

In the beginning there is a void.

In the beginning there is a void.

A void between us and history,
between these words and our muted existence.

How are we to cross his void?

When language
is by definition,
something we do not possess?

You think that because of your writing
you are the author of the world,
but you are wrong.

You were just an accident
like the rest of us,
floating in the sea of time.

Everybody tries to explain the world.

Even the stone,
with its stony reasoning,
finds order
in its rocky little world.

You are nothing special.

There is an inside to everything." (1)

Why “How could a posthumanist be?”

I don't often get a chance to talk about posthumanism so I'm grateful but when Chris invited me to give one of the keynote lectures at this conference, I was reluctant.

I left academia for 'the real world' in 2011 after twenty years and I have no interest in the particular mode of organising one's priorities and activities that the academy demands.

And I have no interest in organising my writing in the form of an academic conference paper.

I certainly don't want to give a talk called 'What is posthumanism?' or 'What is a posthumanist?' The way I see it, posthumanism is a dynamic, evolving response to a set of conditions that is constantly changing.

And so rather than presenting a set of assertions or presenting a logical argument based on empirical observations what I'm doing here is considering a question, or stronger still, **speculating** on the topic of a question 'How could a posthumanist be?'

2 min gone

Authority to speak

not crucial

Perhaps first I should say something about what gives me the authority to speak. I am not a member of the academy, why am I a keynote speaker here?

The definition of research is constantly being expanded, and it may seem not unreasonable for me to claim to be a researcher, albeit sadly, one no longer sanctioned - as in being paid - by the university.

But I don't really want to adopt the guise of a researcher. you could certainly say that for the past five years I've been working in the field, like some maverick anthropologist - a la Brian Massumi - and it has resulted in a book

It's called 'I Am Here' and it's out next month from Scribe, you should buy it - it's a heartwarming story of an academic at an obscure regional university who resigns his tenure and finally learns how to be a human being.

And it will, if I can get the thing written, result in at least one more book.

On the back of the book it says that I am a posthumanist therapist but what is posthumanist therapy and what is posthumanism?

Transforming one's intentions, interactions and intra-actions with the world

important

For the past decade my ongoing project has been what Foucault called '**the practice of the self**'. This project is, in part, concerned with one of the political, ethical, social and philosophical problems of our days which Foucault identified as '*how to free ourselves ourselves and each other, from the type of individuation which is linked to the state - and its institutions and ideologies.*' (2)

4m gone

More recently I've become interested in exploring a way of living and thinking (being-in-the-world, as Heidegger calls it) which could be called posthumanist - or post-anthropocentric.

I adopted this speculative posthumanist narrative to begin thinking through the implications of what I see fundamental part to this project: how to **transform one's intentions, interactions and intra-actions with the world** - a process which, in the posthumanist sense, represents an **undoing or unmaking** of the humanist subject position as 'demanded' by the enlightenment.

I will consider these questions today like a dog running through a field - as an outsider i.e. beyond and outside of the academy and external to institutions and extant ideologies. (3)

5m gone

How to begin (frames, holocaust, complexity)

not crucial

So what shall we do then?

How shall we begin?

When I was an artist, how I might begin, if I was thinking about a picture, was by drawing a frame - and then considering what would be inside of the frame, and what would be outside of it - and what might be partially inside and partially outside of it.

And then, I might consider how that which is outside of the frame and is thus invisible, can influence what is inside the frame, and vice versa.

As in film : within the frame someone might be looking at or reacting to something which is beyond the frame - which film theorists call diegetic space - and so on.

When I decided not to be an artist anymore I became interested in seeing what things look like **when I remove the frame altogether**, when I open things up, and allow things to be as complex as possible - and things become very, very complex quite quickly.

It's as if the complexity multiplies and expands - as the quantum theorist David Bohm might have said **unfolds** - outwards as well as inwards - enfolding - simultaneously.

When I stopped teaching, I realised that perhaps I had thought of my job as trying to make complex things simple for people, but there is a problem with that. In an interview Primo Levi (Auschwitz survivor, writer of 'If This Is A Man') did towards the end of his life, he says that we shouldn't try to **understand** the Holocaust. What he is saying is that to understand something you have to **simplify** it - and that the holo-

caust was and is, so complex that simplifying it is necessarily reductive and disrespectful.

Since leaving the academy I have come to realise that some things are JUST too complex, at least for me, to understand -

And I am OK with that, and some things are ineffable, inexpressible and I am OK with that too. I am also comfortable with doubt - and contradictions. Have been for a long time as these are easily accommodated in art and poetry, as Wal Whitman famously said:

"Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes."

And so here I am : A dog running through a field, full of doubt and contradictions and complications - and I hope you will run with me - or at least, look on in with amusement as I make a fool of myself.

8m gone - u say 9m

What is a man? (Author/ity: On theory)

good ok u=6m

My first year in art school was in what was then an unfashionable backwards place called Hobart at the Tasmanian School of Art, where I had enrolled in an associate diploma of arts and crafts, partly because i didn't think i would have a hope in hell of getting into the bachelor of fine arts program but the other thing i liked was that you could do the same subjects as the students in the bachelor programme but you didn't have to do theory.

And lo and behold what everyone complained about in that first year was how much they loathed having to do theory.

Fast forward twenty five years and I am in the final years of my academic career such as it was, I am studying part time, first holocaust studies and then psychology and then a thing called reality therapy.

And then I resigned. I moved to Melbourne and trained as a Pastoral Worker in a cancer hospital. When I'd completed my training I continued to work at the hospital part time and I enrolled at La Trobe University in a postgraduate certificate in narrative therapy. This is an approach to therapy developed by an Australian, the late Michael White - in response to Foucault's work on power, amongst other things.

I also worked with people privately and I was volunteering for a right to die advocacy organisation and this is how I began working with people who wanted to die. I am currently writing about this in my second book, The Art of Dying.

*In June 1944, Maurice Blanchot was almost executed by a Nazi firing squad. He believed that it was in writing itself that authors find their purpose; there (in the writing) was the use of language, the reality of silence and the overwhelming reality of death.*¹

And so it is writing, I think, that authorises one to speak. Many people who have done PhDs and research masters will agree that it's in the writing that you work out what things mean.

