Mediated Subjectivity: 
Reflection and New Interpretation on Discourse of Posthuman Subject

SHAN Xiaoxi

Abstract
Discourse of post-human subject is formed by the critical reflection on the discourse of modernity subject. In this regard, the “cyborg” discourse of subject, informationism discourse of subject and “universal-vitality” discourse of subject can be seen as the representative forms of discourse of post-human subject in Western countries. When it comes to the reflection on solipsism, autonomy and modernity subject of possession, discourse of post-human subject has made some achievements. However, there are still some limitations the subject concept of adherent entity, the relationship mode between the subject and the object, and the residual anthropocentrism. By putting forward the “mediated subjectivity” discourse, this paper aims to provide a new explanation for post-human subject. As mediated subjectivity discourse takes the mediated “cyborg” life forms as the material basis, the basic structure of the mediated “Cyborg” refers to “individual(body-consciousness)- media-identity”. Specially presented as actively connecting, inviting, gathering, tolerating, and interacting with the outside world, the mediated subjectivity also practically realizes the communication between the subject, the world, as well as the existing forms of post-human subject which are intertwined and infused with one another.

Keywords
mediated subjectivity, posthuman, cyborg

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About the author
Shan Xiaoxi, Ph.D., professor at the Department of Humanities, Hangzhou Normal University (Hangzhou 311121, China), mainly studies the literary theory, new media literature and art theory. Email: nnnoooii@126.com
The most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a ‘posthuman’ stage of history.” 1 The discussion of post-mankind has turned out to be a hot button in recent years. Posthuman discourse now pervades in various fields like western philosophy, aesthetics, culturology, and politics, and the posthuman subject has become the core issue of posthuman discourse construction. This essay analyzes the theoretical context of discourse of posthuman subject, sorts out three representative discourses of posthuman subject, then reflects on their respective pros and cons, and finally puts forward the discourse of meditated subjectivity, trying to offer a new interpretation of the posthuman subject.

1. The Theoretical Context of the Discourse of Post-human Subject

Broadly speaking, the discourse of posthuman subject is a branch of “post-ism” philosophical discourses under the background of critical reflection on the discourse of modern rational subject.

The discourse of modernity subject has inherited the ancient Greek notion of “Man is the measure of all things”. Shaped by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, it came to a climax in Western philosophy and humanities in the late 19th century. With the transcendental substantial rationality of individual as the core, it became the ultimate foundation of subjectivity. Descartes argues: “Because I know with certitude that I exist, and because, in the meantime, I do not observe that aught necessarily belongs to my nature or essence beyond my being a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists only in my being a thinking thing or a substance whose whole essence or nature is merely thinking.” 2 Centering on “ego cogito” (I think), the self-disciplined, self-contained, liberalist, solipsistic, possessory view of absolute subject are formed. Though this individual rationality has been defined differently by philosophers like Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, its apriority, absoluteness, substantiality, and self-containedness remain largely unchanged. It should be acknowledged that the discourse of individual subjectivity has been a weapon of the Western ideological enlightenment, which plays a significant part in the process of liberating humans from Christian theology. However, in this subjective discourse, “Individual is the eventual possessor of his own body and capabilities…Human is essentially the freedom of oc-
occupation independent of others’ will”. ¹ Dallmayr remarks, “Individualism goes hand in hand with detachment and hubris of humanity from the very beginning.” ² Reflection on the individual subjectivity of modernity is an important cultural and philosophical theme in the 20th century, which aims to break through the enclosed, isolated, static, unified, substantial, and self-sufficient self, thus constituting a remarkable opportunity for the presence of posthuman subject discourse.

Husserl’s phenomenology, as opposed to the “solipsism” subjectivity, has aired the concept of “intersubjectivity”. In Husserl’s theory, the other self cannot be directly perceived through conscious reflection but should be corroborated from “another monad mapped out by my monad”. ³ Two monad “ego” (self) “appresent” in respective consciousness through “pairing”, so a broader monad group, as well as the interactions between individual subjects, emerges. However, Husserl believes that the transcendental original “ego” remains the ultimate foundation of this intersubjectivity, which smacks of heavy transcendentalism. In remolding Husserl’s phenomenology, Heidegger forsook concepts like “subject” and “ego”, and invented “Dasein” (being-there). Other than the isolated, introverted “ego”, Extroverted and open, “Dasin” understands its own existence through the relevance to and understanding of others. In the “existenzial” (existenzialien) structure of “being-in-the-world”, a “Mitsein” (being-with) is formed between different “Dasein”s, while a collective world formed between the common “Dasein” and the world. Heidegger intends to prove that understanding of others is the perquisite for understanding the self as well as the “existenzial” structure of “being-in-the-world” on the basis of “Dasein”, thereby placing the “intersubjectivity” above individual subjectivity while drawing the issue of subjectivity to the dimension of “existenzial” reality. Merleau-Ponty further grasped the body (“Leib”) and views it as the medium to connect with the “I” world. Phenomenology has proved effective in challenging “solipsism” subjectivity, however, it is often criticized for the lack of interpretation of language dimension and unconscious mind of subject as well as the maintenance of subjective unity.

