rational' visual allusions that damage people's comprehension and interpretation" (Armitage 2013, pp. 67–78).

The point of Armitage's treatment of the image here (and we can argue the "terrains" through which the "exister" roams) is that its production is not innocent. Its production and persistence are both approximal, algorithmic and simulated and reliant on a digital infrastructures and protocols over which the individual, experiencing human has little control. Thus, as urbanization (and technology) sprawl, the increasingly disabled, extra-sensory, persistent but complexly mediated body transforms in form through new human-world (or flesh-silicon, cell-bit) relations. Its individual, non-collective, diminished physicality and its relation to technology become key aspects and boundaries of its form and vulnerability. It is both situated in and beyond urban space (further informing what a "terrain" might be). Its technologically induced visual reach enables instant, pre-emptive mediated action as well as perception, rendering the importance and meaning of geography, place and even history, irrelevant. This informs us about what the enframing and organizing force of digital media might actually be today: deeply informing any conception of "human-as-is" with regard to the nature of experience.

But Virilio (1997, p. 20) goes beyond description: he suggests something tragic about this "'terminal man's'" shift towards velocity and the remote real-timeness, describing a loss of individual agency, physicality and will, a

withdrawal into and "'cocooning'" in media and associated transportation technologies. He presents

> an individual who has lost the capacity for immediate intervention along with natural motricity and who abandons himself, for want of anything better, to the capacities of captors, sensors and other remote control scanners that turn him into a being controlled by the machine with which, they say, he talks.
>
> (p. 20)

Thus, the mediated nature of experience becomes a vulnerability, precisely because of the loss of control over senses and sensing, something crucial to "human-as-is." The final result is a "'terminal citizen' of a teletopical City that is going up faster and faster" (Virilio 1997, p. 21), a loss of "direct haptic experience . . . and with the grounds of human being, truly expressed" (Cubitt 2011, p. 72): "the world persists, but we are no longer in or of it" (p. 72). This is a critique of the distortion of mediation and its effect on human-world relations. A digitally mediated body and its senses, corrupts a real experience of the world. Thus, Virilio's critique is levelled against a persuasive imagination "the practice of the cosmopolis: a cosmopolis in which the material city of touch and contact is lost in the ephemeral, disappearing city of images and connections mediated by images" (Cubitt 2011, p. 71). Virilio's attacks the lack of critical engagement with information and the insidious production and assumption of a singular, static consumer. In the terms of Conley (2006, p. 77): "Viewers are glutted at teleports and listen to discourses aimed not at normalization but at the establishment of a unilateral and immobile consuming subject."

Virilio's "terminal citizen" depends on the human body being situated in the contemporary, networked city and having its senses augmented, mediated and extended through both analogue and digital, and particularly visual media. In this way, the "terminal citizen" materializes neither as knowing subject and known object, observed and observing nor as an abstract moral figure with retroactive rights. Instead it is a new "human-as-category" instance that is more influenced by human-world relations, specifically the role of technology in going beyond mediating towards organizing and enframing. This figure has an individuated body, even if that body, rather than being liberated, is continually weakened and rendered less authentic and self-aware and more placid through digitally-enabled cell-bit, flesh-silicon relations. This particular, real "human" form reads as doomed, less because of the ambiguity and opacity that "Man" suffers, than through its ignorant enslavement to economic mediation and circumscribed consumption brought about through visual relations. This is in contrast to the more abstract "Human" which, even if inherently vulnerable, is a protective (if retroactively protective), aspirational and self-aware figure (for how else would it self regulate?). "Terminal citizen" is both imbricated and brought

into being through digital media and thus only in a limited sense 'internally' free. Even its very presence as an instance of "human-as-is" is enframed by itself. The "Human," on the other hand, offers the tantalizing, if abstract possibility of liberty and autonomy and is therefore pliable as a figure for activism. "Terminal citizen," like "Man," is profoundly secular in its emphasis on individual experience: it does not seem to require an external authority (other than technology) for either meaning or existence. It is instead, like after-death communication, gripped by the ongoing experience of itself and the present (Lagerkvist, 2017, p. 104). We can observe how the "terminal citizen" is extended perceptually and sensorially, in ways that "Man" is not, and, because of these extended relations, is inescapably enmeshed in ways that the "Human" isn't either: the "Human's" very survival as an instance of a "category" has rested upon its mobility and concrete ambiguity. So we also begin to observe a very different, lurking and increasingly omnipresent mediating and mediated figure. This figure may itself be fallible and fragile and cannot easily be accounted for solely by "human-as-is" as we have discussed this with relation to other instances of "human-as-category," even with a generous acknowledgement of enframing technologies. It is only with the acknowledgement of temporal shift and worldly context of "human-as-category" that the range and extent of the digital, infrastructural force upon "human-as-is" is fully noticed and realized. It shows "human-as-is" is living and even being defined through digital technology. Virilio shows us that, as well as certain exclusions being necessitated in a contemporary context of near ubiquitous access and use of digital media among members of the global middle and upper socioeconomic classes in urban contexts that, certain inclusions create new, distinct vulnerabilities.

