Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 56
Introduction to the Literary Posthuman: Narratives of Becoming- Post

Welcome dear participants. In the previous module we had discussed the Biopolitics of the gendered body in a virtual space while insinuating at our posthuman situatedness in the globalized world. In order to develop an understanding of Gender as a sustainable marker in critical humanities, in today's module we will deconstruct the term Posthuman as an Introductory study and Reference point.

The term posthuman invites multiple approaches, pedagogies and theoretical devices since 1980s. It has been interpreted by a number of theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles, Anne Balsamo, Rosi Braidotti, Carry Wolf or Donna Haraway etcetera. In short, critical humanities has tried to emphasize on the role of posthuman studies, posthumanism and posthuman knowledge in contemporary paradigms.

However, in order to streamline our discussion, we will be focusing on Rosi Braidotti's approach to the posthuman and Donna Haraway's insights on the cyborg and feminism. In referring to Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles in a limited manner we will define the post narratives contextualizing posthuman becomings otherness and posthuman gender performativity. Lastly, we will be assessing our current situatedness in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic while backgrounding some discussions on feminism and the posthuman.

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The Literary Posthuman: Introduction to Posthumanism

- In 1977, Ihab Hassan published his work, "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes". His work is often cited as the first announcement of the "posthumanist culture" in critical studies.
- He said: "We need first to understand that the human form -- including human desire and all its external representations -- may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthuman."(843-
  – Hassan's assertion represents an umbrella term exploring diverse approaches to our present understanding of the "human" and its anthropocentrism.

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As we attempt to theorize gender throughout this course while incorporating multiple approaches and a plurality of voices that have gained a foothold in the area of gender, sexuality and feminist studies.

A close analysis of the function of feminism in posthumanism will allow us to make sense of certain posthuman becomings that have become more real than fictional in our present times.

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Posthumanism as a critical theory questions the relationships between human and the non human, human and technology and human and the other; while responding to our current situatedness and the possible forms of futurities.

In considering these shifting terrains in the contemporary humanities, feminist posthumanities engages with critical and creative pursuits that address changing relations between political animals of a more-than-human kind, bodies, technologies and environments, and it does so from interdisciplinary and post-conventional perspectives. Haraway categorizes our inter relational existence along with the others as companion species in the posthuman universe.

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As companion species, we are more than ever entangled in co-constitutive relationships with nature and the environment, with science and technology, with vulnerable embodiment, and with other animals, viruses, parasites by which we live and die.

Critical and creative forms of humanities measure such make or break entanglements into account, by dehegemonizing the figure of the man as the centrepiece. For example, feminist research long critiquing the centrality of the figure of man for its gender chauvinism, stands as a case in point.

It envisions set of research approaches and pedagogy that deconstruct the notions of power and gendered relations. While acknowledging the diverse forms of approaches and tools provided by posthumanism as a critical theory we will be focusing on the relationship between feminism, performance and posthumans.

For Rosi Braidotti along with many other posthuman theorists anthropocentrism is the by product of 100 years of humanist philosophy and doing. It is a primary cause of othering while creating narratives of political struggles of the sexualized, naturalized and racialized others.

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The primary agenda for the feminist philosophers and scholars of science studies and cultural studies is to deploy the notion of the posthuman in order to break or otherwise overcome the fixed, dyadic and hierarchical categories of nature and culture, or the

human and the non-human and as Braidotti continues thereby enabling alternative analysis that explore the entanglements and mutual productions that result.

For example, the nature-culture continuum produces a binary oppositional category of the man and the woman which disbands the possibility of a gender spectrum and the possibility of mainstreaming multiple sexual orientations.

While interrogating the gender and feminist ontology in the posthuman discourse Haraway's denaturalized cyborg becomes a precursor of change and dynamism. This idea of the cyborg will be discussed in the next module. However, it is importance is established here in Braidotti's theorizations on the posthuman.

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We are witnessing a new era of meaning making to break the nature culture continuum in the works of alter genealogies in several fields. For example, Haraway looks at anti colonial cyborg studies; Franklin Lury and Stacey look at science and literature studies, queer theory and cultural studies in this perspective. Haraway looks at situated knowledge practices and Rosi Braidotti looks at advanced sex-gender theorizing, power-knowledge and sexual difference theory.

