New media, unpredictable futures & radical alterity

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ABSTRACT

The promises of the new communication media tend to stress the benefits but downplay the negative aspects of the new technology. While the ability to communicate is generally beneficial, this assumes that people have control over who, what, when and why they communicate. Often this control is beyond most users and instead the old power structures benefit by the ability to influence, shape and keep track of people's activities, particularly their digital meanderings. In a culture where consumption is an integral part of identity formation, the state and capital stand to gain more from the advances in communication. Our lives increasingly depend on a world generated by media images and practices - what interests motivate these images and practices? Do the new media encourage or do they constrain the democratization of everyday life? Is it possible to remain incommunicado in a world that increasingly insists on always staying in touch? Moreover, communicative practices take place in a world marked by virtuality and radical alterities. Increasingly, we communicate with absent others, including non-human interlocutors. While technologically mediated communication often mimics face-to-face talk, its consequences are often radically different and unpredictable. Earlier boundaries separating culture from nature are technologically transcended. The Anthropocene age marks the domination of culture over nature. This paper argues that one must question who controls communicative structures and for what purposes.

Introduction

The first paradox – (always connected but alone)

A paradox of the digital age is that while people are always in touch with others, they construct an identity that ensures their individuality. Everyone is part of a growing and endless network whose centre is the solitary individual. Politicians and media stars benefit from this individuated network. Feminists have correctly argued that the personal is political, thus including the private sphere into the field of politics. The digital age has ensured that public life has become personal by generating broad coalitions of wide networks, whose centre is the politician or the media star. This shift in public life both empowers and disempowers individuals.

Second Paradox - (Unpredictable futures & the rise of radical alterities)

A consequence of this mediascape is the inherent unpredictability of the future. A feature of this future is the rise of radical alterities – combining natural, cultural and technological elements in forms radically different from earlier expressions of otherness. Genetic hybrids, mechanical anthropomorphs and environmental hazards are the only viable predictions of this future. While the future has always been unpredictable, the conditions of possibility for such unpredictabilities has expanded significantly. In other words, we face more unpredictable futures than earlier generations. Given the future's unpredictability, what ideas are the most useful in the circumstances? We need ideas that are good to think with under conditions of unpredictability.

Third paradox -The Age of Anthropocene – (Man as the measure of all things)

At this juncture let me broaden the context of the new communicative condition. According to geologists, we are now living in the age of Anthropocene – where environmental and planetary changes are the consequence of human activity. It is difficult to precisely date this epoch – it may have started when humans first used fire 500,000 years ago or during the Neolithic period (10,000 B.C.) when early agriculture and animal domestication were employed. Some anthropologists prefer to date Anthropocene beginning in the industrial revolution when the steam engine (1712, Newcomen) was first used to draw water from coal mines. Despite these different dates for Anthropocene, what is now certain is that human activity is contributing significantly to environmental and planetary degradation. It is precisely our human capacity to intervene, both in culture and in nature that significantly increases unpredictability. How are we to respond anthropologically?

Fourth Paradox – (The rapid rise of radical alterities)

The recognition of alterity and difference has been a project of anthropology since its early formation. Although alterity and difference are now better appreciated, their originating bases are expanding at an alarming rate. While the recognition and acceptance of ethnic, gender and other social differences seem to be increasing, technology is producing radical alterities that exceed earlier understandings of difference. Technological advances resulting in transgenic organisms, and the future of social robotics require a new understanding of radical alterities. As the nature-culture boundary becomes increasingly porous, radical alterities require rethinking their former linkages.

Fifth paradox – (Technologization of nature)

Technologies have assisted us in obtaining the products of nature in greater measure and with greater predictability. But we have now reached the stage where our dependence on technology determines our relationship with nature. Increasingly, nature itself is being technologically

transformed – strawberries injected with fish genes to prevent their freezing and tomatoes including animal genetic material to improve their texture, constitute the new world of nature or is it a new world of culture? (Mintz, 1986). Debates on the appropriateness of genetically modified human embryos illustrates this aporia.

