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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: THE POST/HUMAN CONDITION AND THE NEED FOR PHILOSOPHY

Matheson Russell and Matthew Sharpe

On October 4, 1957, what had long been a fantasy of science fiction passed into reality. On that day, the Soviet satellite Sputnik was launched. This was the first human-made object to be propelled into orbit around the earth. So struck was political philosopher Hannah Arendt by this event that she began her landmark 1958 work, *The Human Condition*, with a meditation upon its significance. In the 'Prologue' to that text, Arendt remarks upon a curious reaction to this epoch-defining event expressed in the media at the time:

... it was not pride or awe at the tremendousness of human power and mastery which filled the hearts of men, who now, when they looked up from the earth toward the skies, could behold there a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first "step toward *escape from men's imprisonment to the earth*."<sup>1</sup>

According to Arendt's analysis, the race into space chimed with a peculiar, and distinctly modern, desire to cast off the condition of the earth and to inhabit an environment of our own making. Christians had spoken of the earth as a vale of tears. Philosophers since Plato's *Phaedo* had viewed the body as a prison for the soul. But until now "nobody in the history of mankind has ever conceived of the earth as a prison for men's bodies or shown such eagerness to go literally from here to the moon."<sup>2</sup>

An analogous situation, it seems to us, faces humanity today. As a previous generation dreamt of living in spaceships and colonizing far-flung planets, the present generation dreams of living in superhuman bodies or even of transcending the body altogether. Where our predecessors marvelled at the technological achievement of Sputnik, we marvel at the mapping of the human genome. Where they fantasized about the figure of the space explorer, we fantasize about the figure of the cyborg. Scientific magazines and popular culture increasingly fill with evocations of the "posthuman" or "transhuman". In whatever form, as the essays by Nikolas Kompridis and Jon Seltin here detail, these terms anticipate the possibility of some technologically facilitated translation from our familiar bodily condition into something qualitatively different—and ostensibly, of course, appreciably better. Whatever this new post-human condition will be, it will involve at least the enhancement of mental and

physical capabilities, but also possibly the extension of life itself towards immortality.

Just as the space race chimed with a peculiar and distinctly modern desire to cast off the condition of the earth and to inhabit an environment of our own making, so it seems that today the prospect of a post-human condition chimes with a desire to cast off the condition of the body, and to inhabit a body of our own making. What's more, the same rhetoric of emancipation that Arendt already noted with Sputnik conspicuously permeates much of the transhumanist literature, going all the way back to Julian Huxley, one of the movement's inspirations and forefathers. The presumption in this literature is that the body is a prison, a constraint on our very existence, and that we can be free of its fetters through bio-technology. Hans Moravec, for instance, contemplates what would be needed to adapt to a life "rescued from the limitations of a mortal body,"<sup>3</sup> as Seltin documents in his essay. The same presumption of biological enslavement and technological emancipation is cleverly sloganized in the title of Ronald Bailey's book, *Liberation Biology*.<sup>4</sup> Simon Young, most unabashedly of all, articulates the sentiment in an imperative mood: "People of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your biological chains... As humanism freed us from the chains of superstition, let Transhumanism free us from our biological chains."<sup>5</sup>

Arendt's response to the fantasies of 'transcendence' prevalent in her day is worth reflecting upon in relation to the current constellation of transhumanist aspirations:

This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself. There is no reason to doubt our abilities to accomplish such an exchange, just as there is no reason to doubt our present ability to destroy all organic life on earth. The question is only whether we wish to use our new scientific and technical knowledge in this direction, and this question cannot be decided by scientific means; it is a political question of the first order and therefore can hardly be left to the decision of professional scientists or professional politicians.<sup>6</sup>

Nearly every news cycle today serves to confirm that we are collectively—or at least those of us in the wealthy nations and corporations—becoming able to create our own artificial environment or artificial bodies for ourselves, according to our own design. But with each new development, each new rolling back of the bounds of what had previously seemed impossible, a raft of questions imposes itself, each time in fact with a little more urgency and, in some quarters, with more anxiety: *Should* we act in this direction? What would it *mean* to do this? Would transcendence of all the previous conditions of our telluric mortality amount to freedom? If so, freedom for what? Can such freedom serve as a sufficient motive for political action or technoscientific aspiration? Would it not leave us, at best, like the proverbial astronaut, floating weightlessly in the middle of a void, less meaningfully free than utterly dependant on our artificial, almost womb-like life-supports? Do not the advances in genetics and the health sciences amount to our 'playing God', a technological *hubris* for which, like Prometheus, we can expect to have our moral and spiritual substance eaten away at each new dawn?