Feminist theorizations of sex and gender trace theories of denaturalization; such as Donna Haraway's cyborg ontology, or Butler's dispelling of any heteronormative

foundation of biological sex. They can be traced back to Beauvoir's famous dictum that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'.

Beauvoir's assertion alludes to a sense of performative interactivity of gender when analyzed from a post humanist point of view. To elaborate on this further, we shall watch a video by Braidotti where she discusses her understanding of the posthuman as a navigational tool.

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- Rosi Braidotti is a continental philosopher and feminist theorist.
- She is currently the Distinguished University Professor at Utrecht University. She was also awarded honorary degrees from Helsinki (2007) and Linkoping (2013).
  - Her main publications include *Nomadic Subjects* (2011), *Nomadic Theory* (2011), *The Posthuman* (2013), *Posthuman Knowledge* (2017) and *Posthuman Feminism* (2021).
- Braidotti also considers, among other theoretical contributions, how ideas of gender difference can affect our sense of the human/animal and human/machine divides.

Rosi Braidotti
Source: youtube.com

Braidotti is a continental philosopher and feminist theory. She is currently the distinguished university Professor at Utrecht University. Her main publications include 'Nomadic Subjects', 'Nomadic Theory', 'The Posthuman', 'Posthuman Knowledge' and her latest publication is 'Posthuman Feminism' which has been released in 2021.

Braidotti also considers, among other theoretical contributions, how ideas of gender difference can affect our sense of the human and animal and human and machine divides. Braidotti has pioneered European perspectives in feminist philosophy and practice and has been influential on third wave and post secular feminisms as well as emerging post humanist thought.

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- According to Braidotti, posthuman is not a generic concept.
- It is a navigational tool, an instrument of cartography.
- It allows us to navigate our way as humans, to deconstruct the structures of inequalities.
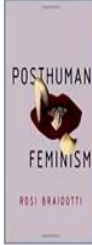- The posthuman elaborates on our current situatedness in the present, in the now, as we continue to live.

Source: https://youtu.be/drLsM1T_Zm0

Braidotti feels that posthumanism is not a generic concept rather it is a navigational tool an instrument of cartography which allows us to navigate our way as humans to deconstruct the structures of inequalities. The posthuman elaborates on our current situatedness in the present, in the now as we continue to live.

"I do not see the posthuman is a generic category and certainly not as concept, it is a navigational tool in the largest terms a conceptual persona, in my own word a cartography. It is a cartographical tool that allows us to illuminate aspects of the present. It allows an engagement with the present operationalized through strategic readings.

So, the idea of a cartographic rendering of the present is the methodological question. How do we access the actual moment, how do we critically access the present knowing that the present is accumulation of horrors, injustices and indigestible nauseating fact that we are essentially opposed to.
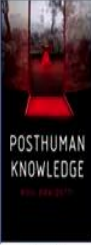
So, it is the oppositional consciousness engaging with aspects of the present that were actually opposed to that we are trying to frame here. So, materialist methodology framed by what I called embodied and embedded situated in accountable structure of thinking, that is for me the great contribution of feminism to critical theory embedded and embodied, situated and accountable".

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Braidotti suggests that feminist posthumanities is but one response among many to the age-old feminist question of who gets to count as human within the authoritative annals of the humanities and sciences. Yet it is a multi-faceted response defined by its open endedness, by its inter-, trans- or post-disciplinarily, and by its insistence on the bio-curious creativity of feminist theory.

On the other hand, gender, like 'genus' and 'generation' can be regarded as a critical category of intersectional analysis, while taking into account the rapidly changing field of technology and the conditions of human embodiment.

We can see that the concepts of gender and feminism are dictated by more variables such as technology, media and global inequalities in the 21st century. To decode the activity and interactions provided by technology the next video by N Katherine Hayles reaffirms the human technology entanglement as a posthuman marker.

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Hayles is a postmodern literary critic, most notable for her contribution to the fields of literature and science, and electronic literatures. She is the author of 'How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics' which was published in 1999. She also writes on electronic textuality, posthumanism, technocriticism, electronic literature, hypertext and hypertext fiction.