Sixth paradox – (Robotization of culture)

Another conundrum arises out of the growth of social robotics, a field predicted to replace human labour with machines. Since work or labour is an intrinsic aspect of our nature and often an essential component of human interaction, what cultural changes are needed to adjust to a life of pure leisure? The media recently reported the opening of a hotel in Japan totally ran by robots (Henn-na in Nagasaki). Is a world without work an example of radical alterity? Paro, the robotic harp-seal has become an important element of therapeutic care in hospices in Europe and Japan. Its success may be due to the fragility of life experienced by elderly patients willing to conflate technology as culture. Patients with dementia are responsive to robots like Paro while other treatments prove ineffective. But other more problematic examples are soon to invade our lives. This advertisement announces the arrival of sex robots:

> Tired of looking for a girlfriend? What should you do? Have you thought about getting a Japanese robot girl? She will never reject your requests. She won't break your heart, she won't betray you. She can do anything for you

If we have to share the world with genetically modified organisms and social robots, we have to develop a better understanding of radical alterities. Following the so-called ontological turn, some have claimed that it is no longer possible to see the world from a single perspective, even a post-human one. But our being-in-the world, singular or plural, still requires us to coordinate whatever radical differences exist. While anthropology may not provide easy guidelines for dealing with radical alterities, it can assist our adjustment to their claims.

Seventh paradox – (increase of agency but loss of privacy)

The new media has opened up avenues for agency. Not only do we interact with countless absent others but we also respond to national and global affairs. In addition, we interact with the technologies themselves. These technologies shape us through their use. The technology opens new worlds and shapes us through our interactions in these extended worlds. Do we retain former notions of selfhood when interacting in these extended worlds, or do we reconstruct notions of selfhood more suitable for new worlds?

Fragmentation of the self

While technologies extend our capacity for agency, in the process, the acting subject is increasingly fragmented. We interact with many absent others, many of whom are strangers, we join local, national and global causes, and we participate in specialized interests such as Japanese wrestling, Caribbean cooking or Spanish flamenco. Many of these online interactions are conducted individually. Moreover, the speed of technological change often does not allow sufficient time for collective norms to determine acceptable practices. Hence, children and the inexperienced are exposed to certain risks. Under these conditions, the notion of a singular, cohesive, consistent or bounded self is impossible to maintain. As testimony of this increased agency, we are regaled with stories of ordinary people triumphing against powerful corporations and institutions. According to Nicholas Kristof (2012), a group of fourth-graders took on Hollywood and won, while a young nanny forced Bank of America to withdraw proposed bank charges. Closer to home we recall how a president (President Estrada in 2001; Pertierra, et.al, 2002) was removed by a coup d'text. These are all striking examples of agency achieved through the new media.

Furthermore, this expression of agency draws heavily on the expectations of others to whom we are increasingly and perpetually connected. It is becoming more difficult not to exercise agency, should we choose not to do so. Constant appeals from the market, the state and even close friends to exercise agency is exhausting and makes solitude impossible. According to Mark Zuckerberg (as reported by Kirkpatrick, 2010 in New York Times), the "age of privacy" seems to be over. We live within a paradox; the more choices we have in authoring our lives, the more dependent we become on the choices of others. The loss of solitude and privacy may be a high price to pay for this expanded agency. Perhaps it is time to reconsider the exercise of agency under conditions outside our control.

Freedom vs. Surveillance

But this agency can also be used against individuals and groups by powerful state bodies and commercial interests. Side by side with the flowering of novel and subversive information is the growing attempt to censure such expressions (SOPA, PIPA , ACTA). While the Freedom of Information Bill in the Philippines languishes in congress, a law against cybercrimes has been quickly enacted. Governments seem to be more concerned about controlling the free flow of information than in guaranteeing its access. While the new media is often perceived as a threat by government officials, ordinary citizens generally see it as emancipatory. Just as we can contact anyone, anytime, anywhere, we can also be monitored anytime, anywhere by any one of many state and commercial organizations. As soon as you turn on your computer (in some cases even before you do so) and before you even start surfing, a host of organizations are already monitoring your activities.

Self as the product of the social world

According to Durkheim (1918) our primary concepts - the ways in which we think about ourselves and the world are derived from society - these basic concepts shape how we experience both the natural and social worlds. But the new technology increasingly fragments and disentangles collective ties which hitherto acted as guideposts for social relationships. One basic concept is our notion of self and its relationship to the other. For Durkheim, this concept is derived from our experience of the social as expressed in the community, the tribe or the nation. We can only think of ourselves and others through concepts provided by the group to which we belong. As these groups are increasingly expanded and virtualized by the new technology, notions of collective belonging give rise to contradictions and fragmentations.

