



H+ Newsletter: New Years Day 2010

(Edited by Ben Goertzel)

So excited for the 2010s because this is the decade you all realize I am not effing insane. I told you so ...

-- Richard Leis

Over the eleven or so years since WTA's [H+'s] inception, we've had our ups and downs. But let's look at the bottom line: The original three objectives were: (a) to increase public awareness of transhumanist prospects and issues; (b) to facilitate networking within the transhumanist community; and (c) to encourage the development of academically respectable, politically inclusive, and responsible forms of transhumanist thinking. These objectives have to a remarkable extent been achieved.

-- Nick Bostrom, co-founder and Board member, H+

Let us blast out of our old forms, our ignorance, our weakness, and our mortality. The future belongs to posthumanity.

-- Max More

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All opinions expressed herein represent the opinions of the individual article authors rather than the official positions of the H+ organization.

H+ in the 2010s

Ben Goertzel

Board Member, H+

H+ has now been around eleven or so years (mostly under the name WTA) – and boy, the world has changed a lot since then ... and so has its attitude toward transhumanism.

Eleven years ago, transhumanist ideas like radical life extension, brain-computer interfacing, superhuman AI, the emerging global brain and the Singularity were popularly considered pure sci-fi, without any hope of being realized in the foreseeable future. Now, on the eve of the 2010s, a reasonable subset of the science, technology and business community recognizes the plausibility of such things occurring in the present century. No one pretends to know precisely what the future holds nor when, but there is no doubt that H+ memes are on the rise, and are taken increasingly seriously by an increasingly large percentage of the population ... which is exactly as it should be.

What does this mean for H+ as an organization? Does it mean our time has come and gone? Since H+ memes are becoming more mainstream, is there now less need for an organization dedicated to promoting their understanding and beneficial development?

As you may guess my opinion is the contrary. As H+ technologies increasingly become realities, there's all the *more* need for careful thinking about their development and implications. There's all the more responsibility for those of us who have been involved in the H+ movement for years to deploy our experience and understanding (imperfect though the latter inevitably is) to help the world guide the development and dissemination of H+ technologies in a beneficial way.

So I see a huge role, and a huge responsibility for H+ in the 2010s. This may well be the decade in which H+ technologies and memes hit the mainstream – and this may have all sorts of interesting consequences ... some exciting ones, and possibly some problematic ones as well. If Kurzweil, Vinge and the other Singularitarians are right, these next few decades are going to be the end of the purely “human” phase of human history. And even if such predictions prove overoptimistic, developments are likely to prove dramatic!

As Niels Bohr said, “It is difficult to predict, especially the future” – but nevertheless, attempting to foresee the future is important, not only because it can sometimes be approximately accurate, but also because our foresight shapes the future itself. Rather than making definite predictions, I'll suggest a few things that I think could plausibly come about in the 2010s, H+ wise:

- A life extension therapy for humans, with scientific evidence suggesting its power to increase maximum as well as average human lifespan
- An AI system with general intelligence at roughly the human level, and exceeding the human level in interesting respects
- A direct neural interface to computer systems such as search engines and calculators
- A “smart drug” that comes along with scientific evidence suggesting its power to increase maximum as well as average human intelligence
- Advances in education methodology, through a combination of technologies, that double the speed with which an average human can be brought to an expert level in a given subject

Will these, or other amazing H+ technologies come about in the 2010s? If they do come about, whom will they benefit; whom will they be made available to? These aren't questions to which we can know the answer now: they're questions to which we will collectively create the answers. Whichever H+ advances really do occur in the 2010s, they will be created collectively by large subsets of the human race – but those of us with deeper understanding of H+ memes and underlying technologies have disproportionately greater power and responsibility to guide their creation.

Onward and upward!

H+ Summit 2009

Alex Lightman

Executive Director, H+

The H+ Summit was held in Los Angeles December 5-6 2009; and it went so well it felt like a dream come to life. The idea for the Summit emerged when I saw the Interactive Digital Center at Eon Reality in Irvine, California, May 2009, and marveled at the 12 demonstrations of 3D, some of which required goggles. I especially enjoyed the CAVE, where I felt like a character in Jumper, able to move at will from the deck of an oil tanker to a mountain top, out into space, and back to a San Diego apartment. The bed looked so real I almost jumped on it. I wanted to share the possibilities with transhumanists; so I asked Eon Reality's CEO for use of the facility as a birthday present and got a 3D green light.