Based on the research results of psychoanalysis and linguistics, a group of French philosophers then criticized phenomenology, and raised the structuralist and post-structuralist view of subject. Foucault doubts all transcendental, abstract humanistic subjects, holding that all subjects could not be separated from the pre-existing “anonymous system without a subject”, namely the thought and knowledge structure of language. Rational subjectivity is exactly constructed un-
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der the ruling of Western scientific ideas, technological equipment, and political organization. Based on a review of the history of Western rationalism, Foucault announced: “Man” is a recent invention on the verge of its expiration date.” In other words, “human”, the rational subject, has been walking toward death by the second half of the 20th century. From the standpoint of Freudism, Lyotard criticizes phenomenology and existentialism’s pursuit of identity and unity, deeming that they have rampantly diminished, or even eliminated the natural differences between subjects. For Lacan, the conventionally much-respected rational subject is nonexistent. The so-called rational subject is nothing but humans’ false self-consciousness and sense of self by misrecognizing “the other”. As early as the “mirror stage”, the tragedy of misrecognition has occurred when the child can recognize as such his own image in the mirror. In adulthood, humans enter the “symbolic” from the “imaginary”, and the “order” represented by the Name of the Father occupies a central place in the “symbolic”. These orders, however, are languages, cultures and ideologies existing ahead of individual, namely “the Other”. The so-called subject is nothing but a construction of language and culture of “the Other”. The secret of the rational subject consists in that humans should think about “self” as something other than “self”. As a matter of fact, the subject “I” comes as a presence made of absence.” Accordingly, humans realize the recognition with social culture, while “the Other” also realizes the seizure of subject.

The “death of man” and the fall of rational subject have prepared the discursive context for the debut of “posthuman”. The postmodern subject suggested by Deleuze and Guattari makes it possible a transition to the posthuman subject. Deleuze’s criticism against the subject of modernity is also directed at the coagulation and unity, highlighting the contingent, different, fluid and generative state of being. Similar to the traditional philosophy of ontology, Deleuze is also seeking a fulcrum for the subject, which, however, is not the transcendental form of perceptual experience but a “plane of immanence”. As Deleuze suggests, “this plane is an abstract machine”. The plane is a network of connections framed by intertwining forces, and a field with the relationality of pre-individuality and impersonalization existing, which provides conditions for the occurrence of empirical events, and propels the individual and the subject. Besides this field condition, the formation of subject also requires inner motivation, which, as Deleuze indicates, is desire. However, different from the hallucinatory object formed by
the deficiency and absence of targets after Plato and Freud, Deleuze and Guattari’s “desire” works as a productive “machine” in terms of infrastructure. The ubiquitous “desire machine” possesses the vibrant production capacity to project itself onto all social beings including human. Fundamentally speaking, man, a machine of desire, is supposed to be an unprescriptive revolutionary power featuring anti-centrism, uncertainty, and fluid generation. Nevertheless, the society must encode this desire machine with laws, contracts and institutions. The formation of the traditional rational subject is nothing but the result of encoding the desire machine. Originally, capitalism decodes the subject in pre-modern society by means of commodity production, but it would then re-encode, or “territorialize” and “opidize” humans with mercantile logic. In this case, Deleuze calls for a “schizophrenic subject”. In his view, “schizophrenia is the universe of productive and reproductive desiring machines, ... it is the universal primary production.” 1 Deleuze and Guattari still call this kind of revolutionary “schizophrenic subject” as “nomads”. “Nomads are not necessarily moving around like those migrants. Instead, they are often immobile. The nomads stay in the same position, constantly dodging the codes of settlers.” 2 “schizophrenic subject” or “nomadic subject” is exactly the postmodern subject that Deleuze yearns for, which can not only revolt against the capitalist laws, contracts, institutional codes but also “deterritorialize” the humans.