The gift as presentation of self

As psychologists have shown, it is through a child's interaction with significant others e.g. mother, kin, neighbour – that we become aware of who we are by drawing boundaries around those who most significantly affect us. As this circle expands, a person matures and learns to distinguish among the several roles she must play. Following Mauss, our dependence on others is most vividly expressed in the gift. Through the exchange of gifts, self and other confirm their basic interdependence. The gift can initiate a new relationship or confirm an old one. The ready acceptance and exchange of (sms) texts by Filipinos can be seen as an expression of the gift. Through these texting exchanges people establish, confirm and expand social ties and relationships. Many of these ties merely confirm existing relationships as people exchange texts with friends and relatives. But increasingly they also include new and individual relationships involving strangers.

In cyberspace who is the Other?

Navigating in cyberspace is a totally new experience for most people. Not only is the notion of community borderless but the notion of the Other is often unverifiable. Your interlocutor may be a serial killer posing as a student, a sufferer of quadriplegia claiming to be a triathlon champion or a robot. How does one exercise civility under these conditions? Cyberspace or life online is clearly a challenge to prevailing notions of duplicity, trust and friendship. While we are all learning as we navigate life online, children and others who are not yet fully socialized ran particular hazards. Early sociologists examined the transformations brought about by the industrial revolution, with its emphasis on rationality and the growing anonymity of urban life. Old forms of community were being replaced by new social relationships. Earlier values dominated by the Church and the nobility were replaced by a dominant bourgeoisie and a threatening proletariat. Literacy was becoming more widespread and popular culture challenged previously dominant aesthetic norms.

The new media and a borderless community/collectivity?

A century later we seem to be on the verge of another major social transformation whose effects are only dimly predictable. Some claim that we are only experiencing a more pronounced version of the industrial revolution but others insist that a qualitative change is taking place. The internet, the mobile phone, advances in genetics and robotics are among its most significant features. A common factor of these technologies is their ready reproductivity and duplication. The computer and cloning make the original redundant. While printing ushered a new age by making texts readily available, digital reproduction not only greatly exceeds this availability but transforms its relationship to the original. The 'hard' copy is subsumed under the 'soft' copy – the readers deconstruct the text, revealing its contradictions and severing any connections to an earlier reality.

Many people now have hundreds of friends in Facebook. Some are old friends or family members with whom relationships are of long-standing but others, probably the majority, are new acquaintances or friends of friends. These until-recently-strangers, are incorporated into our circle of intimates with whom we share both private and public information. Within this large expanded discursive network we develop new interests and become aware of global concerns. Multiply this for the 1.5 billion people currently subscribed in Facebook and we get an idea of the extent of the discursive universe we presently inhabit. Add to this the equally large network in the internet and other polymedia to get an idea of the scope of this new communicative world. Such an expanded world generates its appropriate collective consciousness, hitherto mostly confined to local, regional or national borders. The wider the network of communicative exchange, the broader the range of concepts they generate. It is this global network of communication that Levy claims is the best tool for expanding our collective intelligence. In the past, the capacity of language to generate new concepts depended on the range of its usage, usually limited to locality.

Is there a global discourse?

There are over a 1000 languages in New Guinea. Each of these languages expresses but also constrains a worldview and a corresponding set of practices. Presently, we can engage in a global discourse employing a range of languages, both at the personal and collective basis. An expanded diasporic discourse draws both on the local as well as the global, conflating whatever distinctions existed earlier. This expanded network opens new opportunities for agency & interaction, while simultaneously shaping its exercise beyond our comprehension.

There is a big network of Indians overseas who retain but also challenge tradition – marriages are conducted among overseas Indians that draw on established practices but recently an Indian businessman has started a marriage agency for gay/lesbian couples. Concepts are not just abstract language categories; they are also social constructs that enable us to act in particular ways and to generate social relationships. As this conceptual domain expands, so does our capacity for sociability. New ways of acting and new relationships become possible. But where will this new and expanded sociability lead us? What will happen to earlier notions based on more limited cognitive and social borders? Do we as humans have the capacity for a global sociality or have we evolved to stay close to and remain loyal to kith and kin? Only the future can tell.

Eight paradox – (Does constant contact mean better relationships?)

> "Within the past few years a revolution has been taking place, one with huge consequences, but so far subject to only limited systematic research" (Madianou & Miller, 2012. p. 1).