"Man," "Human," "terminal citizen" all espouse human beings' vulnerabilities differently, but all have a common sense of absence and mortality. They do not assume omnipresent digital thrownness quite to the extent of Lagerkvist's "exister." They instead suggest cell-bit, flesh-silicon boundaries and tensions. "Man's" vulnerability relates to the very sense of it not having any non-contingent meaning at all and thus being threatened with extinction. The vulnerability of the "Human" relates to its emptiness and dependence on death and suffering for meaning and power. In contrast, the "terminal citizen" exhibits an absence of any real, worldly engagement and will as well as a persistence and circulation that challenges even mortality. It is "terminal citizen," with its account of "human-as-is" through "human-as-category" that makes visible and critiques the historical, political and economic role of digital media. It is to digital media's affordance for creating human beings' vulnerabilities, particularly those of absence and mortality that we turn in the next section.

Human now, life and death

What "human" inhabits relevant academic discourse on digital media and what kinds of vulnerabilities are articulated and elided? A simple starting

point is a report produced through a meeting of Human-Computer Inter-action researchers in 2007, which echoes some of the language of existential media studies and is ambitiously entitled "Being Human" (Harper et al. 2008). In this report "being human" is described variously as being transformation-oriented, as "a set of aspirations" (p. 9), and as necessarily influenced by current and future relationships with technology. The report argues for the importance of human values in the design of such technology: " 'being human' in our relationship with technology means that we need to bring to the fore and better understand human values and make them central to how we understand and design for a changing world" (p. 35).

The "human" in this excerpt reaches towards "as-category" status, while being less centered on the "as-is," human existence as lived through digital technologies. It has a profound relationship with technology, is even defined through these relations, and is also future-oriented. In this way it can be considered a hopeful advancement: none of the ambiguities and reflexive crises of "Man," vagueness and contestation of the "Human" or subjugation and distorted mediation of artificially extended subjectivities of "terminal citizen" are evident.

In this section we will begin to come to terms with key existential themes for digital media that also happen to be key, recently emerging themes in the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI): mortality (Lagerkvist 2017, p. 103) and absence/presence (p. 105). While existential approaches to digital media may articulate these in terms of 'vulnerabilities,' HCI often understands them as value-laden, ongoing opportunities for design as the quotation from Harper et al. (2008) shows. So the question we now turn to is: What "human" is being proposed, brought forth and practiced in recent works that center on digital media, design and mortality? What are the defining features of the "terrain" that "the exister" is navigating? We reflect on this question through some key works from the last five years.

Graham et al. (2013) demonstrate, through analyses of current and emerging practices of grieving and memorializing online, that even after death "people's lives are extended, prolonged and ultimately changed in the present, future and in history through new circulations, repetitions, and recon-textualizations" (p. 133). These authors conceptualize "human" in terms of some related but distinct articulations of "digital selves"; that is, the digital self as variously an "identity," "effigy" or "doppleganger" that enjoys multiple presences, both online and offline, and shapes how the human is "consumed, worked with and viewed after death," fundamentally altering our notion of bodily being (p. 134).

Virilio's "terminal citizen" appears relevant here through the focus on visual consumption, visual persistence, the augmented body and through the attention given to how the figures described are given shape or inflected by the publics within which they are enmeshed. These authors call our attention to "how publics are formed and connected with through different technologies as much as which publics are created and networked" providing the context for understanding the live(s) and death(s) of human beings (Graham

et al. 2013, p. 135). They call forth the potentially insidious and co-existent status of these digital formations and show how any understanding of mortality is deeply entangled with issues of absence and presence.