And in a strange way, it is through working with work with people who are dying and who want to die, that you work out what it means to live as well as **what it means to die** and what it means to choose death.

Heidegger says is that the entire history of western philosophy is based on a mistake - or a wrong turning. He said philosophy has always been interested in a particular thing or being **in itself**, instead of being interested in 'Being'. Or to put it in another way, the focus of the human being, is on the human instead of the being. And this leads to a preoccupation with the self or the ego.

That the ego is problematic I knew from my studies of Zen and Taoism and Krishnamurti in my late teens and early twenties - and later from my exposure to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. But there were two problems with Zen and these kinds of approaches that took a long time to work out even though it seems obvious now. They were so individualistic, so inward focussed. The ego is a slippery customer. Many of the people who were interested in these approaches were interested in well being, but their own - not that of others. And the kind of well being they seemed to be most interested in was their own personal comfort and wealth.

1

As I was working with people who were dying I was also becoming interested in quantum theory and ideas like posthumanism and new materialism, reading the work of Jane Bennett and Karen Barad principally but Rosie Braidotti and others like Ian Bogost and Graham Harman and Timothy Morton, there are a whole lot of slightly different flavours of what some people like to call thing theory or object oriented ontology or speculative realism for example Morton is from an English Literature background and has worked on food and ecology and collaborated on a book with Bjork. And Barad is a quantum physicist who has become a professor of philosophy.

Go here for some links to readings:

<http://bit.ly/posthumanistwriters>

<http://bit.ly/posthumanism>

On praxis/On history

important 5m

So I have no particular authority or expertise in posthumanism other than that I've been thinking about it in terms of a practice - I've been engaging in praxis.

As wikipedia has it, "*praxis* is the process by which theory is enacted, embodied, or realised - the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practicing ideas."

For Hannah Arendt philosophy was too preoccupied with contemplation. She argued that praxis is the true realization of human freedom, our capacity to analyze ideas, wrestle with them, and engage in praxis is what makes us human.

And this has been a constant in my work since second year art school : the relationship between theory and practice. I am not interested in theory per sé. I am interested in what kind of practice theory leads to.

- What do your ideas mean in terms of everyday life?
- And how do you talk and/or write about your experience of that *praxis*?
- And how does that feed back into your thinking, your theory?

And this is how the idea of a narrative arises. And this is why I'm not arguing a particular position.

A *posthumanist* narrative, as I see it, is neither dialectical, nor oppositional, and it is not critical - one might say posthumanism is post-critical.

It is dynamic and is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with history and with, what I call in my book, the unfolding and enfolding of the ten to the power of five hundred universes and the eleven dimensions.

On history : The enlightenment/humanism as a stage (5m)

Humanism as a stage between pre-humanism and posthumanism

So posthumanism is not anti-humanism, rather it evolves **from** the idea of humanism. One might say that posthumanism only becomes possible **because of humanism**.

When you think of the enlightenment and the idea that each human life is of equal value, that was revolutionary.

And at this time, at least in Europe and the United States, a new idea of freedom was born and it has a legitimacy born of reason and science.

That idea undermined the way that power structures that had evolved over many centuries operated and were maintained.

At that time the idea that some humans were inherently worth less than others, and that one person could quite literally be owned by another, was not only acceptable, it seemed to many people, to be common sense.

When Immanuel Kant was asking his four 'big' questions (what ought I do? what may I hope for? what can I know? what is a man?) in the middle of the eighteenth century, the idea that you could legitimately ask such questions rather than accept what you were told by the church - and the idea that the sun doesn't revolve around the earth and that the earth is not flat and that we are descended from apes and an idea which is increasingly prevalent today that **there is no supernatural omnipotent interventionist being who demands obedience and worship** such ideas were considered heresy and espousing them could get you locked up.

And then came the idea of the Social Contract, and with the French revolution, the idea of the separation of church and state - and the term humanism, began to be used.

But humanism too is a **stage** which marks a particular period of significant change in how humans conceive of themselves and the world in which they live.

And we say *hey, all humans are important*. And then we ask, how do we make that work? And we find that its very, very difficult.

It becomes a political question.

important u=2'

The ethics that come about with humanism are not just a matter of theory, of philosophy or ideology.

It is about the way in which resources are used and allocated in the world, and it is about the kinds of systems that ensure that people have enough to eat and they have adequate access to health care and housing and that they feel safe - all the things that are important for people's health and comfort.

And where we are now is that there is a long way to go before all humans have equal access to having these basic needs met.

Because we now know full well that the freedoms afforded by the enlightenment became available only for the privileged few - men mainly, white men, certain groups of white men, who seized the upper hand and began to dominate discourse.

Not that women were not involved in the conversation, they might have to pretend to be men to be heard.

Mary Ann Evans, better known as George Eliot, wrote : "the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man ... the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of goodness entirely human (i.e., an exaltation of the human).

How could a posthumanist be?

ok 5'30"

So you can't go from pre-humanism direct to posthumanism. But when you ask how could a **posthumanist** be? what you're asking - what I am asking - is: is it possible to value **other lives** as much as human ones, and what kinds of ways of living does that lead to.

And then we ask: *what happens when we value plants and trees equally and rocks and waterways and land?* And this is why I am speaking at a conference about land.

A posthumanist would ask: *What happens when you care about land for its own sake, not because it is a resource to be exploited, which you have to look after so it can better serve the needs of humans, but because each entity that exists has integrity and value and the right to exist as it is.*

And a posthumanist asks : *How do you put that into practice?*

And the pragmatist says, if they're in a generous mood: *That's all very well but we have to eat.*

But the idea that we kill animals for food for example, does that seem quite absurd when you think about it? Would you make a different choice if you can feed yourself quite adequately eating vegetarian food?

I was talking about this with a Christian, a qualified Minister of the Church who leads people in prayer and worship each Sunday and he said: *I believe that God put animals on the earth to serve humans and to provide food for them* and I said *well what do you base that on* and he said *the Bible* and I said *well what's the story with that* and he said *we believe that the Bible is the word of god.*

About religious fanaticism

But arguing with with people who have different beliefs using reason is not part of a posthumanist praxis as I see it.