The H+ board, especially Ben Goertzel and Todd Huffman, helped me to recruit great speakers. We were delighted to be able to offer 40 talks, and this expanded to 50 presentations, including the lunch breakout sessions. James Hughes helped make it an optional three day event by offering to hold the IEET Seminar on the Biopolitics of Popular Culture immediately prior. I was especially pleased and honored that Aubrey De Grey and David Pearce would fly all the way from England to speak at the H+ Summit.

One of the wonderful experiences to come out of the H+ Summit was collaboration with Mindshare Labs. Doug Campbell and Adam Sadowsky had built a very interesting and high-energy event around sharing information, about technology, science, adventure and culture, in a party atmosphere. The World Transhumanist Association (WTA)/H+ is a global organization, and didn't have an LA Chapter until one was formed out of the H+ Summit, and Mindshare Labs helped to get the word out in Southern California, and handled the AV and other logistics.

The H+ Summit started with a talk (from me) on Finding and Funding the Future, which summarized several trillion dollar opportunities. From there we had themed sessions with four to eight speakers each, starting with Longevity (and a bit of good natured engineered controversy – Aubrey de Grey's talk on the Methuselarity, which included the notion that someone in the audience might live 1000 years, was immediately followed by Gregory Fahy's talk on why Aubrey was too pessimistic!). This was followed by Information, and talks on redesigning the hedonic treadmill (a sort of Transhumanist keeping up with the Joneses) by David Pearce, Steve Omohundro on the Global Brain (one of my personal favorite talks), and what might have been the talk I heard the most buzz about, Joann Kuchera-Morin on the Allosphere, which took the possibilities of visualization up a few notches and blew many people's minds.

After lunch and breakout sessions, Todd Huffman served as MC for sessions on culture, politics, arts and entertainment. Several of the talks – especially Patri Friedman’s talk on Seasteading (which included a slide showing how modern cruise ships are roughly the size of the Empire State Building, and thus already floating cities or countries); and Bryan Bishop and Ben Lipowitz’s talk on how to make a civilization seed and their Open Manufacturing initiative -- had a revolutionary feel that made me feel lucky to be in on the ground floor of new worlds in the making. I was very pleased that RU Sirius, the legendary editor of H+ magazine, was able to show the history of the Transhumanist movement from the perspective of someone who has, for decades, been giving voice, and national distribution, to prominent thinkers in our community.

Saturday night was one of the best nights of the decade for me, as it combined the H+ Summit party with my birthday. This was not a coincidence – I’d set the dates for the H+ Summit so that I could celebrate with people I admired, respected, and enjoyed. Mindshare Labs went the extra mile to provide artifacts (nerf guns, balloon pits, piñatas, electronic music) to make for futurist fun.

On Sunday Dylan Morris and Doug Campbell, both of Mindshare Labs, led science-centric sessions on biology (including Todd Huffman on Whole Brain Emulation, the new term of art for Uploading and Anselm Levskaya on building an I/O interface to cells and the brain), AI (featuring Ben Goertzel’s review of his proposed roadmap to human level Artificial General Intelligence), interaction, and the senses. John Smart gave the final talk, on Metaverse 2.0.

What came out of the event? 50 presentations to almost 200 people was already a big success, but no one predicted that 412,095 people would tune in for at least part of the webcast of the talks, something that, to the best of my knowledge, is completely unprecedented for a Transhumanist event, and approaches the audience size for Discovery Channel television shows. I was surprised and thrilled to hear from hundreds of people that they loved being at the event, or watching it. I’ve organized hundreds of futurist events, but never have I heard 100% happiness and delight from participants -- and the people who came to the H+ Summit include some of the world’s smartest people with the best ideas for improving the future.

I look forward to seeing you at the next H+ Summit!