The authors are here referring to the increasing importance of polymedia in shaping, experiencing and representing our lives. Many Filipinos depend on the new media to maintain family relationships. Relatives who work abroad remain in touch with family using the internet, Skype and other media. These relationships are built on previous experiences but are conducted under new circumstances. They are not necessarily less authentic but lead to very different expectations. These long distance (and often long term) relationships are now part of everyday life. While incorporated into everyday life, digital and corporeal relationships operate according to distinct logics. Relationships built on digital and corporeal presence develop along different paths. The expectations of overseas parents and their stay-at-home children can often be exacerbated when the relationship is conducted digitally. Ironically, while the ready accessibility of the new media mimics everyday life, it disguises their important differences. Thus, mothers overseas say that the new media allow them to act like real mothers again: commenting on and supervising their children's daily activities. However, the children perceive this behaviour as undue interference on the part of an absent mother. On their return from overseas, parents like to continue the relationship where they left it several years earlier but in their absence, the children have matured and developed new interests. What appear to be equivalent relationships (digital and corporeal) are exposed as significantly different. The very success of the new media to mimic aspects of everyday life makes their differences invisible. Their conflation often leads to unexpected results.

Our lives in media

Paradoxically, while spatially separated, some informants claim a new emotional closeness but others complain that separation diminishes the original relationship. In both cases, our lives become inseparably entwined in both direct and mediated experiences. A person who uses a video to sing at home or responds to a Tweeter message illustrates the extent to which our lives are technologically mediated. As these mediations are incorporated, they become invisible. Technologies are not just a means of communication but also shape who we are. Our world is not only mediatised but we live in and through these media of communication.

Material constraints of discourse

Communicative transformations are often caused by structural realignments. In this case, the quest for personal freedom, expanding markets, social equality and democracy ushered a global dialogue that necessitated new communicative resources. The success of the internet and the mobile phone while phenomenal is based on earlier structural transformations such as globalization, mass communications and the rise of financial capitalism. The internet generation may well represent a new stage of social evolution, but its shape will depend on the structural configurations that preceded it.

Connected individuals & personal identity

The new media generates a greater sense of individualism, cultivated through relations with strangers as well as the boundless capacity for private and personal entertainment. This expanded field of social relationships in both actual and virtual worlds allow us to pursue individual goals within new collective limits. It is in this context that self authorship becomes viable and, in fact, necessary. We create ourselves as we go along, sampling cultural items according to our taste and means. Is the cyberworld a new cornucopia promising endless abundance to its users? Or is it a salesman's trick to get us to buy more useless things? As Miller (1998) has argued, material accumulation is not just instrumental but also symbolic. The quest for individual identity requires a growing collection of material and virtual goods. When you combine self authorship with a consumerist society you enter capitalism's utopia.

In the case above, culture becomes totally individualized, uniquely combining actual and virtual elements. One can now choose, given the economic circumstances, a particular lifestyle from a broad range of available ones, from eating preferences (e.g. Vegan), to sexual practices (e.g. apotemnophilia), religious beliefs (e.g. scientology) and even the means of death (e.g. euthanasia). This personalization of cultural choice is problematic for earlier modes of believing and belonging that require common standards. In this individualized culture, identity becomes an endless search for roots and meanings! Can we make any sense out of this plethora of meanings long enough to built a stable society? This individualization of culture within an ever expanding universe of choice creates a paradox: we are on our own but always with others. In the internet we may be physically isolated but always connected with virtual others. This condition of being on our own with others is exemplified in the case of contemporary entertainment.

Alone but always with others

This condition of being alone in a crowd became common some decades ago with the transistor radio and the walkman. Encapsuled in one's private experience while negotiating urban spaces, is a feature of modern city life. Remaining private in public spaces requires particular attitudes which children and country folk often lack. Conversations and behaviour have to be muted so as not to cause public offence. The mobile often breaches this norm and new rules have to be enforced. Strolling in urban spaces while secluded in our private mediascape has become a common feature of contemporary life. The former boundary between private and public have to be renegotiated. The quest for solitude becomes increasingly difficult in a world demanding constant connectivity. Facebook is the greatest threat to solitude, with its demands for us to share every detail of our lives with countless others.