She is particularly concerned with the parallels between scientific models and literary theories as well as in contextualizing the intersections between humans and intelligent machines.

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Hayle's refers to the challenges posed by various technological inventions to the humanist philosophy of the anthropocentrism. Her work analyzes human embodiment in the age of the posthuman. "Well, when I wrote my book 'How We Became Posthuman' that was published in 1999, I was not talking about humans in general.

I was talking about a particular vision of the human which emerged from the enlightenment and imagined that humans were possessed of free will that they were primarily rational, that they were autonomous and that they were more or less at the head of all creation.

And, what I saw happening in the 1990s was the development of a lot of technologies that were challenging these ideas including robotics, computers and technologies like virtual reality. And, every one of those key attributes it seemed to me was being shifting and also transforming into something else and at that time we did not really have a word for what the something else was, but posthumans seemed to me as good a word as any.

However, we are still pursuing the ideas of life, death, identity and sustainability. Beyond the rigid categories of the man and the woman we have not given up on the human'.

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Popular and scholarly notions of the posthuman subjectivities often share a belief in modern progress, also in technology and biotechnology as saviours from bodily

vulnerabilities, even from death at moments. For example, the sex reassignment surgeries have helped individuals in claiming their own gender identity and leading a better life.

This figuration of posthumanism as opposed to anthropocentric humanism can transcend the imagined mind-body split, as a binary opposition in the humanist philosophy. Posthuman studies aim at deconstructing, dehegemonizing binary oppositions and the narratives of otherness consequently produced by the categorical distinction of the given that is nature and the constructed that is by culture.
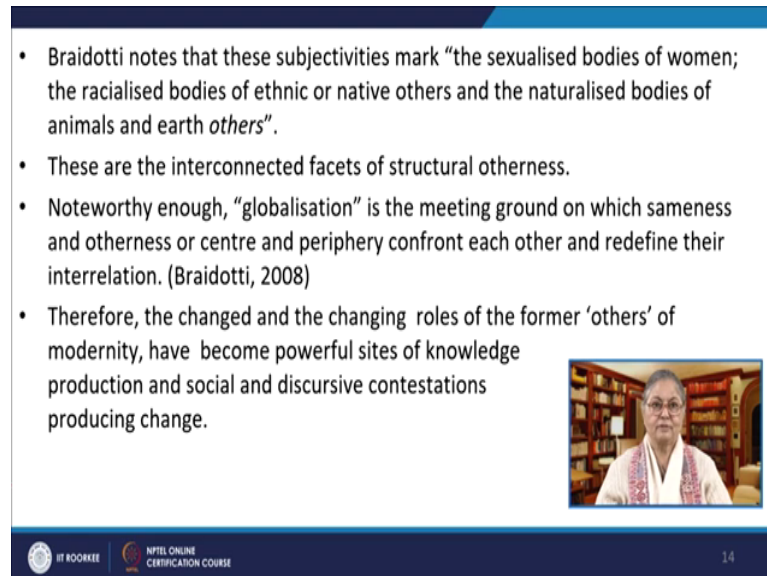
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Braidotti defines otherness as the site of production of counter subjectivities. The humanist philosophy has historically produced narratives of otherness by positioning men at the centre of the universe. However, in recent times feminist postcolonial black, gay, lesbian and transgender countercultures have emerged as mainstream subjectivities.

Interestingly, posthumanism does not claim to band these distinct subjectivities under the garb of any single narrative of otherness. These subjectivities speak from a specified point; and the intersecting lines of marginalization can be seen as entanglement, but not as any collective signifier.

Braidotti notes that constructed subjectivities of otherness as disposable bodies in the society are interconnected through struggle and differences. To quote Braidotti in a

phrase reminiscent of George Orwell, "We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others."

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Braidotti notes that these subjectivities mark the sexualised bodies of women; the racialised bodies of ethnic or native others and the naturalised bodies of animals and earth others. These are the interconnected facets of structural otherness.

Interestingly, globalisation is the meeting ground on which sameness and otherness or centre and periphery confront each other and redefine their interrelation. Therefore, the changed and the changing roles of the former others of modernity, have become powerful sites of knowledge production and social and discursive contestations producing change.

