

ANTHROPOMORPHOSIS: THE “HOWL” OF MAN’S CLONES

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“We have to be as clear-headed about human beings as possible, because we are still each other’s only hope.” - James Baldwin, *A Rap on Race*

“Man, and indeed every general predicate, denotes not an individual, but a particular quality...” - Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations*

Abstract

This paper argues that we are all cloners. Bound by our innate predisposition to process the world around us in symbols, we clone our own image onto everything else, and experience the universe on those human terms, in a referential comprehension known as anthropomorphosis. Anthropomorphosis is a reference, a cloning process that structures how we think about ourselves and the surrounding world. The source experience is substituted for a host of ideals, forming the category of Man. The label of Man proves incomplete for the infinitude of human existence, and the naming process enacts a separation that enables exclusion from the category of human, which translates into disposability. Allen Ginsberg’s poem, “Howl” illustrates the complex struggles that are driven by this separation, an endeavor antithetical to anthropomorphosis. The experiential and participatory essence of human experience, acknowledged even by recent developments in quantum physics, suggests a re-imagination of anthropomorphosis.

Anthro

The Anthropocene, with its glaringly obvious impacts, has trudged one step closer to the official Geologic Time Scale. As of 21 May 2019, it has been recognized by the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy, and awaits the decision of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (Subramanian, Anthropocene). Leading climate scientists, including Paul Crutzen and Will Steffen, in a 2011 review calling for recognition of the new epoch, named “civilized Man” as the agent behind global warming (Steffen et al. 843). A 2017 report by the Carbon Disclosure Project found that “100 extant fossil fuel producers” are responsible for “71% of global industrial greenhouse gas emissions” since 1988, further asserting that the root ‘Anthro’ in Anthropocene does not refer to the global population of humans, it refers to Man (Griffin 8). Understanding what Man is might help explain why the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls for a reconsideration of “human-environmental relations” and their “intrinsic

interconnectivities and disparities,” questions which can be explored by investigating the phenomenon of anthropomorphosis (Allen et al. 54). Anthropomorphosis is generally considered a literary technique. In discussing Friedrich Nietzsche’s “better known than understood” phrase, “So what is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms,” Paul de Man defines anthropomorphosis as “not just a trope but an identification on the level of substance...no longer a proposition, but a proper name” (de Man 239-241). de Man insists the human is self-evident, and beyond reference, as a “proper name.” Barbara Johnson adds that anthropomorphosis “is not the name of a pure rhetorical structure but the name of a comparison, one whose terms is treated as a given (as epistemologically resolved). To use an anthropomorphism is to treat as known the 3 properties of the human” (Johnson 190). If the human is a presupposition, then it is not available for definition. de Man’s refusal to question how the human was given a ‘proper name’ disregards the power of that designation, a relation best illustrated by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*, where “definitions belonged to the definers, not the defined” (Morrison 225). Anthropomorphosis is a rhetorical structure, a reference to the idea of human – a category of which humans are both the definers and the defined.

In the process of anthropomorphosis, the author transposes humanity onto the nonhuman, but anthropomorphosis is not just reserved for authors. Anthropomorphosis is a given feature of the human condition; the expression of ideas and experiences in language necessitates that nonhumanity is imagined human. Anthropomorphosis inhabits almost every instance of language-expression. Anthropologist Maurice Godelier, in *The Enigma of the Gift*, asserts that human understanding of the nonhuman is merely a “projection” of what is known as human (136). In this way, “things are never truly ‘things’...since they necessarily take on the appearance of persons, and, transformed into persons, are addressed by humans as persons” (Godelier 136). Bound by their innate predisposition to process the world around them in symbols, humans clone their own image onto everything else, and experience the universe on those human terms. This projection is cast into the realm of social relations: persons are addressed through the idea of human. Anthropomorphosis is an ever-present reference to the category of human. Through the referential comprehension of anthropomorphosis, the category of human governs how humans relate to the world around them.