The collapse of previous boundaries has led not only to the movement of people, goods and capital but also to the cross-fertilization of ideas. What had previously been thought of as impregnable positions, whether it be politics, culture or society are now seen as partial perspectives open to refinement or rejection. The terrorist threat, religion and class/gender hierarchies are now seen as contestable perspectives. Some are even claiming that we need to develop a post-human perspective. "In this abundantly mediated and progressively mobile lifestyle, media are such an augmented, automated, indispensable and altogether inalienable part of one's activities, attitudes and social arrangements that they disappear — they essentially become the life that people are experiencing on a day to day basis" (Deuze, Blank & Speers, 2012).

Culture operates most effectively if unperceived

For a mode of life to operate effectively, its underlying assumptions must work invisibly. For a set of ideas to be effective they must have the assent even of those whose interests are opposed to them. Gramsci's notion of hegemony is more applicable presently because more of our lives are mediated by systems of which we are unaware.

> ".... in a media life, people, groups, networks and institutions observe themselves in the selection terms of media, that is, in terms of whether they are relevant and of interest to media. In the process, the media's systems of reference and criteria for selection gradually come to structure the way people live their lives in media" (Deuze, Blank & Speers, 2012).

In popular TV programs participants learn to behave as they are expected to in media – they immediately launch into a sad tale of family woes or comport themselves like media stars. In both cases, people unself-consciously imitate what they think is appropriate for media.

Not only are we surrounded by media but living in media has become part of everyday life. The internet, mobile phone, iPod and cable TV are among the most recent media but print, photography, film and radio are equally significant. Most public events and spectacles are conducted in terms of media participation and exposure. The present presidential campaign in America are as much media as political events. In fact, the distinction between media and politics becomes blurred if not totally irrelevant. Hence their previous containment in one area such as politics inevitably spills over into other areas such as entertainment or civil involvement. Living in media means that signs and images become the main reality around which we orient our lives. But media images and signs mostly refer to other signs and images as media increasingly refers to its own realities. The simulacrum becomes the dominant image and endless reproduction gives it greater potency. Performance and spectacle characterize this new reality not only in the world of entertainment but also in everyday life as it adjusts to the requirements of media.

Therapeutic powers of media

The transformative powers of living in media are illustrated in television shows such as Face To Face, a Philippine version of an American TV show, where participants publicly confess their transgressions and confront their accusers. Apart from the participants, others such as the program host, appointed counsellors and the audience also contribute to the collective effervescence. Within the allotted program time, previously hostile participants are reconciled. What more conventional reconciliatory therapy may achieve in longer sessions, life in media achieves much more quickly. The participants become momentary stars whose real lives become absorbed in the virtual world of media. Whether such reconciliation is maintained outside the studio is irrelevant once its image, even as simulacrum, is confirmed.

Our private life, from shopping, leisure and the home are permeated with media representations. The care of self and relationships with significant others are measured by expectations and orientations derived from media. Not only do we base our standards on media but our notions of desirability, success and achievement are media driven. Consumption is not only material accumulation but also cultural production. Through acts of consumption we become who we think we should be. Facebook and other social networking sites reproduce our lives in media, mimicking media personalities by opening our lives to the general gaze. In the recent past, art mimicked life – presently life mimics media. Politicians are among the

most adept illustrations. Media exposure becomes the safest way to a political career and once voted in politicians start to behave with the haughtiness of drama queens. The close links between media and politics indicate that both draw on the simulacra of the real. People are so besotted by media that even criminals are admired if they are good looking. It is this capacity of media to provide a stage for self presentation as simulacrum that continues to baffle political commentators.

Theatre as politics or politics as theatre

It seems that the world of politics is best seen as theatre, whose players enact scripted roles disconnected from everyday life. It is a world of make-belief but whose consequences are only too real. Politics is a world of simulacra consisting of manipulable and refractory images referring only to themselves. In this context, demands for a politics of morality and decency require the restructuration of the political to include quotidian life. But quotidian life itself is imbricated in the world of media.

An example for the being alone and together characteristic of a life lived in media is the so-called "Silent Disco" phenomenon, where partygoers dance to music received through headphones. The music is broadcasted via FM transmitter and the signal is picked up by the wireless headphone receivers worn by the silent party attendees, who often listen to different, individualized streams of music while still dancing together. This suggestion of being together and generally having a great time yet still being alone in one's experience captures the notion of a media life, where people are more connected than ever before – whether through common boundary-less phenomena such as global warming, terrorism, and worldwide migration, or via internet and mobile communication – yet at the same time on their own, securely secluded in "mediaspace" (Deuze, Blank & Speers, 2012).