Apart from the philosophical discourses mentioned above, researches on feminism, post-colonialism, and ecological ethics have also joined the chorus of reflection on the subject of modernity. Following this path of reflection, the discourse of posthuman subject has boarded the arena of history by absorbing some of the research achievements while combining with the ground reality that the new scientific and technological revolution has altered humans’ state of being.

2. Representative Forms and Limits of the Discourse of Posthuman Subject

The discourse of posthuman subject has been an intensely-studied topic. In view of the key ideas of interpretation, the “cyborg” discourse of subject, the informationalism discourse of subject and the “universal-vitality” discourse of subject can be regarded as representative forms of the discourse of
posthuman subject.

Donna Haraway is a pioneer and backbone in the construction of the “cyborg” discourse of subject. “Cyborg”, the abbreviation of “cybernetic organism”, was originally invented to refer to the human body strengthened by technologies or medicines. In this sense, any human body, whose strength is improved by external objects, machines, devices, and technologies, can be a “cyborg”. Clark suggests: “For human beings, I want to convince you, are natural-born cyborgs.”

Since the ancient times, human beings have “upgraded the intelligence”, and strengthened their capability to adapt to the nature and create culture with the help of characters, typography, sounds, images, and digital media. Intrinsically, human beings are cyborgs throughout the history. Donna Haraway did not approach cyborg in such a general way. She writes: “Cyborgs are compounded of special kinds of machines and special kinds of organisms appropriate to the late twentieth century. Cyborgs are post-Second World War hybrid entities made of, first, ourselves and other organic creatures in our unchosen ‘high-technological’ guise.” and “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. … By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.”

Haraway’s cyborg has the following characteristics: (1) Cyborg is a hybrid of machine and organism; (2) As the hybrid of machine and organism, cyborg isn’t a traditional creature featuring machine-embodied human, but the organism here should be better understood as “the machine of cybernetics”; (3) The use of common tools by human beings in the traditional time cannot create the cyborg, which is the product of the new technological revolution in the second half of the 20th century; (4) Due to the potent involvement of contemporary technologies, human beings are getting to be sort of a “cyborg”, which is more than a human body equipped with apparent mechanicals, and humans are generally becoming cyborgs. Haraway seldom applied the term “posthuman subject”, and “cyborg” in her works is often regarded as a form of posthuman being, so the discourse of cyborg established on this very basis naturally constitutes one of the discursive patterns of the posthuman subject.

The discourse of informationalism subject is the logical deepening of the cyborg discourse. If the discourse of cyborg subject has already contained a preliminary concept of “man is machine”, informationism further views human beings
as a more advanced intelligent machine—or a set of information programs. In Wiener’s eyes, humans are exactly such information processors. After the 1960s, cybernetics developed to the “autopoiesis” stage: in response to external environment, all organisms including humans who would not only perform self-organization but can also constantly self-replicate the self-organization. After the 1980s, cybernetics developed to the stage of virtual reality, in which self-organization is seen as a “being” with the capability of self-evolution, such as the information coding of computer data. Afterwards, the informationism world outlook arose out of the mechanistic. This outlook recognizes that everything is information, “The world is a true rather than metaphorical Turning machine, a part of the eternal calculation.” ¹ Within the domain of informationism world outlook, human beings are generally considered as a complex system to receive, store, retrieve, transform and send information. A hybrid of the cyborg discourse, the cybernetics, and the informatics thus gives rise to the informationism discourse of posthuman subject. In general, the informationism discourse of subject also regards the subject as a kind of hybrid or cyborg, “a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity”.² But it underscores the human consciousness’s restoration to information and the ontic status of information. Likewise, informationism opposes the humanistic view of rational subject, especially the respect for the transcendental “ego cognito” after Descartes, who deems that consciousness is not transcendental but something contingent in the evolution of self-organization. In terms of the relationship between consciousness and body, informationism still holds high the ancient dualism, insisting that the latter is the carrier of the former, and the former can exist even without the latter. The point is that the high and new technology can turn the ancient myth of independent consciousness and dominance of body into reality. It seems that the body is simply a “prosthesis” that can be manipulated and forsaken by the subject through consciousness. Human consciousness can not only move around the body, but also can find a new host when leaving the body. Briefly speaking, on the informationism discourse of subject, “by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the view of posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals”.³