The point is more that like it or not (and there are who some don't like it **at all**) we are transforming, we are at a point of transition from a religious society, where we believe in the existence of heaven and hell and an omnipotent being that is more or less benign or vengeful and more or less interventionist, who demands that we worship and obey him and offer sacrifices of lambs or virgins or innocent bystanders.

We are slowly but surely transforming from a culture that believes in a vision like that, holds it to be absolutely true - into a secular one.

Which is not to say there aren't significant pockets of that (let the lord smote me down for blasphemy) primitive kind of vision that remain and that are attractive to people and I will talk about why I think that is so - and those pockets have agency and cause untold damage and suffering as they have recently done in Brussels and Paris and continue to do in Pakistan and Iraq and Syria and on the border of Turkey and Greece and on Manus Island and Nauru and so on and so forth. How could I hope to name all the places where cruelty and callousness and violence, inspired by what the perpetrators would call faith, are rife and they have been doing so with increasing vehemence and effectiveness in the last ... what is it now decade and a half ... and there are people coming of age now who have never known a world without the kind of random mass killings by people who are fundamentally - and I use the word advisedly - opposed to what the secular world stands for.

But what is it actually that the secular world stands for? There is what the secular world **says** it stands for which is probably and most efficiently summed up by the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity with which we are familiar from the French

revolution and which was the first serious attempt to establish a secular state. But in reality?

What can I know? (I am not a philosopher or a historian)

OK? u=4'33"

I am not a philosopher in the academic sense and I do humbly apologise to the academics in this room and beyond, for venturing into an area about which they may feel I have no authority to speak.

I **am** a doctor of philosophy but it was awarded on the basis of my creative work, and my thinking and writing about my creative work - although good art is philosophy made solid (unless it is a performance!). And the art that matters is a matter of life and death - or so I used to try and tell my students.

Not being properly educated in the fundamentals of formal logic and argument is bad enough but what makes it worse is that some of my ideas about the nature of reality and what it means to be a human being (not to mention the idea of being posthuman and the possibilities that affords) are informed by phenomenology that is the experience of being - and inspired by science, in particular one of its most controversial and disputed areas of research known as quantum theory, and I have even less expertise in science than I do in philosophy.

Now there is not a lot of love lost between philosophers and scientists, and especially lately there has been some noise from people like Stephen Hawking who declared that "philosophy is dead." and astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson who has said philosophy is not "a productive contributor to our understanding of the natural world". Bill Nye a beloved American science educator and TV personality has suggested philosophy is irrelevant because we're incapable, as fallible beings, of un-

covering the absolute truth. "You're a human seeking the truth," he says, "so there are going to be limits."

I am not a mathematician either, but certainly in Einsteinian terms, the information and history available at any one place in the universe is slightly different from the information and history available at any other place, which means in effect that everyone's universe is slightly different. Every spot in the universe is unique. There will always be a piece of it that you haven't seen yet and a piece that **you** have seen but that nobody else has. There is no place to stand if you want to claim universal knowledge. www.nytimes.com

This doesn't make philosophy irrelevant!

Quite the opposite.

But yes, as has also been established by the poststructuralists, there is no absolute truth - just as there is no objective reality. And anyway, i am not looking for the truth! I am looking for at the mess that we're in - collectively and as individual humans - and for a way out of it.

So. At least I'm honest. I am not here to convince you using evidence and logical argument. My method, such as it is, is a narrative method. I am here to present a narrative, a splendid but speculative, fragmented narrative and what I need you to do is to suspend your disbelief, just as you would if you if you were going to the movies.

Except, this is not an entertainment. This is deadly serious.

I am not a neuroscientist

crucial u=5'45"

Einstein: 'Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.'

I am not a philosopher but I'm interested in the nature of reality, always have been. As long as I can remember, I have thought : There is something *wrong*... this world is dysfunctional. **People** are dysfunctional.

Neuroscientists who study the structure and workings of the physical brain, like David Eagleman, who recently had a show on SBS called The Brain, like to say : "The world is an illusion. The real world has no smell or taste or sound. If you could see **reality as it really is out there**, you wouldn't recognise it at all."

So there is no reality. Everything you know is an illusion, right? And then the neurologist does some clever demonstration and looks really smug like he knows the secret of the universe, and says:

Colour doesn't actually exist. It's 'just' electromagnetic radiation and we only perceive one ten trillionth of the electromagnetic spectrum because we only perceive what we have evolved to perceive.

It's worth repeating what he said "We only perceive what we have evolved to perceive." He is talking about you and me and how limited we are but he could just as easily be said to be talking about himself and his discipline, his field, which is neurology - and how he has evolved as a neurologist, to think/feel that he has a superior understanding of what reality is and how the world functions - and the way in which human and non-human beings experience it - than anyone else. But if I was to ask him what the experience of a rock is or a big pebble at the bottom of a lake, he would look at me as if I am completely insane, which by some standards I probably am.

But I am hungry and there is nothing to eat. That is real enough. And if they are throwing bombs out of airplanes and they're landing on my house, it doesn't **feel** like reality is an illusion. **My experience is that reality is very real. And it seems to be trying to kill me.**

The point is not that there is a discrepancy between David's so called 'actual' measurable demonstrable reality and human perception of it, interesting though that is. The point is that there is a much bigger reality, the field of the experiences of all the people that have ever lived and that are alive now and that will ever live - and the non-human beings. They have experiences too, although their consciousness is different from the human one and so on and on - and trees. What is the being of a tree? This is one of those questions. And what can I know about it? Well not that much, but more than nothing. That is the point.

Am I a tree hugger?

Yes I am. And I am not ashamed of it.

What I take from the vast, mostly uncharted field being explored by quantum theory, is that no thing is either one thing **or** the other because nothing exists by itself, everything exists only in relation to everything else, and is dependent for its being on An Other.

Everything everyone sees and everything they say is entirely dependent on their position in the context. Everything is subjective. My subject position is that of a human, a white heterosexual Anglophone. My understanding of the position of women, people with different gender identities, people of colour, is limited by this subject position. As is my understanding of what it's like to be an animal or a tree. But I am intimately connected with them, and dependent for my existence on them. And so are we all.