It is significant to note that ‘anthropomorphosis’ was originally coined in iconoclastic reference to the Anthropomorphites, who applied a human form to the Christian God (Chambers 4 107). The Church rejected these depictions because they believe human creations fall short of God’s perfection, but divine perfection is a product of the human imagination. Godelier finds that the divinity of sacred objects or concepts masks the fact that humans constructed their significance, “as if it was not humans who assigned meaning to things, but rather the things, whose meaning derives from beyond the world of [humans]...at which point the opacity necessary for the production of society is fully realized” (Godelier 137). As manifestations of divine will, sacred objects function as reinforcement and legitimation of both the mythological origin of society and the ordained social order. The category of human, then, is the most sacred concept. All other projections originate with the category of human, as humans “populate the universe with beings conceived in [their] own image” (Godelier 136). The category of human is the central concept through which society operates, and people understand themselves as human. It is also constructed by humans, though its construction has been attributed to supernatural forces. What becomes opaque, through the invocation of a supernatural entity, is the human authorship of society. This supernatural attribution is the abstraction of the category of human, the opacity that Godelier claims is essential to preserve society, but is actually essential to the preservation of society in its current state.

Sylvia Wynter traces the advent of this supernatural hegemony, through the overrepresentation of “ethnoclass Man,” to the Middle Ages (Wynter 262). The first instance of this exclusionary dichotomy was drawn from interpretations of the fall of Man from Eden, as “enslavement to the Fallen Flesh” separated the redeemed from “beasts” (Wynter 323). Following the eleventh-century Gregorian Reform, the hierarchy of celibate clergy leading the sexual (reproducing original sin) laity was established (Wynter 274). On the eve of the West’s colonization project, a council commissioned by the Spanish crown to circumvent Requisition documents, contracts where the Pope granted indigenous lands to colonizing monarchies, decided the conditions of what Michel Foucault called the ‘invention of Man’ (Wynter 263). “Rationality” now separated Europeans from “savages,” a reinterpretation of Plato’s tripartite theory of the soul, in which Appetite (desire) and Spirit (excitability) must submit to Reason (logic) before a soul is ‘just’ (Stocks 211) (Wynter 296). A new divide appeared in the nineteenth century, amid misinterpretations of the theory of evolution, between selection-by-evolution and dysselection-by-evolution as the “extrahuman agency” between human and not (Wynter 330). The most treacherous of these lines of thought are those like Thomas Malthus’ Law of Scarcity, which hide violence behind supernatural agencies. In Malthus’ Law of Scarcity, any attempt to alleviate precarity runs against the ‘survival of the fittest,’ putting salvation in economic terms. These three divisions, between celibate clergy or sinful laity,

rationality or animality, and selection or dysselection by evolution, emerged as legitimating terms for struggles of their time, and continue to uphold a divided society in which the ‘human’ must exist separate from their desires, from each other, and from nature.

The constructed category of Man has fueled a multitude of historic and contemporary “struggles,” as Wynter describes them (Wynter 260). These struggles fester under the influence of false dichotomies, and human|nature is one of many that are used to debase humans into things to justify their abuse, and to justify the abuse of things. The separation of human from nature renders nature ‘lesser’ and expendable, a notion that is translated into racism, sexism, environmental destruction; a confiscation of dignity from who- or whatever does not fit the category of Man. Conformity to Man is a quick test for moral, ethical, or philosophical considerations: a simple evaluation, with easy disqualification. Disqualification is encouraged, because nonconformity to Man is permission for objectification, exploitation, enslavement, destruction.