Christensen and Gotved demonstrate how online memorials alter the visibility of physical death, making death a part of our everyday lives, insofar as we are plugged into online social networks (2015). These authors, again reminiscent of "terminal citizen," conceptualize a figure caught up in "life," conceived as a dense web of significance, an individual node in a "meaningful structure" that is disrupted by the person's death, and that can be reconstituted by shared social/public rituals of mourning. But this figure is not en~~trap~~ped in simulated life and commodified relationships. ~~This 'entrapment' is~~ productive of sentiment and meaning: the public grieving associated with this figure, is "a quest to reestablish life as a meaningful structure without the deceased" and to bridge the gap their death has created (Christensen and Gotved 2015, p. 6). In this way the reflexiveness and meaning making of "Man" is apparent, and digital media is a key means through which this is achieved. Again we observe how mortality is profoundly altered by the new, inferred absences and prolonged presences enabled by digital media.

New ~~i~~nternet technologies also generate anew an old problem for the deceased, as both remembering and forgetting are threatened by the mass production, circulation and consumption of images of the deceased by the living. What emerge are not just the age-old concerns about human beings being forgotten and obliterated, but concerns about being remembered "correctly," such that "even death is no longer a guarantee that one's story is over" (Graham and Montoya 2015, p. 10). The "human-as-is," in the present, may thus be characterized by a shift to a persistent representation decoupled from the body captured through "terminal citizen." But it also is constituted in the increasingly fragmentary and unregulated representations of the deceased made possible by the ~~i~~nternet Graham and Montoya 2015, p. 12). These potentially prolong one's engagement with the world beyond death. This is also precisely the kind of shift that Virilio describes through digital media with, for him, the negative consequence of detaching human beings from the real, as opposed to the experienced, world. Realizing the aspects of "terminal citizen," that relate to how human beings are connected to the world, allows us to anticipate the ongoing presence and changing mortality of the deceased in a world permeated by digital media. This realisation also shows the pathways to presence and absence the deceased afford.

Kern et al. (2013) provocatively assert that online memorials suspend the deceased indefinitely between life and oblivion through the actions of memory and speech permanently archived and publically displayed on social network sites. "If the dead are virtually memorialized, they never really die. The more in-depth the memorial and the greater its permanence, the more the deceased remain with the living" (Kern et al. 2013, p. 10). This attributes persistence to the dead, a consequence of the kind of visual, urban cultures that Virilio describes, making the real and unreal, the living and the dead

indistinguishable and providing the dead with an enduring, if approximated visual presence (Virilio 1997). However, this assertion surely mistakes persistence for immortality. In this way, the "as-is" element of "the human" is neglected and shown to be crucial in understanding (and not mistaking) themes of presence and absence as they relate to mortality.

New problems also arise from the retention of digital materials related to the deceased, and the need to dispose of these symbolic materials to advance the grieving process (Sas et al. 2016; Lagerkvist 2017). The deceased enjoy a fragmentary and complex afterlife as oftentimes, the living do not always wish to retain painful reminders of the dead. The disorganization of people's digital collections make it "difficult to identify specific symbolic possessions to retain or to discard," meaning that grieving loved ones may accidentally encounter painful reminders unexpectedly, particularly online (Sas et al. 2016, p. 2). Thus the "as-is" properties of the human being and the visual persistence afforded by networks pose challenges for design. Those who try to dispose of digital materials find themselves instantly confronted by the "crude binary process" and "inflexibility" afforded by deletion (Sas et al. 2016, p. 2) with its own possible negative emotional and social outcomes. This lingering, fragmented persistence is somewhat reminiscent of the "Human" in how these various evocative fragments can be understood as having rights (e.g., to be retained) that are hard to act upon ahead of the tragedy of death. This work is also suggestive of the dual status of "Man," as both subject and object, as well as the multi-materiality and hybridity of the "terminal citizen" and its reliance on digital media for its circumscribed being and relations. Mortality may have changed, and in some sense the life of human beings has been extended, but the nature and subtlety of relations with human digital remains is defined through the mechanisms that generate, host and sort digital media.

Likewise, Staley has written about the etiquette of communicating around and with the deceased via social media platforms (2014). She notes that communication is directed toward the deceased themselves and rarely toward the community of mourners linked by the dead individual. This indicates that users imagined the deceased as a certain kind of entity; one aware of the activities of the living, and that was able to receive electronic communications from the living through digital messages (2014, p. 13) (cf. Lagerkvist, Chapter 9 this volume). "The implication is that, though the deceased's earthly body is lifeless, she retains some kind of body" that can see and hear these events and receive these messages (Staley 2014, pp. 14–15). Virilio's "terminal citizen" is evoked because of the deceased's visual persistence but so is the crisis of "Man". How might such a figure be considered both subject and object?