Of how these connections, these inter and intra dependencies work we are only just beginning to get a glimpse. And I for one am not nearly smart enough to try and understand quantum theory. But Karen Barad is. I recommend her book Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning

An infinitely variable illusion, the five basic needs)

Ok i think/feel u=4'

So are we all labouring under a humungous collective illusion?

An illusion maintained (and continually refreshed and renewed in small and large ways) by those whose interests the illusion serves? by ourselves ?

An infinitely variable illusion which simultaneously simple and complex, which contracts and expands into the available space as required by the conditions.

and yes David, it is in part, the result of the way that we have learned to use our brain, and our cognitive systems.

We see causes and effects, we avoid pain, we seek out comfort and safety, we want to be loved and recognised. We want to feel that we are valued, we want to feel that our existence has meaning. We want to have fun. We want to feel comfortable. We want to belong. We want to have continuity. We want to feel like we can have an effect on our world on our lives. We want to be respected. We want to be immortal. These are the five basic human needs from Glasser's Reality Therapy model : power | freedom | belonging | fun | survival

Over time we develop beliefs about what we can do or not to do to increase the things we want and decrease the things we don't want or prevent them happening.

We may be more or less successful in doing those things and/or not doing them but other things 'happen' which we did not foresee and over which we have no control. We try to work out how those things happened and we try to work out ways in which we can foresee them and avoid them in future.

Yet, some of us more than others, we do things we don't want to do and we don't do things that we want to do. We do things we don't want to do because other people want us to do them and we don't do things we want to do because other people don't want us to do them.

Some of the things we don't do, we don't do because it seems reasonable not to do them, for example most of us don't hit or kill another person even though they may be odious, annoying or repulsive or Derry Hinch.

But ultimately we all fail. As long as we stay at home and nothing changes, the Dutch writer J.J.Voskuil said, we are immortal. And yet death is the only certainty we have. All I can know is that I will die. And all we can know as humans is that we will die. One hundred billion humans have been alive and died. But rather the certainty of our mortality making us into brothers and sisters, it fragments us.

Why is that?

nothingness

done 12.4.16 good crucial 6 minutes

so shall we begin then finally, with nothing?

with nothingness?

that is what karen barad does in this text which has been mysteriously appearing in and around the city

why would we begin with nothingness?

and then how do we get from nothing to something?

The idea of nothing as a starting point is useful as john cage demonstrated. he said : i have nothing to say and i'm saying it and he made a composition called 3'41" **check** which was three minutes and 41 seconds of silence.

And Beckett said 'Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.' Yet he kept writing.

Beginning with nothing is interesting because it is revealing of the way in which humans constructed a narrative of everything that exists and right there is a flaw or a fault line which we would do well to keep in mind.

So to begin let's go to the beginning, let's go right back to the beginning of time before there was **anything?**

Even 13.8 billion years ago - before the big bang, when the entire universe was contained in something the size of a grapefruit, **it was something.**

Was there nothing except that grapefruit sized something which contained everything?

How did we get from nothing at all to *that* something?

Who or what was the cause of that event? Because for a human, right here, right now, it is difficult enough to imagine everything that exists being contained in something the size of a grapefruit, but going from zero to one from nothing to something? and from the disorder that exists immediately after the big bang to this beautiful ordered universe is inconceivable.

first there was nothing

and why do we assume that first there was nothing and then there was something? because that's how we understand the world to work.

first there nothing and then there was a primordial chaos and then there was order and then, ones asks - of course one asks, how does order come from chaos come about?

and then you say, something or someone must have caused this to happen. it is a miracle. it must have been an omnipotent supernatural being.

we look around at all the things and we ask: how did it all begin?

it must have started with one thing.

and then we make a narrative out of it.

there was one thing and then there were two and then there were four. this is how all of this came to exist because of course when you have one thing then you soon have many things - things multiply.

and now 13.8 billion years later there are so many things - there seems to be **a surfeit of things** now, today, more things are on offer than ever before - in some of the world there is more, much more, than is needed or desired, and things which are good enough are rejected because people have very specific needs/desires.

And then we ask, **how does something become nothing?**

and can we prevent something becoming nothing?

But of course

only one thing

ever truly becomes nothing.

and that is us, ourselves.

When I, when you ... no longer exist,

then there will truly be nothing.

but wait, you say, everything just carries on when i am dead.

you have seen happen many times :

someone dies and everything stays the same except they are no longer there but you weren't inside the mind of the person that dies.

So one might say that is the oldest and most fundamental binary:

nothing and something - more fundamental even than night and day, black and white, on or off, zero and one - two binaries which have been so important in recent technological developments - yet the on/off binary is so much less important now: with the coming revolution in quantum computing.

What makes quantum computing so compelling so revolutionary is the superposition. Where something is both on and off at the same time.

It is **not** either, but both,

although it can become either.

We are so dependent on binaries for our understanding of the world.

Can we envisage an indeterminate state where nothing is settled,

where **every 'thing' is indeterminate**, neither one thing nor the other *and* both at the same time.

Quantum theory allows us to speculate what no/things are if we abandon the binary of nothingness vs somethingness.

Indeterminacy/The superposition

crucial 3m

In 'What is the Measure of Nothingness', Karen Barad attempts to explain the relationship between an apparently empty space, a void or vacuum and virtual particles which are quanta of vacuum fluctuations, that is slight variations, if you will, of thingness and nothingness.

These virtual particles are traditionally thought of as very short lived objects that move between being and not being so fast that they can't be detected let alone measured.

Their short lives can only be inferred from other measurements.

But for Barad they are 'quantitated indeterminacies-in-action' on the razor edge of being and non being.

Barad writes:

The void is a lively tension, a desiring orientation toward being/becoming. The vacuum is flush with yearning, bursting with innumerable imaginings of what could be.

The quiet cacophony of different frequencies, pitches, tempos, melodies, noises, pentatonic scales, cries, blasts, sirens, sighs, syncopations, quarter tones, allegros, ragas, bebops, hip-hops, whimpers, whines, screams, are threaded through the silence, ready to erupt, but simultaneously crosscut by a disruption, dissipating, dispersing the would-be sound into non/being, an indeterminate symphony of voices.