To some extent the political/economical clampdown on media and the use of media for the coordination and amplification of activism and protest are practices premised on a similar assumption: that people as individuals as well as institutions are looking at social reality as under permanent construction – as something to intervene in, redirect, manipulate, and transmutate (down to the level of genetic modification). The remixabilty of the real has become a property of lived experience. Questioning reality is the first and most fundamental step towards changing it (Deuze, 2012). The notion of reality suggested above is one that is open to intervention rather than apprehension or adaptation. The real is presented to us not as immutably given but as constructed, interpreted and reconstructed. The question is who does this construction – only those few allotted this task or is it open to democratic participation?

Ninth paradox – (The illusions of media or the media of illusions)

The new media gives us the impression that we control the media environment within which we operate. We choose our friends in Facebook, follow events in Twitter, download music and videos of our choice, shop online at our leisure and even remix and reorganize all these features in our personal blog. It seems that the new media is under our control. But this is illusory; it is media that controls us by allowing these choices. The new media also gives the impression of easily organizing mass movements. But it is one thing to generate crowds, it is another to construct and maintain new structures. The Arab Spring movements are examples of movements that can topple established regimes but are less successful in replacing them with more viable ones.

Conclusion

The new communication technology has launched us into an age beyond the industrial revolution. The former allowed us to better control nature and to regard society as a rational project. The new technology extends this control to culture. But unlike society, culture cannot be fully rationalized since it includes counterfactuals such as fantasies, desires and multiple identities. Media illustrates these contradictions when it depicts a world which media itself constructs. The world of media consists of an endless regress of images referring only to themselves - its reality is intertextual.

We are shaped by our associates. Normally, the boundaries of association are fixed e.g. relatives, neighbours or workmates but increasingly, as in the case of online associates, these borders are porous. And yet these online associates also influence who we are. But an online network is not the same as a lived community. Single stranded relationships online are not the same as multi-stranded ones resulting from regular consociation. Life is more than a set of discursive practices, even as these practices increasingly dominate our world. Parents overseas often discover this on their return despite having maintained regular communication with their children while abroad. The notion of an absent/presence made possible by the new media reflects this antinomy. A hundred years after the industrial revolution we are on the threshold of another even more transformative period. The speed, extent and reproductivity of information challenge our notions of the original and of the past. Neither seems relevant for the present. If modernity involved a transformation of our notion of time that allowed us to think globally following the introduction of standard time, then the new media may also require a different notion of temporality. Constant connectivity negates spatio-temporal borders. Neither time nor space constrains life in the virtual present. Modern life is one of constant transit from an actual present to a virtual future.

Culture is now individually generated as people author their lives according to tastes, desires and circumstances. Material accumulation becomes a way of expressing ourselves. Most of us conduct our lives both online and offline. The problem is how to combine these two modes without one unduly distorting, influencing or reproducing the other. Virtuality is now an aspect of everyday life and we must contend with its vagaries. Like other constructs, the virtual world is also a product of society. But society now consists of individuals encased in their own private cultures. What forms of sociality ensue in these circumstances? Increasingly, media become invisibly incorporated into our lives. Life outside media is now impossible. But life in media means that social reality is always under construction, revision and rejection. Who participates in this process of social construction is one of the most contested issues. Is Wikipedia a reliable source of knowledge or should only the experts dictate what we can know?

The global reach of our communication opens possibilities for collective knowledge hitherto unprecedented. If society shapes our notion of self and our relationship with the other, global communication constitutes a new social order and with it come new social relationships. Our offline world and relationships continue even as we interact more online. We live in a world of endless choice. This allows us to author ourselves as individuals. But we also live in a world of constant and growing connectivity. Self authorship is only possible in collusion with others. What notions of selfhood arise in the context of radical alterities? If our interlocutors include non-human anthropomorphs or involve transgenic entities, what norms cover such interactions?

Do we extend to these radical others equal rights? Can we have the notion of a common world involving distinct and incommensurable ontologies? What will a post-human future look like and can anthropology comprehend it? The paradoxes mentioned are related to the increasing intrusion of human action into both nature and culture. This intrusion generates unpredictable futures e.g. genetically modified organisms, social robotics. The new communications media creates a new ontology combining both unpredictable futures and forms of solipsism.

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