As the struggles sparked by disqualification from Man deepen and morph, their demands and susceptibilities shape what humans idealize under the title of Man. If anthropomorphosis is a ‘proper name,’ it is the name of Man. ‘Man,’ the epithet, is symbolic of the obfuscatory, exclusionary nature of the category of human. Man is always followed by a silent addendum, ‘meaning all humans,’ reinforcing how it refers to a narrowed and contrived field. The understanding of anthropomorphosis as the name of a self-evident identification masks the enduring influence of the ideals that form this category, and the struggles they perpetuate, which are charted opposite each other:

Man	Struggle
Purity	Race
Piety	Class
Rationality	Class
Lawfulness	Sex
Heteronormativity	Gender
Ableness	Anthropocene
Sobriety	Overconsumption
Wealth	Poverty
Breadwinner	Incarceration
Conqueror	Urbanization
Steward of nature	Drug epidemics
Eugenic	Famine
	Consumerism
	"Howl"

There is a web of reciprocal transformation between the ideals on the left and the struggles on the right. Their chiasmatic connections do not follow straight lines. A chiasmus is a "repetition of ideas in reverse order," and its Greek root means "a diagonal arrangement" (Burton). A chiasma signifies both the junction between two chromatids during meiosis, where genetic material is exchanged, and the point where the optic nerves cross, enabling the visual cortex to provide depth perception. Both are appropriate metaphors for the gravity between these categories. They cannot be understood in isolation, and they can only be pacified together. To overcome the struggles, the category of human must be decolonized, and Man must lose its capital.

Man is a set of ideals, devoid of objectivity. Simply calling them ideals is deceptive without remembering that they are not 'ideals,' but impossibilities. Man masquerades as the definition of human, when it is merely the unattainable idol of Western culture. Man has been substituted for human, in semantic and ontological contrast to the feminine, which Judith Butler asserts is suspended away from the category of human: "the construction of gender operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures...a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human'" (Butler 8). Beyond Man, and beyond semiotic figuration except in reference to a "set of constitutive exclusions," the feminine is essentialized into a category of 'not Man,' which enacts and enables the identification of nonconformity (Butler 42). This binaristic essentialization into 'conforming' and 'nonconforming' undergirds exclusion from Man, exemplifying Man's incompatibility with amorphous, "undesignatable" lived experience: "precisely because that which is to be named can have no proper name, 8 bounds and threatens the sphere of linguistic propriety, and, therefore, must be controlled by a forcibly imposed set of nominative rules" (emphasis mine) (Butler 44). Butler speaks to both the feminine and the human as unnameable and multiplicitous. The infinitely diverse human cannot be named, because each time it is, the naming process resubstantiates exclusionary, and necessarily incomplete, terms for the category it references.

Man is an attempt to name a category without illustrating the indefensible logic and violence of the exclusion that sustains the category. The repetitive cloning of Man through anthropomorphosis becomes a "ritualized production" that engenders and compounds the deception that the ideals of Man can be realized (Butler 95). The iterability of this deception renders it performative, compelled through the violent means of "prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death" (Butler 95). Anthropomorphosis facilitates human understanding of the nonhuman, connects humans to the idea of human, but absorbs delusion, and spits out pain. This continuously reiterated exclusionary oppression maintains the extant hegemony, an exclusion that Ginsberg rails against in "Howl."

Howl

Exclusion from Man is the crisis to which Ginsberg reacts in "Howl," expressed through misfit anthropomorphosis. Misfit anthropomorphosis reveals how Man is an incomplete definition of human by describing human experiences that fall outside the boundaries of Man. "Howl" opens with a decisively anthropomorphic statement, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked," in which the "best minds" are figured as human but are not designated Man (Ginsberg 9). The "best minds," referred to 9 through metonymy, have minds that are conscious, that can snap and go mad. They are "starving," in need of external materiality, "hysterical," a word whose history suggests the uterus is moving, but also describes deviant, socially unacceptable behavior, and "naked," which conveys a self-consciousness only available to humans (Ginsberg 9). All three descriptors are antithetical to the category of Man. Misfit anthropomorphosis is nonconforming, anomalous, but most specifically, an exception to the rule of Man. The 'best minds' are anthropomorphized without invoking Man, attesting to the human transcendence of the category.