The blank page teeming with the desires of would-be traces of every symbol, equation, word, book, library, punctuation mark, vowel, diagram, scribble, inscription, graphic, letter, ink-blot, as they yearn toward expression. A jubilation of emptiness. (Barad p11)

What would this mean for our lives, for the way we conceive of ourselves?

This is why I ask 'How could a posthumanist be?' Because to think of oneself as a human is arbitrary in such a fluid context.

To think of oneself - to experience oneself - as an entity that is conceived, is born, conceives, gives birth, works, suffers, dies, is clearly but one of an infinite number of possible ways of describing the space between being and non-being in the ten to the power of five hundred universes and the eleven dimensions.

But speaking pragmatically,

we live our lives from day to day,

we have a variety of tasks that we have set for ourselves

or that are set for us by those who pay our wages, or our children.

On posthumanist praxis/poieses

crucial = good now = 3m

There is also object oriented ontology, new materialism, speculative realism, new or deep ecology but I am interested in **being** - in praxis, the process by which a theory is enacted, practiced, embodied, or realised - so what would be the praxis of a posthumanist in every day life?

A process a posthumanist might engage in is **poiesis**, which like praxis, comes from the Greeks via Heidegger, it is a process by which something which was not visible, becomes visible - or the act of making visible.

Heidegger speaks in terms of 'bringing forth out of concealment into unconcealment'. This is quite different to a creative act which makes something exist which previously didn't exist. In an art context one might say that Duchamp's readymades were poieses.

I am interested in the idea of poieses both as a writer and as a narrative therapist. In terms of the work I do with people on their narratives it is about feelings and memories and thoughts which have been or are being concealed or rendered invisible - either by being simply ignored, and/or by not being given a voice or through a process of suppression by the self or others.

Another aspect of a posthumanist praxis would be making connections, and creating possibilities for interactions or what barad calls intra-actions - intra-actions with the entire range of living and non-living things. A posthumanist seeks to collapse distances, especially the distance between things that appear to be binaries.

A posthumanist would be interested in possibilities, in change, and the possibility of change, and in what closes down possibilities and what are the forces that prevent change.

And thus the concerns of a posthumanist would inevitably be political.

And what constitutes political has changed as a result of feminism and queer theory and the old ideas about right and left have collapsed.

Indeed, what was once a simple matter of the tension between those who were in favour of change (because they were poor and/or disempowered and/or they experienced or saw injustices) and called themselves progressive or radical - and those who wanted things to stay the same (because they were wealthy and/or they have power and/or what their opponents see as injustice is working to their advantage) and who called themselves conservatives.

Be realistic

crucial 7'30"

In May 1968, on May 3rd, the phrase "Soyez realistes, demandez l'impossible" (Be realistic, demand the impossible) appeared on a bridge in Paris. It was said to be the work of the Situationists. The previous year one of their core members Raoul Vaneighem, had called for **the revolution of everyday life**:

The modern world must learn what it already knows, become what it already is, by means of a great work of exorcism, by conscious practice. (...) Everything starts from subjectivity, and nothing stops there. Today less than ever. From now on the struggle between subjectivity and what degrades it will extend the scope of the old class struggle. It revitalizes it and makes it more bitter. The desire to live is a political decision. (The Introduction to The Revolution of Everyday Life - Raoul Vaneighem 1967)

The Situationists had been more or less active for ten years by then. In 1958 in the first issue of their journal, they had called for a new creativity.

The Dadaists had proclaimed in the years following the Great War, that art was played out and any new regeneration was impossible, the Situationists argued for

"a creativity that starts where 'art' left off. Imagination should be applied directly to the transformation of reality itself, not to its symbols in the form of philosophy, literature, painting, etc. Equally, this transformation should not be in the hands of a small body of specialists but should be made by everyone. Everyday life should be made passionate and rational and dramatic, not its reflection in a separated 'world of art'." (Christopher Gray - Leaving the Twentieth Century)

That is no small task, **to transform reality itself!**

When I stopped making art in 2005, the reason I gave was that "there are already too many things in the world and I want to stop adding to them."

I resigned from the academy in 2011 and I walked every morning by a river which was called Birrarung by the Wurundjeri, the river of mists - and in the gardens which were made from the billabongs into which the river frequently expanded until it was straightened out in the interests of commerce and industry in the latter part of the nineteenth century. I made friends with the trees, red river gums and lemon scented gums, and the bell birds and what I call the blue chested water chickens and occasionally, if I stood still for a long time and waited, a bittern.

I discovered Jane Bennet's book *The enchantment of Modern life* and like Marcel Duchamp all those years ago I discovered that

"I like living, breathing better than working... my art is that of living. Each second, each breath is a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral, it's a sort of constant euphoria."

I discovered that in the early 80s that Foucault had called "the political, ethical, social (and) philosophical problem of our days. The problem, as he saw it was how to free ourselves and each other "from the type of individuation which is linked to the state." ¹

Foucault's challenge was to undertake what he called **an ongoing, aesthetic project of total self-transformation.**² He advocated a view of the self - or more accurately, a **relationship** with the self³ - which is a free creation on the part of the subject.⁴ For Paul Rabinow what Foucault means by that is "to actively seek ways to free oneself from a single "true" or "essential" self. Subjectivity as "a form of continual self-bricolage."⁵

I would call it, part of **a posthumanist reinvention of the self.**

I went to work in a hospital where people were dying, to learn about suffering and they taught me well.

I learnt various modalities of therapy and I walked with people by the lake and by the river and in the gardens and they talked to me about the problems of having a life the problem of being human.

¹ (Michel Foucault - Afterword: The Subject and Power)

² ("de prendre de soi-même" lit. to take oneself away from oneself)

³ ("rapport à soi-même")

⁴ (Foucault - What is Enlightenment? 1983)

⁵ (Paul Rabinow, Introduction: The History of the Systems of Thought, in Michel Foucault, ethics, the essential works 1, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1997, pp. xi-xliii.).

