

Homo sapiens declared extinct

Yes, human beings have finally gone, but the 24-hour global party continues.

Bruce Sterling

AD 2380: After a painstaking ten-year search, from the Tibetan highlands to the Brazilian rainforests, it's official — there are no more human beings.

"I suppose I have to consider this a personal setback," said anthropologist Dr Marcia Raymo, of the Institute for Retrograde Study in Berlin. "Of course we still have human tissue in the lab, and we could clone as many specimens of *Homo sapiens* as we like. But that species was always known primarily for its unique cultural activity."

"I can't understand what the fuss is about," declared Rita "Cuddles" Srinivasan, actress, sex symbol and computer peripheral. "Artificial Intelligences love to embody themselves in human forms like mine, to wallow in sex and eating. I'm good for oodles of human stuff, scratching, sleeping, sneezing, you can name it. As long as AIs honour their origins, you'll see plenty of disembodied intelligences slumming around in human forms. That's where all the fun is, I promise — trust me."

The actress's current AI sponsor further remarked via wireless telepathy that Miss Srinivasan's occasional extra arms or heads should be seen as a sign of "creative brio", and not as a violation of "some obsolete, supposedly standard human form".

A worldwide survey of skull contents in April 2379 revealed no living citizen with less than 35 per cent cultured gelbrain. "That pretty well kicks it in the head for me,"

declared statistician Piers Euler, the front identity for a collaborative group-mind of mathematicians at the Bourbaki Academy in Paris. "I don't see how you can declare any entity 'human' when their brain is a gelatin lattice, and every cell of their body contains extensive extra strands of industrial-strength DNA. Not only is humanity extinct but, strictly speaking, pretty much everyone alive today should be classified as a unique, post-natural, one-of-a-kind species."

"I was born human," admitted 380-year-old classical musician Soon Yi, speaking from his support vat in Shanghai. "I grew up as a human being. It seemed quite natural at the time. For hundreds of years on the state-supported concert circuit, I promoted myself as a 'humanist', supporting and promoting human high culture. But at this point, I should be honest: that was always my stage pretence. Let's face it: gelbrain is vastly better stuff than those grey, greasy, catch-as-catch-can human neurons. You can't become a serious professional artiste while using nothing but all-natural animal tissue in your head. It's just absurd!"

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Gently fanning his wizened tissues with warm currents of support fluid, the grand old man of music continued: "Wolfgang Mozart was a very dull creature by our modern standards but, thanks to gelbrain, I can still find ways to pump life into his primitive compositions. I also persist in finding Bach worthwhile, even in today's ultracivilized milieu, where individual consciousness and creative subjectivity tend to be rather rare, or absent entirely."

Posthumanity's most scientifically advanced group, the pioneer Blood Bathers in their vast crystalline castles in the Oort Cloud, could not be reached for comment.

"Why trouble the highly prestigious Blood Bathers with some trifling development here on distant Earth?" demanded President Arno Hopmeier of the World Anti-subjectivist Council. "The Blood Bathers are busily researching novel realms of complex organization far beyond mere 'intelligence'. We should feel extremely honoured that they still bother to share their lab results with creatures like us. It would only annoy Their Skinless Eminences if we ask them to fret over some defunct race of featherless bipeds."

A Circumsolar Day of Mourning has been declared to commemorate the official extinction of humanity, but it is widely believed that bursts of wild public enthusiasm will mar the funereal proceedings.

"When you sum them up," mused Orbital Entity Ankh/Ghjh/9819, "it's hard to perceive any tragedy in this long-awaited event. Beasts, birds, butterflies, even the very rocks and rivers must be rejoicing to see humans finally gone. We should try to be adult about this: we should take a deep breath, turn our face to the light of the future, and get on with the business of living."

"Since I've been asked to offer an epitaph," the highly distributed poetware continued, "I believe that we should rearrange the Great Wall of China to spell out (in Chinese of course, since most of them were always Chinese) — 'THEY WERE VERY, VERY CURIOUS, BUT NOT AT ALL FAR-SIGHTED.'"

"This historical moment is a serious occasion that requires a sense of public dignity. My dog, for instance, says he'll truly miss humanity. But then again, my dog says a lot of things."

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