Nansen et al. (2014) claim that the dead can enjoy "new forms of social persistence" and are "animated": the dead are "no longer in repose, but socially active". They also claim they are *temporal*, subject to "worldly, secular and mundane engagements unmediated by church or sacrament" that are

temporary (2014, p. 113). This is an analysis echoed by Briggs and Thomas, who draw attention to the social life of one's digital footprint after death, thinking through the benefits and dangers posed by our "digital ghosts" (2014). This is in stark contrast to the kind of passive, living figures depicted by Virilio (1997) and the primacy of the visual that they depend on. These later analyses also begin to invoke not only a persistent presence by the dead but also their potential for social action through digital media and thereby a place in society for them, a presence despite an absence after death.

These scholars and others seem to argue that ICTs may afford a partial or depleted form of immortality in terms of what remains present online after death. By contrast, analyses, like those of Kera (2014), invert this familiar unidirectional orientation. Death becomes simply the body losing control over its various elements, because the body is not, in Virilio's (1997) terms, simply both depleted and sensorially extended through digital media. In fact, the body's very essence is a entanglement of flesh and silicon, cells and bits. The entropy-drive of those elements in their anarchic diversity is revealed to be a neutral state, rather than in any sense a "human" unity or identity. This treatment veers considerably from the "human-as-is" alluded to in other work we have considered here, towards a new posthuman means and category of being through digital media and particularly networks.

Other scholars argue that ICTs, and the rapidly evolved genealogy of older technologies that shaped their present form (photography, radio, telephonics, etc.) have provided the avenue, within the secular regime of knowledge of the late twentieth century, for the emergence of the "Human." This "abstraction" ~~that was~~ from the beginning bifurcated between its physical/historical specificity, and its (after)life as a collective representation, curated symbol, or circulated cypher (Montoya 2015; see also Fukushima 2015). It also emerged just as these older technologies were obtaining ubiquity. Indeed, as we may move beyond an arithmetic and probabilistic media ordering regime (Cubitt 2011), it is perhaps the "Human" that is potentially the most persuasive category for its convenience, malleability and agency to act upon the living. While Virilio's "terminal citizen" may connect with distinct aspects of "human-as is" and "human-as-category" presented in recent literature on mortality and digital media, it is the "Human" that begins to evoke the necessary and felt social presence and post-mortem power of the distributed and increasingly non-optical remains of the dead.

Conclusion: we (late) moderns, under the open sky

In this chapter we have made key distinctions in order to gain some clarity regarding what particular human beings are talking about when they talk about "the human," creating a crude map of "the human" in recent discourse on digital media. To achieve this we have deployed, as a heuristic device, two versions of this "human" – "human-as-is" and "human-as-category" – in order to explore how "the human" has been conceived, proposed, responded

to or acted upon in the recent past. We have maintained a special focus on the articulation of these figures with particular configurations of discourse and technology. We have traced some of the various instances of "human-as-category" through the recent past and considered its ongoing relationship to "human-as-is." It should be no surprise that we have found that conceptions of "human-as-category" are numerous and varied. We have discovered a tendency to simply conflate this "human-as-is" concept of a concrete, existing, mortal instance of a human being with an abstract proposal concerning a universal character or "nature" or form and to not question its possible transformation. It is possible that, as more of life is lived through digital media, "human-as-is" will be questioned more as "human-as-category" reaches in, informs and even shapes it to a greater and greater extent. It is notable that there are elements of both in the "terminal citizen," the most recent "human-as-category" we have treated, and in the way "the human" concept is discussed with regard to mortality, absence and presence. Indeed, the "exister," like "Man," seems to possess the ambition to emerge as a 'meta' "human-as-category" compressing the difference between "human-as-is" to nothingness regardless of time and context. Our meagre analysis of contemporary academic discourse, if connecting strongly with existential themes, shows that while it is possible to isolate and apply discrete instances of "human-as-category," there is no single, preferred instance across the scholarship we have considered nor even a consistent appeal to one, singular instance. "Man," "Human" and "terminal citizen" seem capable of coexistence.

It is tempting to consider recent new anthropology in the field of artificial intelligence (see Richardson 2015) as pointing to new locations where we might encounter and/or generate particularly new instances of "human-as-category" through explorations of "human-as-is." The quest to develop a truly human-like AI necessarily must involve some sense of what the "human-as-is" really is. Alan Turing's famous "Imitation Game" is often credited with proposing "an 'operational' or 'behaviorist' definition of 'thinking' or 'intelligence,' though he considered himself to have proposed merely a criterion rather than a definition of thinking" (Guo 2015, p. 4). As Turing later put it, his aim was to find out " 'how we think ourselves' by way of 'making a thinking machine' " (ibid), or, as we have seen with the "Human" and "terminal citizen," probing "human-as-is" through creating a new instance of "human-as-category". Turing considered this self-knowledge to be a particularly human characteristic. This observation both runs through "Man," the "Human" and "terminal citizen" and also necessarily expands our definition of "human-as-is." It is the point of connection between our two versions of "the human."