Next Braidotti also elaborates on the inherent problems of neo-liberal post feminist strengths. She suggest that gender is not embedded either in theory or in pedagogical practices instead it has become a polarizing signifier. In practice gender creates binary oppositions and strengthens the I instead of the collective we diminishing a sense of collective solidarity.

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With the changed narratives of otherness situated in the posthuman context, gender politics is yet to find its genealogy. In institutional settings, feminist activism is replaced by the less confrontational policy of gender mainstreaming. Braidotti suggest that the neo liberal post feminist wave is oblivious to the structural inequalities in a globalized set-up.

Braidotti illustrates this point by stating that the new generations disavow any debt or allegiance to the collective struggles of the rest of their gender which leads to entitlement. Therefore, Braidotti suggest an analysis of the context which she calls the politics of location in the globalized setting to deconstruct any form of polarization and displaced sense of anthropocentrism.

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As a feminist philosopher while referring to being embodied and embedded, Braidotti focuses on the specific brand of situated epistemology in feminist theory which has been termed as by her the practice of the politics of locations to account for the context of the voice, struggle and individual.

Thus, the place and stance matters in today's global narrative. In feminist theories and practices such structural inequalities that emerge in the age of globalisation are known as scattered hegemonies. Braidotti calls it the fast-developing world of the anthropocene in her work posthuman knowledge.

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Braidotti feels that in this regard, feminist theories should propose and I quote a "need to safeguard women's interests, dignity and well-being amidst the dissemination of hybrid and fast-changing ethnic, racial, national and religious identities, virtual identity on a virtual platform and now at home in quarantine amidst the COVID-19 pandemic a position previously known as feminist standpoint theory or humanist feminism" unquote.

Post feminist standpoints highlight that the globalised society forces a departure from womanhood. Therefore, we are witnessing a loss of one's identification as a feminist, there is a lack of solidarity to the other woman, though we sometimes may witness it online.

In considering the dialectics of self and the other the posthuman does not allude to a rigid sense of identification to any category or form, rather it refers to entanglement and relationality. However, the sense of belongingness is sometimes misplaced.

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What we have is that gender equality, woman empowerment and feminist issues are resorted to twitter trend, virtual wallpapers, t-shirt quotes, WhatsApp status and virtually monetized the story telling on YouTube. The practice and performance aspect of it is largely neglected.

However, the term 'post feminism' does not refer to the end of feminism, gender theory, gender performativity and sexuality studies. It should ideally refer to the feminist practice of overthrowing the pejorative, oppressive connotations that are built not only into the notion of difference, but also into the dialectics of self and other.

Therefore, the prefix post does not limit itself to an end rather it should refer to a critical alternative. The term post feminism is an ambiguous marker creating an illusion that the goals of gender, quality and equality have already been achieved in the 21st century.

It does not take into account the geospatial locatedness of the subject under investigation. Therefore, we need to situate the post in the post feminism to extend our reading of the feminist discourse in our current posthuman technologically advanced globalized world.

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Critiquing the "post-" in feminism

- While acknowledging the intersections of the post-narrative, posthumanism and the *post* in post feminism, Angela McRobbie, a British cultural theorist, argued that the prefix "post" in feminism largely undermines the achievements of feminism and feminist theory.
- According to Braidotti, the "post-feminist neo-liberalism is a variation on the theme of historical amnesia in that it expresses the rejection of the sense of a common connection to other women". (143)
- She also suggests that the urge to find new feminist heroines celebrates the individual rather than the sense of solidarity which in turn flattens out the political ambitions of feminist philosophy.

It would be pertinent to refer to Angela McRobbie, a British cultural theorist while acknowledging the intersections of the post-narrative, posthumanism and the post in post feminism McRobbie had argued that the prefix post in feminism largely undermines the achievements of feminism and feminist theory.

Braidotti also says that, the "post-feminist neo-liberalism is a variation on the theme of historical amnesia in that it expresses the rejection of the sense of a common connection to other women. She also suggests that the urge to find new feminist heroines celebrates the individual rather than the sense of solidarity which in turn flattens out the political ambitions of feminist philosophy.