I worked for an organisation which helps people die when they experience their lives as unbearable and I taught people how to end their lives peacefully and with dignity. I travelled all over the country to discuss the problem of death and dying and how to talk about it with others.

⁶ <- Deleuze and Guattari - Body Without Organs

Freedom (6m)

"Spinoza said that freedom is not so much the state where there is no impediment between you and the thing you desire, as rather a certain agreeable sensation that sometimes accompanies the determined unfolding of things."

Justin Erik Halldór Smith

ah yes the unceasing unfolding and enfolding of the ten to the power of five hundred universes and the eleven dimensions.

Foucault says for there to be freedom there needs to be power, so we have one of the necessary conditions. What else is needed?

⁶ or compare with deleuze/guattari's body without organs
> You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death-drive. Dismantling the organism never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage ... You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn ... You don't reach the body without organs ... by wildly destratifying. ... If you free it with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then ... you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe. Staying stratified ... organized, signified, subjected ... is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which bring them back down on us heavier than ever.
Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: 160-161

When you ask the four questions like Kant you're asking "What are my obligations to the world, to other human and non human beings, to everything that exists in the world and that is yet to exist."

And then Heidegger asks what does it mean 'to be in the world'?

And then we ask : Is there a way to be authentic and ethical way in the world?

And how did we become inauthentic?

What is required for a human being to become authentic,

Heidegger and Ernst Becker say it is because of our denial of death, and I agree that we need to talk about death and dying and accept and understand our finitude. But it is difficult because we are binary creatures and we worship the one - not the zero.

Why is it so difficult for us to accept our mortality.

I think/feel it is also at least in part due to the sublimation of our sadness. We retreat into our selves

and yes this is in direct opposition

to the radical individualist position,

this is about more than individual liberty,

the right to carry a gun, freedom of speech which is more or less

synonymous in the west now with justifying racist ...

Ressentiment was a term coined by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to refer to a particular form of resentment or hostility, a psychological state resulting from suppressed feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, incomprehension, lostness, and I would say sadness, resulting in envy and hatred which cannot be expressed.

Ressentiment is a sense of hostility directed at that which one identifies as the cause of one's unhappiness

How do we overcome our resentment?

There are no solutions

ok crucial 2'33"

How are we going to affect a transition from a religious society into a secular one and not just become nihilistic narcissists that destroy the world and everything in it within a few generations.

But the bigger, more important question, bigger than secularisation, bigger even than equal rights and access to resources, vitally important though that is, is about not our relationship with God but our reliance on authority.

A posthumanist narrative is not just about transforming from a religious society into a fully secular one, but about transforming from an authoritarian society (where people do what they do because they are compelled to do so or they are threatened with imprisonment or punishment if they don't) into a self-determined society where all humans (and a posthumanist would add "and non-humans") are free to do what they want and yet they do what needs to be done, and perhaps even more importantly, they DON'T DO what needs NOT to be done.

So the 'realists' are going to cry foul here. You have to be 'realistic' they say.

You're an anarchist, they say - and they would be right in the sense that I do believe people need to be motivated to do and not do what needs to be done and what needs not to be done, by their authentic selves.

And how we become authentic that is something I would love to talk about but it will have to be at some other time because my hour is up.

Karen Barad again:

There are no solutions

there is only the ongoing practice

of being open and alive to each meeting,

each intra-action,

so that we might use our ability to respond,

our responsibility,

to help awaken,

to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly.

ENDS

Wagga

index

1. Invocation of the names 35
2. There are no solutions 36
3. The void 37
4. 1000 trillion connections 38
5. Sea of teeth 39
6. An agnostic prayer 40-41
7. Yearnings 42
8. Freedom 43-44
9. Layli Long Soldier 45
10. We used to worship gods 46-50
11. The philosopher 51-52
12. Godel and/or Einstein 53-54

721 nothings

Invocation of the names

Shannon Bell Abu al-Alaa al-Maarri Gilles Deleuze Donna Haraway Martin Buber
Robert Walser Robert Fripp Philippe Petit Adorno Bieckman Marcel Duchamp
Maurice Sendak Claude Lanzmann Jorge Luis Borges Isaac Brock Eve Sedgwick
Blanchot Van Der Elsen Michel Foucault CS Lewis Anais Nin Roland Barthes
Carl Gustav Jung W.G. Sebald Maarten Biesheuvel Bernlef Albert Camus
Mark Linkous Kafka George Perec Pessoa Reznikoff Debord Tristan Tzara
Jane Bennett Samuel Beckett Timothy Morton Al Alvarez Ernst Becker Anne Carson
Joseph Cornell Joseph Beuys RD Laing Otto Rank Sigmund Freud Alison Bechdel
DW Winnicott Susan Sontag Wei Wu Wei Jaques Derrida Melanie Klein
Julia Kristeva Baudrillard Eva Hoffman Inge Clendinnen Paul Celan Jean Amery
Eli Wiesel Tadeusz Borowski Gita Sereny Anne Frank Rimbaud Koos Schuur
Janet Malcolm Philip Lejeune Walter Benjamin Viktor Klemperer Robert Prisig
Jacques Presser Doris Salcedo Robert Jay Lifton Patti Smith Avita Ronell Lou Reed
Cornell West Peter Singer Andy Warhol Wolfgang Herrndorf Chris Kraus
Lauren Berlant Zygmunt Bauman Simone De Beauvoir Adam Phillips
Art Spiegelman Jacques Lacan Bertrand Russel Kurt Godel Heidegger
Soren Kierkegaard Werner Heisenberg David Bohm Karen Barad Immanuel Kant
Lucretius Jean Paul Sartre Kathy Acker Virginia Woolf Judith Butler
Jeanette Winterson Karl Marx Jan Wolkers Badiou Paul Ricoeur Helene Cixous
Robert Dessaix

There are no solutions

there is only the ongoing practice
of being open and alive
to each meeting, each intra-action,
so that we might use our ability to

respond, our responsibility,
to help awaken,
to breathe life into ever new possibilities
for living justly.

Karen Barad

the void (history of others)

"In the beginning there is a void.

A void between us and history,
between these words and our muted existence.

How are we to cross his void?

When language
is by definition,
something we do not possess?