Yet this move to suggest another instance of "human-as-category" is perhaps the wrong one conceptually, underplaying how our exploration has allowed for another concept, on a par with "human-as-category" and "human-as-is," to emerge. Guo writes that "The digitization of social and

personal knowledge has created an abstract web of information in a digitized virtual reality, in which knowledge about ourselves has been reformulated digitally" by means of (simple, not true) AI technologies (Guo 2015, p. 6). Thus, the self-knowledge and knowledge of other human beings that are crucial to "human-as-is" have been externalized and disembedded, like the "Human" instance of "human-as-category," through and for an apparatus, in this case digital media. Guo quotes Julie Chu, who wrote that we are in the end all "encoding ourselves for the machine" (Chu 2001, p. 135, in Guo 2015) or, in the terms of McKelvey, Tiessen and Simcoe (2013) a "simulation machine," bringing forth extended and reshaped vulnerabilities as much as extended perception. These insights are in line with Lagerkvist's conflation of questions of existence with questions of technology (2017, p. 96) and argument that such technologies have become ways of being.

This perspective is suggestive not only of new exclusions, for human beings who are both absent and present, alive and dead for digital media, but also evokes a form of life that in its abstraction and ability to act upon the living is pervasive and persuasive enough to be beyond what any new "human-as-category" instance can describe. Digital media has enabled not merely extension through new forms of persistence, e̶x̶p̶l̶o̶r̶i̶n̶g̶ and circulation but has also become a force in the world. s̶u̶c̶h̶ t̶h̶a̶t̶ can t̶h̶a̶t̶ "reengineer key concepts – such as attention, ownership, privacy and responsibility" to give us a framework within which "our onlife experience may be understood and improved" (Floridi 2015, p. 1). The ubiquity of digital media, for such scholars, may affect every aspect of "human-as-is," from our self-conception and sociality to our very conception of reality. However, the fate of "the human" cannot be considered through the perspective of human beings alone, as we have attempted here. We have made a world from the digital map we sought to use to describe it. We are now not only searching for the means to navigate the territory the map became, but are also exploring what we might mean to that territory.

By way of example, we suggest that the "Human," the object currently at the center of human rights and humanitarianism, is not only the product of a historical moment, a failed artefact or fabulous construct, but a new starting point for both critical perspectives and imaginative possibilities. This "human-as-category," as our analysis shows, points us toward specific issues of control and rights, and tells us something about today's historical, political, ethical and economic assumptions concerning the "human-as-is." It also, because of its impotence beyond a rights-focused apparatus and the limitations of its abstractness, forces a close examination of the precise nature of the time, politics and very materialities that make it possible, sustain and govern it. Its absences vividly bring forth distinct, if unpredictable, situated and fragile presences and less visible forces, including those that are non-human: the infrastructural, the algorithmic, the symbolic. It may be the result, over the past half century, of specific conglomerations of human beings or "existers" seeking to think, name and speak of themselves, to carve

a space for themselves within, and navigate a world of rapidly evolving dangers driven by technological change.

In an essay on the status of storytelling under commercial and industrial conditions of production, Walter Benjamin reflected on time, technology and the experience of human beings, of what remained of the human being caught up in the inexorable, productive and destructive capacities of the modern world.

> A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile, human body.
>
> (1968, p. 84)

We must be alert not only to 'who we are' or 'who we may be,' but also to 'who we have been,' as we imaginatively consider the possible fates of "the human" in times when digital media reach beyond the arithmetic and probabilistic and embrace the imaginative possibilities of a vectoral network that is "not self-identical, that plunges into accident and disappointment, and in which machines have as much to say as humans" (Cubitt 2011, pp. 87–88). What these new struggles and categories might be, is something only time will tell us, but we ignore or elide the trajectory of its becoming at our peril. In another vein, in that same essay, Benjamin (1968, p. 87) also reminded us that the erosion of long-held notions or meanings or forms, though troubling and disruptive, also makes it possible for us to recognize a new significance, a new beauty, in what is vanishing, under newly open skies.

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