Interestingly, to expand and cope up with the rapid advancements in every field, feminist theory expanded its boundaries to accommodate various intersectional fields such as medical humanities, digital humanities, the cyborg, artificial intelligence in post 1990s. In this context we have already discussed Anne Balsamo's 'Technologies of the Gendered Bodies' and we will also discuss some more examples in the upcoming modules.

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Braidotti notes that "the pernicious part of this syndrome is that it not only denies the history of women's struggles, but also fosters a new sense of isolation among women, and hence new forms of vulnerability."

Astrida Neimanis notes that though poststructuralism dominated feminist theory in the 1990s, feminist theory developed an "interest in materiality in fleshy, material bodies, in the material effects of immaterial processes drawing increasing attention to the non-human or more-than-human, and the biological and ecological dimensions of life matters".

On the contrary, some post human theorists are also invested in the idea of the posthuman knowledge as the idea of becoming woman rather than adding another post term to the feminist pedagogy and practice.

In doing so, Braidotti situates her cartography of the posthuman in the notions of becomings instead of the anthropocentric idea of the being. In her book the posthuman she strategically articulates the ideas of the posthuman as becoming animal and the posthuman as becoming machine.

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"Becoming Women"

- In her analysis of the posthuman, Braidotti suggests that not all of us can say that we have always been human, or that we are only human now.
- Therefore, in her cartography of the posthuman, she emphasises on the idea of *becoming* rather than *being*. For her, the idea of *becoming* is central to our understanding of political struggle in the twenty-first century.
- According to Braidotti, "the subject of feminism is not woman as the complementary and specular other of man, but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity". (12)

Souce: legalhistory.in

Analyzing her idea of the posthuman Braidotti suggest that not all of us can say that we have always been human or that we are only human now. Therefore, in her cartography of the posthuman she emphasizes on the idea of becoming rather than being. For her the idea of becoming is central to our understanding of political struggle in the 21st century.

Braidotti suggest that, "the subject of feminism is not woman as the complementary and specular other of man, rather as she says a complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity". In doing so, she refers to the she as a subject in process hence alluding to it is macro and micro processing of posthuman entanglements.

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- "'She' no longer coincides with the disempowered reflection of a dominant subject who casts his masculinity in a universalistic posture.
- "She, in fact, may no longer be a she, but the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis". (13)
- The idea of becoming a woman in the twenty-first century is to understand the relationality -- the non- human, animal, technological and cyborg-ian relationality, not as binary oppositions but mass media mediated, prosthetically enhanced, globally situated humans in performance, signifiers in action.

Source: criticalposthumanist.com

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The idea of becoming a woman in the twenty-first century is to understand the relationality – the non-human, animal, technological and cyborg-ian relationality, not as binary oppositions, but mass media mediated, prosthetically enhanced, globally situated humans in performance, signifiers in action.

It also can be mentioned that the post human she is a figuration as mentioned by Braidotti, Balsamo and Haraway in their respective genealogies of the posthuman. In the posthuman universe the signifier she can transmute into an animal, a cyborg or a machine. It is a performance an act in doing.

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The politics of global situatedness refers to a way of making sense of diversity among women within the category of sexual difference as opposed to the phallogocentric subjectivity. In feminism, the aforementioned is coupled with epistemological and political accountability to unveil the workings of othering, marginalization and hegemonized discourse production.

The practice of accountability for one's embodied and embedded locations is relational. Whereas the figurations of alternative feminist subjectivity like the womanist, the lesbian, the cyborg or the in appropriated other or the nomadic feminist etcetera differ from classical metaphors of the man and is precisely in calling into play a sense of accountability for one's locations." Such figuration combines the theoretical underpinning of the feminist intervention in the discourse of the posthuman.

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The politics of location consequently refers to a process of consciousness, a political awakening. And therefore, the notion of being a woman evokes a sense of emerging subjectivity or emerging subjectivities as subjects in process of making. It marks patterns of becoming adhering to new forms of geolocated forms of expression and representation, that can be mediated via post humanist and feminist entanglements.

In her analysis of the posthuman, Braidotti mentions that the posthuman also relates to how we feel about the idea of the human in the first place. This sense of belonging though ironical relates to the idea of doing a performance as we are always in performance and subjects in articulation. We see that performance of gender and not gender as a fixity is extended to our reading of the posthuman universe.