You think that because of your writing
you are the author of the world,
but you are wrong.

You were just an accident
like the rest of us,
floating in the sea of time.

Everybody tries to explain the world.
Even the stone, with its stony reasoning,
finds order
in its rocky little world.

You are nothing special.

There is an inside to everything."

100,000,000,000,000

There are around 86 billion neurons in a human brain with often 1,000 or more synaptic connections for each one, for a total of 100 trillion connections. There are 14 zeros in 100 trillion. It looks like this: 100,000,000,000,000.

Speaking of 100 trillion, neutrinos are everywhere. Every second, 100 trillion of them pass through your body unnoticed, hardly ever interacting.

Speaking of speaking I wonder how long it would to count from 1 to 100 trillion, your entire life probably. thank god for computers.

sea of teeth

Can you feel the wind
of Venus on your skin?

Can you taste the crush
of a sunset's dying blush?

Stars will always hang
in summer's bleeding veils

Can you feel the rings
of Saturn on your finger?

Can you taste the ghosts
who shed their creaking hosts?

But seas forever boil
trees will turn to soil.

an agnostic prayer

Let us pray.

Simone Weil said that attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.¹ and that any undivided attention is prayer.

The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough.

I was reading somewhere a definition of an agnostic as "someone who doesn't know if they believe in God". That's a joke, right? It was, after all, in an article written by an atheist.

I am an agnostic but I'm not proud of it. It is really not something you can be proud of. I realise that for some, agnostics are sitting on the fence but on the fence does seem like the only sensible place to sit in this instance.

I am agnostic about omnipotent supernatural beings and the afterlife not because I think it's at all plausible that there is such a thing as omnipotent supernatural beings or an afterlife but because there's so much I - and other people - don't seem to know.

The unknown (and the unknowable in all likelihood) is so vast - and, in any case, how minuscule is the human mind?

¹ From an April 13, 1942 letter to poet Joë Bousquet, published in their collected correspondence (Correspondance [Lausanne: Editions l'Age d'Homme, 1982](#), p. 18).

Why would anyone think that because you're conscious and you're able to work out that 1 plus 1 usually works out at about 2 you can be certain about the existence or non-existence of something which, if it did exist, would likely be multi-dimensional and present in each of the ten to the power of five hundred universes (if they exist) simultaneously.

Or about something that would happen when you are no longer actually in possession of your hitherto much loved (or not) consciousness?

I respect people of all faiths and none, provided they are not on a mission to ram their beliefs down other people's throats - or do other unspeakable things in the name of their favourite omnipotent supernatural being - but someone who claims to have definite knowledge about the unknowable surely needs to be taken with a grain or two of salt.

Bertand Russell, if anyone remembers him, was asked what his response would be if he died and went to heaven and waiting for him there was God! And He said unto him : Why didn't you believe in Me?

You didn't provide enough evidence, Russell said.

But there is not enough evidence to the contrary either.

Although you can argue against the existence of a compassionate interventionist god on the basis that God doesn't seem to heal amputees no matter how hard they pray (there is a whole web site devoted to this).

But that only holds true if you are arguing with someone who believes in an compassionate interventionist God who listens to prayers. It doesn't provide any evidence for the non-existence of an omnipotent supernatural being who is not interested in intervening with the limbs of amputees or listening to prayers.

yearnings (Karen Barad)

Virtual particles are not in the void but of the void.

They are on the razor edge of non/being.

The void is a lively tension,

a desiring orientation toward being/becoming.

The vacuum is flush with yearning,

bursting with innumerable imaginings

of what could be.

The quiet cacophony of different frequencies,

itches, tremors, melodies, noises, pentatonic scales,

cries, blasts, sirens, sighs, syncopations, quarter tones,

allegros, ragas, bebops, hip-hops, whimpers, whines, screams,

are threaded through the silence, ready to erupt,

but simultaneously crosscut by a disruption,

dissipating, dispersing the would-be sound into non/being,

an indeterminate symphony of voices.

The blank page teeming with the desires of would-be traces

of every symbol, equation, word, book, library, punctuation mark, vowel, diagram,
scribble, inscription, graphic, letter, inkblot,

as they yearn toward expression.

A jubilation of emptiness.

Freedom

Freedom freedom freeeeeedom freedom

Freedom freedom freeeeeedom freedom

Richie Havens made me cry today. On Youtube I watched him walk on to the stage at Woodstock. Another couple of years and it will be fuck fifty years ago and they'll do some crappy anniversary show with Bono joining Coldplay on stage or some such.

Richie is strumming a battered old guitar that looks like he just rescued it from a tip like his life depends on it and it does. The guitar is tuned to some chord so all he is doing with his big hands is fretting all the strings at once up here and down there and then over there but my god the strumming. This is his moment.

What does it matter says Maurice Blanchot, "all that remains is the feeling of lightness that is death itself or, to put it more precisely, the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance."

some

times

I feel

like a mo-o-otherless child

some

times

I

feel

like a

motherless child

a long ... way

from my home ... yeah

clap your hands

sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone

Who would have thought that of all people [[Invocation of the Names]] it would be Richie Havens, almost fifty years ago, who would give me the inspiration I needed yesterday. His father was a Blackfoot Indian and his mother was from the British West Indies.

Here is a man at the absolute height of his powers (although it would have been better if he hadn't done Strawberry Fields Forever but he had been playing for three hours and he'd played every song he knew and they just kept telling him to keep playing.) A black man and a native American in one are calling out from history it sounds like now and it sounds to us today like a plaintive cry.

But the problem is that once the word for the thing that you are asking for, has been co-opted by a furniture chain, it loses a bit of its power. I remember years ago when I discovered there was a new chain of clothing stores in Australia called politics albeit with an x. That was probably thirty years ago, and I thought 'That's it, that's the end of politics as something that you can be genuinely interested in, or want to become involved in.' And so it was.

As for philosophy, "philosophy is a brand that approaches personal care from a skin care point of view, while celebrating the beauty of the human spirit. we believe in miracles and..."