The "hollow-eyed," emptied of their subjective significance, but outwardly, objectively human, expose the futility of Man's quest for objectivity (Ginsberg 9). They are subjectively excluded from a supposedly objective category. The "ashcan rantings" and Moloch's "Ashcans" allude to this false objectivity (Ginsberg 10, 21). An 'ashcan' is a wastebasket, a torpedo-like weapon, and a throwaway copy of a comic book published purely for copyright purposes, all symbolic of Man: a receptacle, a weapon, erected solely to exclude. Misfit anthropomorphosis, while humanizing debased and devalued qualities, does not expand the category of Man, but renders it invalid.

Part I is a continuous stream of misfit anthropomorphosis, which coalesces into two formidable expressions of nonconformity to Man, sexuality and irrationality. The regulation of sexuality is woven into the fabric of Western society, and was the first method of qualifying human. The poem repeatedly attacks the regulation of sexuality as a determination of humanity. The brutally explicit sexual imagery rejects regulation by repression, attempted when the second shipment of *Howl* and *Other Poems*, 520 books, were seized on import for obscenity by San Francisco Customs, and highlights sexual expression as a subjective experience that has never fit into the category of Man (Ginsberg 10, 13) (Collins & Skover 33). The marriage of divinity to sexuality in "saintly motorcyclists" and "human seraphim," and "the blond & naked angel came to pierce them with a sword," alludes to the separation of the celibate clergy and the sexual came to pierce them with a sword," alludes to the separation of the celibate clergy and the sexual laity, and challenges the religious exclusion of sexual desire from humanity (Ginsberg 13, 14). The allusion to "El," the unwritable, unspeakable, Hebrew for God, also the nickname of the elevated transit system in Chicago,

foreshadows Moloch's constructed essence in Part II, and along with many other references to the divine, "angelheaded," "Heaven," "salvation," and "archangel," emphasize "supernatural darkness" as the source of exclusion from Man (Ginsberg 9, 18, 20).

Irrationality, the crystallization of Enlightenment efforts to distinguish the inhuman, is claimed by Ginsberg as part of the human experience through intoxication, crime, and insanity. The despair of subway riders on an endless circuit brought down "battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance" and "Tangerian bone-grindings and migraines of China under junk- withdrawal" meld with revelatory hallucinations of "Blake-light tragedy" and "the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with flame under the tubercular sky" to anthropomorphize the urge for an altered consciousness (Ginsberg 10, 11, 16). The blatant illegality of getting "busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt of marijuana for New York" and "whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night cars," and the mischief of throwing "potato salad at CCNY lecturers" and "investigating the FBI in beards and shorts with big pacifist eyes," culminating in the offenders "left with their insanity and their hands and a hung jury," makes palpable the irony that crime, an egregious disqualification from Man, is an exclusively human quality (Ginsberg 10, 12, 14, 18). The "hung jury" cannot decide if those before it, with their 11 qualifying "hands" and their disqualifying "insanity," are human or not (Ginsberg 18). Insanity is a constant tone in "Howl," heard in the expulsion "from the academies for crazy," the echoes in "Pilgrim State's I Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls," and simmering underneath the sexual gratuity, drug use, and various crimes (Ginsberg 9, 19). Together, these expressions of sexuality, intoxication, illegality, and insanity, crescendo into "an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani² saxophone cry" – the misfits asking why Man has forsaken them (Ginsberg 20).

Man, which has a cornerstone in what de Man calls the "verbal building" of anthropomorphosis, is figured by Ginsberg in Part II of "Howl" as a supernatural entity named 'Moloch' (de Man 247). Moloch, the "judge of men," is the anthropomorphosis of Man (Ginsberg 21). Moloch is an allusion to the Canaanite god of child sacrifice, and the validity of undesignatability, of the infinitude of lived experience, of limitlessness, is a childlike innocence that is sacrificed to Man. Moloch is incarnate in "cement and aluminum," a figure "whose buildings are judgment," judgment of acceptance to the category of Man, of earth and earth's tenants (Ginsberg 21). The image of Man as construction evokes the "pure machinery" of anthropomorphosis as a rhetorical structure, the construction process of sacrificing natural resources, construction as an indicator of colonization, and Man as a constructed category, one that is not self-evident or objective, and can be demolished (Ginsberg 21).