The “universal-vitality” discourse of subject is another representative disc-
course form of posthuman subject constructed by Braidoti in accordance with Deleuze’s logic of nomadic subject. The philosophical foundation of this discourse of posthuman subject, derived from Spinoza’s “monism” cosmology, is called “vital Materialism”. In response to Descartes’s “mind-body dualism”, Spinoza argues that the world and human beings are not in an “in-out” binary opposition, instead, they are connected by matters and reveal monism of matter. French philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari return to Spinoza’s monism of matter, and offer the matter two essential connotations “vitality” and “self-management”, thereby developing the “vital materialism”, or the “vitalist materialism”. The so-called “vitalist materialism” highlights not only the monism of matter, the structural relationality of matter, and its relevance to the diverse environment, but also that matter by itself is creative, generative and nomadic, and has universal-vitality (vital force of Life). Therefore, “an expanded, relational self” comes into being, accompanied by a kind of “generative vitality” that connects human with non-humans. In this domain, “life is posited as process, interactive and open-ended. This vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for anthropos, that is to say bios, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as universal-vitality.”¹ The concept of “universal-vitality” indicates the collapse of human centricity, the nature/culture binary, and the scope of human and non-human “other”. The animals, the plants, the environment, the planet, and the entire universe have been mobilized, and an image of posthuman subject featuring “a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbours the animals and the earth as a whole, and to do so within an understandable language”² is established. Braidotti has generalized it into three specific forms: “becoming-animal”, “becoming-earth”, and “becoming-machine”. “Becoming-animal” stresses breaking the boundaries between humans and animals, “to see the interrelation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each…It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the ‘nature’ of each one”³. “Becoming-earth”, the consolidated “becoming-earth”, underlines humans’ overstepping toward natural objects. But the author did not provide a concrete answer on how this kind of subject exists. “Becoming-machine”, which is described as “a new kind of eco-sophical unity”, emphasizes humans’ overstepping toward machines or advanced cultural products, or essentially the cyborg subject.
It should be recognized that on the path of reflection on solipsistic, auton- 
omy, and the subject of possession and modernity, the above-mentioned discourses of posthuman subject go further than phenomenology and post-structuralism. In addition to reflection, it neither evades and dispels the subject as deconstruction, nor does it return to the beaten track of traditional humanism. It directly faces the reality that the new scientific and technological revolution has altered the living conditions and states of human beings, and extends the construction logic from the human/society category to study on animals, nature and artificial machines, especially applying the “/” (boundary between opposing camps) region in the philosophical culture of modernity, getting through the boundary, and even staying at the boundary, making it the soil for new discourses of subject, which is undoubtedly more dynamic than the various discourses of subject before.

Despite that, the limitations of the discourse of posthuman subject should not be ignored. The discourse of posthuman subject still keeps to the conception of substantial subject. Substantial subject, the product of western traditional metaphysics, has been profoundly criticized by some theories of phenomenology and post-structuralism. But the representative discourses of posthuman subject still cling to this conception. Haraway’s cyborg is originally a reference to a new form of life, but she herself, especially her successors, sometimes unconsciously and routinely transformed it to the concept of posthuman subject. It seems that the posthuman subject is a cyborg entity of presence-at-hand that exists without activities and relations. One of the revolutionary aspects of informationism is to replace “mode of information” with “mode of realism” to explain the issue of “being”. But pitifully, the informationism discourse of subject specifically depicts the posthuman subject as “independent matter-information entity”, which differs from the subject in metaphysics solely in terms of internal structure. More regrettably, the “universal-vitality” discourse of subject is originally called “vitalist materialism” by the author. Although this subject concept has absorbed the implications of creativity, generativeness, and nomadicity, it is ultimately prescribed as a “transversal entity”, seemingly indicating that the posthuman subject has one “essence”, namely the aprior “transversal entity”, while the creativity, generativeness, and nomadicity are merely acquired functions of this entity. Such a posthuman subject, to a certain extent, returns to the stereotype subject in metaphysics, which is essentially characterized by Hegel’s absolute spirit (developing from self-movement either).
Lacking thoroughness in resisting the dualism, and acquiescing the subject-object opposition, most discourses of posthuman subject resist the dualism of modernity. Haraway has specified the vital part of “these troubling dualisms”: “self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man.”