Layli Long Soldier

I don't trust nobody but the land

I said

I don't mean

present company

of course

you understand

the grasses

hear me too

always

present

the grasses

confident grasses

polite

command to shhhh

shhh listen

We used to worship gods

we used to worship gods and goddesses
and then a single god
and now, we worship ourselves.
we worship humans.

an entirely empty and indulgent
narcissistic worshipping
of entertainers and models
and people who are ugly but rich.

we worship them through images from afar
we starve ourselves (or use photoshop or botox)
to look more like the ones we worship
or, we give up and let ourselves go.

we pray at the altar of the taut and tight,
the six pack, the shaved pussy,
the well-stretched lubricated anus
and the always erect oversized cock.

in the temples we frequent,
we are offered sacrifices
in the form of splendid concoctions
made from exotic organic ingredients
that make us drunk and clog up our arteries.

we drape ourselves in finery
made in factories far away
by people paid a pittance.

we love ourselves
in spite of ourselves
or we despise ourselves
it can go either way.

and then we cut ourselves or
harm ourselves or take outrageous risks,
to make the adrenalin that we desire, flow
and the oxytocin and the serotonin and the dopamine.

we worship technology
and the science that makes it possible
to better see and adore
or abhor
ourselves.

everywhere empty indulgence of the ephemeral is encouraged.
nothing lasts.
everything is transient,
before you know it, the best and most desirable products will be gone.
don't miss out. get it now.

nothing is ever good enough for long
but never mind
tomorrow
another, better product
will be available for your convenience and comfort.
order now.
have your credit card ready.
your call is important to us.

everything has been debunked and everything is empty,
all that remains is the remote possibility
of a temporary feeling of fullness.

nothing has any meaning
and no-one is deserving of respect.

everyone is either a clown or an arsehole
and they're doing something they shouldn't be doing
when no one is looking
or behind someone's back.

politicians are either on the take
or having it off with someone on the side,
or both.

sports people are drug cheats or rapists.
teachers and priests are kiddie fiddlers.

parents and grandparents are despicable weaklings
who worked hard all their lives
or they were alcoholics or junkies or stoners
or wife beaters and battered wives
or
they were naive with their investments
and got badly burned in the GFC
and now what they're left with
is worth nothing.

in the army and at school you're bullied or sodomized
or sexually assaulted
or humiliated
and the videos are posted on youtube.

so here is the problem : you want to be good.
but you have no way of finding out how
or what good is.

you don't know what is important. or true.
everything has been stripped of meaning.
no one can tell you anything.
and anyway you wouldn't listen.
or if you do, no one has a convincing story.

and then someone comes along
and this is what they've got:
a clear set of rules,
the possibility of respecting others,
people who understand what's important.

and what is on offer is the all-important feeling of belonging,
a life which has value and meaning, no matter if it's short.
and if you're asked to offer it up for the greater good
you do so gladly.

let's fuck something up, someone says,
and let's fuck it up real good.
let the fucking up be bigger and better
than anything that's been fucked up before.
let's make some people bleed,
let's make them hurt - real bad.

The philosopher

I was given a piece of paper by a real university, albeit one in the middle of nowhere with a name which means 'place of many crows', which told the world that I was a doctor – not a doctor of something practical or lucrative like medicine, but of philosophy, which should be the most important thing in the world, but isn't. As soon as I learned that there were philosophers, that there were people whose job it was to think about the meaning of life—which has puzzled me since I learnt the meaning of 'meaning'—I wanted to meet one and, when I was thirteen, I did. The father of my stepfather's brother-in-law was introduced to me as a philosopher, and now I wonder if I was the butt of a practical joke. But I took it very seriously.

As a child, I always believed everything people told me. It didn't occur to me that anyone would say anything that was untrue. Why would they? My father thought this was hilarious. He told me that you could frighten monsters and make them go away by yelling 'Poo!' at them. Actually, that may be true. But he also told me chewing gum was made from old bicycle tyres, and this non-fact lodged itself in a corner of my brain for thirty- five years. One day, I was walking along thinking about chewing gum when I suddenly thought, Hey! at is absurd! It can't be made from old bicycle tyres! And I remembered how heartily my father would have laughed if he had known it would take me the best part of forty years to work that out. But I guess it was stored in a part of my brain that I didn't access during that time. Why would you think about what chewing gum is made of?

The philosopher was Italian and didn't speak a word of English, and at the time my command of that language was not much more than rudimentary. e brother-in-law acted, somewhat half-heartedly and all too brie y, as translator. Gesturing and sign language don't really cut it when you're trying to discuss the meaning of life. e phi-

osopher smiled a lot, and pointed at the sky, and said some things in Italian. He was old and grey and wearing a nice suit. I was sure he knew the answer to the meaning of life, but I couldn't get it out of him in an intelligible form. I went away disappointed, but I liked his aura.

Gödel and Einstein

Gödel, the famous mathematician, the equivalent in his field of Einstein in physics, formulated his incompleteness theorem, which simply stated, is that there are things which are true, but which cannot be proven to be true.

How do we know what those things are, and how do we know what is bullshit. This is a problem we face on a daily basis and/or we don't experience it as a problem. We make decisions more or less arbitrarily about what we think/feel is true ongoingly.

A few of the things that we accept are true we know are true (or think/feel we know are true) because we have seen proof or experienced them directly ourselves. This vase is broken. I know it is broken because here are the pieces. In this case I also know why it is broken : I just dropped it and it hit the floor.

But for the most part we accept some of the things we are told to be true as true, and we reject other things. Some of us accept what we are told about God and some of us don't. Some of us, at some point decide that we no longer believe in what we did believe to be true and vice versa.

Could science help?

Einstein did a lot of thinking and writing about religion at the tail end of his career. He saw science as being inspired by a religious aspiration for truth. He said, "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

For Einstein the religious impulse originates in a deep sense of awe and mystery. He said, the individual feels "the sublimity and marvellous order which reveal themselves in nature ... and he wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole."

But the interesting thing about Gödel was that, at the end of his life uncertainty got the better of him. He became worried that someone might poison him and would only eat food that had been tasted by his wife. When she was taken ill and was unable to provide this service for him, he starved to death.

Einstein said : "Reality is an illusion, albeit a persistent one."

Until we and it persist no more. And then we are truly free. But without knowing about it.