Moloch is depicted as an "incomprehensible prison," which identifies Man as a carceral restraint on the designatability of humans (Ginsberg 21). As "skyscrapers," "factories," and "smoke-stacks," the environmental degradation of Man is realized, because what is not Man can always be rationalized as expendable (Ginsberg 21). Moloch, as a supernatural force "whose love is endless oil and stone," becomes the agent of the Anthropocene (Ginsberg 22). Moloch is "Robot apartments," "invisible suburbs," and "the city," and attempts to control housing, such as blockbusting, redlining, and gentrification, have been central to the economic marginalization of communities that do not fit the category of Man (Ginsberg 22). Moloch, whom the speaker declares "I abandon!" is abandoned like a condemned building (Ginsberg 22). To escape Moloch, the "Mad generation... jumped off the roof," ejecting themselves from the structure of Man, like comic book characters into their next scene (Ginsberg 22-23).

Part III of "Howl," with the refrain "I'm with you in Rockland," is a direct contradiction of this exclusion (Ginsberg 24). Ginsberg shifts misfit anthropomorphosis to a collective form, a reversal of the flow of traditional anthropomorphosis. Instead of proceeding from an ideal of Man to a qualification, Ginsberg pulls the reader into an experience contrary to Man. The reader and Carl Solomon are anthropomorphized through the same lens of instability, emphasizing empathy and connection. Those who are flattened by the machinations of Man cry out with Ginsberg 'I'm with you in Rockland.'

QBism

Both quantum physics and language relate to the perception of reality, by limiting possible explanations for the processes in play. The paradox of quantum entanglement, in which the probabilistic properties of particles are correlated over great distances, enacts this precisely: the limitations of language in describing the behavior of quantum particles impose limitations on the way that reality can be understood. If wavefunctions describe an observer-independent reality, objective possibilities, as the language of classic physics suggests, then when they collapse, they change reality. In this view, quantum entanglement appears as what Albert Einstein called "spooky action at a distance" (Fuchs, Private View). The 'many-worlds' theory supposes that at this juncture, reality splits infinitely into different multiverses, one for each possibility, which Christopher Fuchs regards as an "incredibility" (Fuchs 2). Quantum entanglement is only a paradox because of language, because physicists have only been able to express their data as embedded in an observer-independent reality. Consequently, the most significant aspect of Fuchs's theory of QBism is a redefinition.

1. Pilgrim State, Rockland, and Greystone are psychiatric hospitals that still operate, as of April 2019.

2. Greek translation of Jesus in his ninth hour on the cross: "My god, my god, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45) NASB

Consequently, the most significant aspect of Fuchs's theory of QBism is a redefinition. QBism transforms quantum physics into an addition to probability theory by defining quantum states, such as wavefunctions, as probabilities that reveal experiential knowledge, information that is only available to the particular observer performing the experiment. For Fuchs, a wavefunction describes beliefs about the system and its collapse is the observer updating their belief with the acquisition of new information. Quantum states, then, do not describe an external reality, but an experience. QBism, "an unflinching combination of 'subjective probability' with 'objective indeterminism,'" resolves several paradoxes of quantum physics, including quantum entanglement, by asserting that reality does not split, but that even empirical measurements are simply an experience (Fuchs 8). The implication is that each person's conception of reality, and therefore their concept of human, is experiential information: neither anchored in objectivity, nor floating in subjectivity, "but prior to the very notion of a cut between the two at all...[it's] not the world or us, but us-within-the-world" (Fuchs, Private View). The participatory reality described by QBism can serve as inspiration for the transition from the absolute authority and false objectivity of Man to the experiential undesignatability and 14 connection that anthropomorphosis should describe. We can stop cloning Man, and start cloning each other.

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