She believes that cyborgs have challenged and toppled these dualisms. However, her double standard in dualism made the resistance incomplete, that is, the new posthuman subject, as well as a potential new binary of “posthuman subject/world object”, grew out of the existing binary structure. Compared with the toppled old binary, this new binary only differs in that the dominant human subject is replaced by posthuman subject, with no substantial changes on the structural pattern and the subject/object opposition mode. In this regard, the most disconcerting of all is the informationism discourse of posthuman subject’s view of the body/mind relationship. As noted before, it deems that the consciousness restored to information can be separated from body through high-tech means. Another well-known but harsh viewpoint comes from the scholar Moravec, who put forward a fantasy assumption: computers can perform a “cranial liposuction” operation on human brain, “read the information in each molecular layer as it is stripped away and transfer the information into a computer. At the end of the operation, the cranial cavity is empty, and the patient, now inhabiting the metallic body of the computer, wakens to find his consciousness exactly the same as it was before.”

This notion is still stuck in the thinking frame of traditional metaphysics on the separation and opposition between the dominant spirit, soul, consciousness and the dominated physical body or flesh. Braidoti has reiterated that her posthuman subject is “monistic”. Nevertheless, since the subject is eventually positioned as an essential, ontological “universal-vitality”, “transversal entity”, the non-universal, non-transversal opposing party have been bound to be potentially retained, so it follows that “dualism” has not been fundamentally overcome.

However, there still exist some problems such as the remnants of anthropocentrism, and a lack of proper analysis on the state of being of subject. Admittedly, the discourse of posthuman subject abandons the transcendental individual self of modernity, and becomes “a collection of heterogeneous components”, a “transversal entity” that encompasses human beings, animals and the earth, etc. But “new models of subjectivity emerging from such fields as cognitive science
and artificial life imply that even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman. The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components.”¹ Put another way, in the posthuman subjects like cyborg, the core strength that props up subjectivity is still the “Homo sapiens” or “Homo silicon” rather than other components like the machine, and “an assemblage that includes non-human agents” “implies that subjectivity is not the exclusive prerogative of *anthropos*”.² It is *anthropos* that transmits the subjectivity to these “non-human agents”, or it is *anthropos* that spurs the non-human ingredients, thereby eventually offering this “assemblage” posthuman subject the subjectivity. In short, *anthropos (Homo sapiens)* still occupies a dominant, leading and central position. Unlike the traditional anthropocentrism, the human centricity shifts from the relationship between human beings and the environment to that between human and non-human actors in posthuman subject. Anthropocentric within as the post-human subject is especially when related to non-subject being, it is difficult to substantively alter the nature of anthropocentrism. The closely related issue is the labeling of the way how the subject exists. In the aforementioned posthuman subject, analyses on the positive, creative state of being of subjects are few in number. In Braidoti’s view, all beings in the entire earth and universe have been mobilized, and become the subject or part of the subject. So why and how does this immeasurable subject exist? This is a puzzling question.

3. Discourse of Mediated Subjectivity: New Interpretations of Posthuman Subject

Given all that, how to regard posthuman, and how to carry out more valuable analyses on the matter of this subject, remain questions to be answered. Based on the reflection on several representative discourses of posthuman subject and the absorption of their beneficial results, this essay has raised the idea of “discourse of mediated subjectivity”, in an attempt to interpret the posthuman subject from a new perspective.

The discourse of mediated subjectivity has two theoretical preconditions, both of which are inspired by the study of phenomenology. First of all, it’s necessary to distinguish between the life forms of human and the subject, as well
as between the life forms of posthuman and the posthuman subject. This aspect is poorly recognized not only in traditional metaphysics, but also in various discourses of posthuman subject. It seems that the two can be confused. This essay firmly believes that the life form is the liquid material reality, and sticks to the material monism of “vitalism”; subject and subjectivity fall into the category of discourse under the specific premise—the interpretation of life presentation and activity in terms of the relations, history and field. Life forms must be distinguished from the subject, but they are not a binary opposition. Though at different layers, they are closely connected with each other. The former is the foundation of the latter, while the latter is the discursive representation of the former. Second, this essay opposes the subjective discourse of “presence-at-hand”, and pursues the true, solid generative discourse pattern. The present-at-hand discourse views the subject as an established independent entity that can exist without the specific relations, context, and field. That’s also the internal reason for the confusion of life forms and the subject in posthuman discourses. The generative discourse, however, is based on the precondition of life-form activities, and conditioned on relations, context, and field, holding that there is no isolated, static and completed substantive subject which can break away from this precondition, for no the life form out of this precondition can be called the subject, which is always the generative being of life forms in activity and the precondition above. The subject can be liberated from the swamp of the substantive concept, the subject or object binary opposition, as well as the anthropocentrism by developing such a mode of thinking.