Update from H+ Chapters

Marcelo Rinesi

Assistant Director, H+

During the past year, Humanity+ chapters have found new success engaging with their local communities.

In Italy, they presented materials from James Hughes, Max More, and others, in the event "The Idea of Earthly Immortality. A New Challenge for Theology" organized by the Catholic Church, and on the other side of the Atlantic, the Mormon Transhumanist Association participated at the conference "Parallels and Convergences: Mormon Thought and Engineering Vision," organized, among others, by the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University and the Mormon Scholars Foundation (the papers from the conference are being published as a forthcoming book by Kofford Books).

The Finnish Transhumanist Association (one of the largest and most active H+ chapters in the world), not only sustained a very high media profile and organized various events, but also held their spring meeting at Parliament House with Green League MP Jyrki Kasvi as a guest speaker. We are sure it won't be the last time that H+ topics will be discussed in a parliamentary setting...

Switching from politics to tinkering, the Seattle chapter has set up a wiki at <http://st.imul.us>, including links to talks, and is also organizing a h+-friendly maker's space -- <http://jigsawrenaissance.org> -- that sounds like an absolutely incredible space to spend some time playing seriously. We even love the first line in their welcome page: *The renaissance is here, and it brought ice-cream!*

Other chapters have continued the ongoing, important task of networking, translation, and advocacy. The Croatian chapter will work on a project with the SENS Foundation Academic Initiative, presented at the National Conference for Science Fiction, and was even invited for an hour-long interview on a local TV station. Meanwhile, the Israeli chapter has unveiled their new website, <http://www.singulariut.com>, which is the first website on h+ themes published in Hebrew.

Although the central themes of H+ are profoundly global (and ultimately will likely reach far beyond the globe!), it's still true that the work of local chapters, whether their scope is a city, a country, or a particular organization, is an integral part of how H+ ideas touch the world and begin to change it.

Thanks are due to all the H+ chapter leaders who supplied their updates, providing the raw materials for this summary article.

January 2010 H+ Board Elections

There are going to be six open seats on the H+ Board of Directors in the election slated for January 11-15, 2010.

Humanity+ Board members set policy goals and oversee their implementation, contributing with their experience and expertise to the Humanity+'s work.

All voting members in good standing as of Saturday January 9th, 2009 are eligible to run in and vote in the Board election. Board members must be and remain voting members in good standing in order to run and serve.

The Board meets and votes virtually, so no travel is required, although Internet access is essential.

The term of service is two years, so the top five vote getters will serve in the five open positions Jan 18, 2010 – Jan 15, 2012. The sixth vote-getter will serve Jan 18, 2010 – Jan 15, 2011.

The period for self-nominations closes Saturday January 9th at noon EST. Voting will be conducted Monday January 11th to Thursday January 14th.

Please send your candidate statements to Humanity+ Secretary J. Hughes at secretary@transhumanism.org.

Previous examples of candidate statements are here:

<http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/more/vote2006/>

<http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/more/vote2007/>

<http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/more/vote2008/>

You can become a voting member here:

<http://humanityplus.org/join>

Join H+

If you're reading this newsletter and are not a paying member of Humanity Plus, we would like to encourage you to remedy the situation! You can become a full voting member of H+ here:

<http://humanityplus.org/join>

Your membership fee will be used to promote the goals of the H+ organization, including the campaigns described at

<http://humanityplus.org/explore-projects>

and also new initiatives to be launched in 2010, which YOU as a full member will have the opportunity to help shape. It's a new decade and it's a time to brainstorm together about how best to push forward toward the goals of H+.

Also members will be given access to the Members-only section of the H+ Discussion Forums, to be launched early in 2010 – watch your inbox for more information!

H+ Discussion Forums

The WTA mailing lists have a long and illustrious history, but as one of our initiatives for 2010 we aim to complement them with an online forum, which will contain several sections, including some open to the public and some restricted to full H+ members.

The goal is to promote high-quality discussion of H+ issues, and also to encourage collaboration on the many projects we envision H+ members being collectively involved in as the decade moves forward.

Details on the forums will be posted on the H+ site, and disseminated by email, as they become available (likely early in 2010).