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Informed with the feminism in posthumanism, gender has a performative understanding to the act – in doing, in becomings if we borrow the term from Braidotti and in relationalities if we want to allude to the concept of cyborg by Haraway. It goes beyond the material semiotics of the world of which we are collectively a part.

The term gender and performativity in a posthumanist discourse can be understood as a way of methodological defamiliarizing where the subjects are encouraged to reconstruct the dominant image of the self and one's own power relations. This paves the way for new subjectivities.

For posthumanist theorists the posthuman turn provides an opportunity to decide together our collective becomings as opposed to individual gender notions of self conscious and self reflexive 'I'. We can take the example of disidentification from the binary representations of the masculine, feminine, effeminate etcetera.

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Dis-identification allows the subject to actively process the preconceived notions of identity formation and enables the shifting individual to shed the confines of anthropocentrism. It reworks the research for trans mediated assemblages such as the cyborg.

Gender identification intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities' in the posthuman universe; while rethinking of gender-specific relations to space, time and the interval between the sexes, and of issues related with other differences and figurations.

Therefore, we need to revisit the concept of gender in the discourse of the posthuman and subjectivities. As a result, we will be refiguring our collective imaginings as a posthuman. Collective imaginings is a term used by Braidotti to denote the interrelational living of a human.

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To conclude, we can say that our primary agenda is to establish gender as doing, becoming and as a relationality in our today's globalized setting. The plurality of entanglements produced by the heterogeneous multiplicities of the human and the posthuman does not refer to a unified category, but a shared understanding of struggle, powerlessness and injustices.

It also marks the cartographies of various becomings in the form of: becoming a cyborg as suggested by Haraway; becoming a nomadic subject as suggested by Braidotti; by becoming machines as suggested by Hayles and also becoming isolated in the pandemic.

Some of these ideas will be explicated further in the upcoming modules while contextualizing the human as opposed to man, woman, queer, virus, animal or machine. We can say that the new frames of references are emerging in the form of technology, globalization, COVID-19 pandemic, processes of othering in the form of sexualisation, marginalization, racialization and naturalization.

These frames of references have forced us to reassess the category of the human as non-anthropocentric and also through assemblage. It is also loaded with the queer, feminist, sexuality, material and gender performative discourses. While acknowledging these intersectional ties we aim to make sense of our current quintessential posthuman and postmodern existence. Therefore, a reassessment of the term human is mandatory.

We have looked at these preliminary observations as a cautionary remark in this module. After having discussed this background today we will analyze Donna Haraway's a Cyborg Manifesto in detail in the next module.
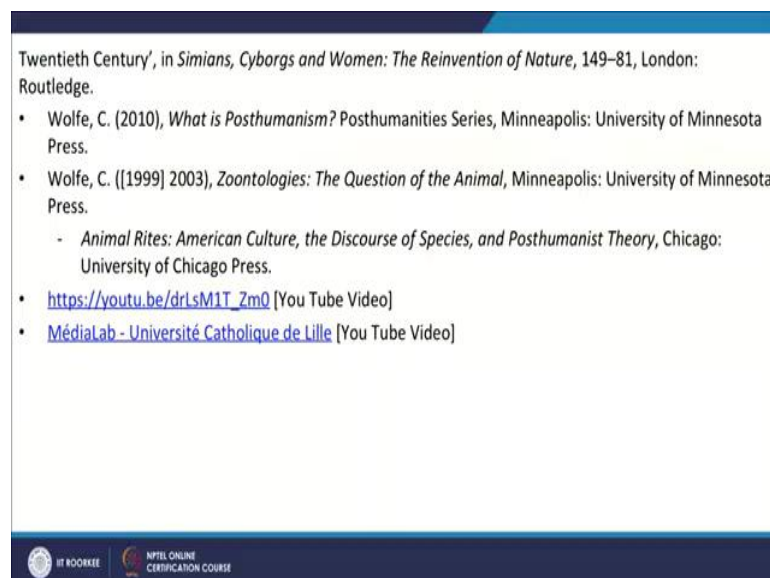
Thank you.

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