The discourse of mediated subjectivity is based on the life form of mediated cyborgs. This essay suggests that other than cultural metaphorical meanings, cyborgs should not be generalized infinitely. From the perspective of mediology, the mediated cyborg is proposed as a category of cyborgs, which is also fundamentally characterized by crossing the boundaries of the natural and the artificial, nature and culture, the nature and machine while strengthening human beings’ capabilities. Nevertheless, it underscores the capability to receive and process external information rather than the general capability to counter the nature, a capability to connect, mingle, and communicate with the world and form the information system as a “cybernetic system”. In the meantime, mediated cyborg stresses the intimacy between natural organisms and the “prosthesis” medium, which has constituted an integral part of human body. According to McLuhan, “If the wheel
is an extension of feet, and tools of hands and arms, then electromagnetism seems to be in its technological manifestations an extension of our nerves and becomes mainly an information system. It is above all a feedback or looped system.”¹

Traditional media is a general extension of human limbs, and cannot shape a cyborg between human bodies. But the electromagnetism and the electronics can become an extension of the nervous system that constitutes an information system with human body, namely the mediated cyborg, which requires the incessant intimacy between human body and prosthesis. An important facet, also the most pivotal point, is marked here: informational pathways are constructed between the organic body and its prosthetic extensions, so information “can flow between carbon-based organic components and silicon-based electronic components to make protein and silicon operate as a single system.”¹ As stipulated above, the mediated cyborg includes the following four typical forms: (1) The new life form appears which can integrate with human organism by embedding or implanting high-tech material media in the organism; (2) The man-machine (media) joint producer is formed out of the intimate symbiotic relationship between humans and high-tech media such as digital computers and the network; (3) The avatars of interaction between human body and digital audio-visual images turns out to be a technologized version of the second form; (4) High-tech media, as an inherent part of organism, has embodied a biological “self-evolution capability”, or simply, the tendency of media animation.

In the mediated cyborg, a life structure of “individual (flesh-consciousness)-media-identity” is formed. The individual here refers to the combination of organism (flesh) and consciousness in general philosophy. The subject in traditional philosophy of subjectivity indicates a superposition of individual and social identity out of the combination of flesh and self-consciousness, or more specifically, the enclosed structural pattern of “flesh (body)-consciousness (mind)-identity”. The reason why the subject is also referred to as subjectivity is that individual man or individual-based community, influenced by consciousness, especially self-rationality, can act on the object proactively. In mediated cyborg, the exertion of relevance with cognition, experience, practice and subjectivity established jointly with the world is no longer independently realized by individual being. It goes beyond the aforesaid individual, and has extended the individual structural mode composed of “flesh (body)-consciousness (mind)” into a more expansive life structure. The life here refers not to the human life in traditional philosophy
of subjectivity but to the one that has assimilated the connotations of immanent intelligent beings in the posthuman discourse, where information coding is considered a prominent manifestation of such vitality. But it is not an unbounded collection of life that encompasses all beings. The individual being of human is just a part of this life form, and it is the high-tech media that has entered the interior of life structure originally as the external object outside the organic life, and constituted a necessary component therein, on which the social culture is finally superposed to form some kind of social identity. Accordingly, a life structure of “individual (flesh-consciousness)-media-identity”, namely the basic structure of the life form of mediated cyborg, thus comes into being.

Based on the life form and structure of mediated cyborg, a discussion on posthuman subject and subjectivity draws forth the discourse of mediated subjectivity. It is not difficult to understand the mediated subject: it is the active, generative life form of cyborg under the specific relational, contextual, and field conditions. The nature of mediated subject embodied in activity is explicitly the mediated subjectivity, while the overall outlook of mediated subject embodied in activity is the mediated state of being. It can be stressed that once the mediated life form becomes the mediated subject, the various elements and sections in its structure will also be brought into a state of circulation and generation. Here is neither entity nor center.

The discourse of mediated subject absorbs the basic idea of informationism worldview, but opposes the dualism of consciousness information and body carrier in informationalism discourse of posthuman subject. Since “the medium is the message”, medium is inseparable from information. Even if our human consciousness can be reduced to information, the latter cannot be separated from the carrier medium—cyborg life (natural organism and its intimately correlated medium). Hayles remarked, “It (information) must always be instantiated in a medium, whether that medium is the page from the Bell Laboratories Journal on which Shannon’s equations are printed, the computer-generated topological maps used by the Human Genome Project, or the cathode ray tube on which virtual worlds are imaged. The point is not only that abstracting information from a material base is an imaginary act but also, and more fundamentally, that conceiving of information as a thing separate from the medium instantiating it is a prior imaginary act that constructs a holistic phenomenon as an information/matter duality.” The mediated discourse of subjectivity embraces the concept that interprets
the world as an information pattern, but the information here is inseparable from the medium, and is generated out of the medium. As for the mediated subject, there will never be consciousness and information separated from life forms of mediated cyborg.

The mediated subjectivity opposes the idea of subjectivity elimination, and recognizes that there are always different facets of the initiative, the dominant, the passive and the dominated in world relations. But such initiative or dominance is neither represented as an overwhelming “I” who suppresses, rules, and dominates “him”, nor as the so-called intersubjective relation realized after “I” secretly evokes, dominates “him” and symbolically offers “him” a subjective position. Instead, it comes true by establishing a network of individual medium in the life structure by directly connecting, inviting, accommodating, and interacting with the object or other world elements. At this point, mediated subjectivity specifically embodies the activity nature of actively connecting, inviting, gathering, accommodating, interacting, and mingling with the outside world, as well as the subject’s property of producing, restoring, processing and receiving information. During the process, the individual and the media item facilitate and restrain each other. The individual item, restricted by the medium item, has to overcome the inflation of self-consciousness, and always releases the energy within the networking jointly developed with the world.

As the mediated subject takes shape and the mediated subjectivity emerges, a unique state of posthuman being—the mediated state of being also comes into being. As is mentioned above, in reflecting the individual subjectivity of modernity and the subject and object duality, the western philosophy and humanity studies since the 20th century have always been longing for and pursuing the state of being of subject that exchanges, communicates, mingles and coexists with the world. In the course of exploration, it becomes increasingly plain to the theorists that the formation of this ideal state of being requires the technological media as the connection between organisms and the world. For example, Husserl noticed that the writing technique can change the phenomenon of meaning; Heidgger, by taking hammer for example, analyzed that how to get rid of “present-at-hand” tools and transform objectivity tool to medium, thus propelling the appearance of “Being-in-the-world” in “Dasein”; Merleau-Ponty, however, grasped the body media as essential medium in human-world interaction. By contrast, post-phenomenological research represented by Don Ihde has provided a more tailored
Ihde argues that “embodiment” in phenomenology should inherently contain technological media elements, and technology is of ontological significance to human existence. Concurrently, phenomena of “variation” cannot be separated from technology, which brings about the “magnification-minimization” effect to human consciousness. On Husserl’s intentional structure, Ihde argues that technological media may fill in the blank in “consciousness of ___”, as “technologies can be the means by which ‘consciousness itself’ is mediated. Technologies may occupy the “of” and not just be some object domain.” It is beyond doubt that these discussions are insightful, for to some extent, they has raised the technological media to the ontological dimension, and made the more original existential relations dimly visible. However, the theorists still confined the object of analysis to the scope of “human” being. Therefore, here arise two questions: first, for the traditional low-tech era, there is a limited transformation of objectivity tools to media due to technological constraints; second, the technological media here is outside the subject, barely in the sense of “field of being”.

As the viewpoint turns to posthuman, the meaning may be quite different. In the mediated cyborg, the medium has constituted an inherent part of its material life form and structure. The blank in individual element’s “consciousness of ___” is not a rigid insertion of technological media from outside, but a sort of self-embodiment. Both the implantation of media into organism, and the avatars, as well as the computing system with “self-evolution capability”, have merged with the consciousness elements in individuals. Therefore, the organism, on the one side, is strengthening the capability to connect, invite, gather, accommodate, and interact with the world; On the other side, it is constantly generating, flowing, or even thawing toward the world. Eventually, with the world, the subject and the “field of being” merged into a single whole, a truly fusional and symbiotic state of being can possibly come into existence.

Notes


11 汪民安、陈永国编: 《尼采的幽灵》, 社会科学文献出版社2001年版, 第166-167页。