These questions, which in different ways are taken up here by Kompridis, Seltin, and Chad Parkhill, are made only more vexing and pressing by what seems to be the contemporary flipside to the emergence of the post-human. Here we have in mind not the longing for, and increasing possibility of, escaping our naturally given biological form of life, but rather the growing awareness—in the face of one of the world's great (and first human-induced) mass extinctions of species, anthropogenetic climate change, and imminent peak water and oil—of human beings' inescapable dependence on our natural environment. It is as if, in an odd Hegelian coincidence of opposites, in the very moment when scientists seem on the cusp of realizing the possibility of artificial immortality, our finitude and biological vulnerability as a species is imposing itself in a way it seldom has before, certainly not in the modern age. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the long-maligned category of 'postmodern' as we seek to come to terms with this new awareness of our specie-al dependence on the natural world. The Cartesian dream of being 'master and possessor of nature', which underlay both liberalism and

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socialism, is now broadly contested and seems to be evaporating in the rapidly heating global climate. From the realm of theory (in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, or Actor Network Theory, to take two examples addressed in Rosalyn Diprose's paper) to grassroots environmental movements, we are being forced and enjoined to readdress our dependence on the non-human and social environment.

In the wake of these contradictory 'signs of the times'—on the one hand, the transhumanist impulse, on the other the all-too-(post-)human(ist) ecological realities—it is small wonder that much continental theory or philosophy has increasingly undertaken its own problematisation of many of the suppositions of previous thought concerning the human condition. One line of continental thought beginning with Jacques Derrida, but more recently represented by Bernard Stiegler and differently by Giorgio Agamben, has called into question the founding suppositions of much religious and humanist thought concerning human beings' relations to, and transcendence of, their animality, and the technics or tools we 'use'. In his paper, David Wills undertakes a poetic meditation on Derrida's passing 1997 remark that "I can die, or simply leave the room," turning it into a stage for a reflection on the way that language as iterability deconstructs the life-death opposition, so that, aporetically: "Without it, there could be nothing like what we call life; because of it, what we call life has from the beginning left something we would normally call dead behind it." Rosalyn Diprose's paper critically responds to an alternative theoretical lineage which culminates in the "Actor Network Theory" (ANT) of figures like Bruno Latour, which seeks to redefine agency in a way that relocates it in non-human life and environments, as well as human beings. While she welcomes some of the impulses behind this post-humanist theoretical trajectory, Diprose attempts to correct the politically suspect ontological egalitarianism of ANT through a rereading of Foucault's critique of biopolitics. She points to Merleau-Ponty's notion of intercorporeality as the basis for an expanded ethico-political position which, she maintains, can accommodate the ontological insights of ANT, without throwing out the ethical baby with the bathwater.

The present conjuncture then seems in fact to bear out in striking ways the validity of another 'post-' term which has recently passed out of widespread circulation, except as a term of fear in the populist media: namely, Lyotard's notion that we have passed into a 'postmodern condition'. On the one hand, the new transhumanism clearly strikes out beyond the dreams of earlier humanists. Yet Seltin notes how the very technologies involved, and the aspiration towards 'freedom' however defined, clearly carry forward the type of modernist dreams first voiced in Descartes' vision of human beings as 'masters and possessors of nature', and in Bacon's famous metaphor of putting nature on the rack to pry loose her secrets. On the other hand, it is notable in contemporary debates around climate change that scientific discourse itself, long the unambiguous champion of all things 'progressive', has now become complex. Whereas the reactionary Right alone insists that anthropogenetic climate change is a conspiracy to halt economic development, many scientists today sound oddly like the conservatives or reactionaries of old: warning against the dangers of technological overdevelopment, and calling for massive cutbacks and reshaping of world industries. It is timely, then, that in this edition of *Parrhesia* William Martin's takes up Lyotard's claim from the 1970s that we have passed into a 'postmodern' condition, interestingly noting Lyotard's proximity (and in fact debt) to the younger Habermas' work on epistemology and the public sphere. The proliferation of more and more specialized—and more and more privatized—scientific discourses, Martin suggests, need not have the fragmentary effect for public discourse which Lyotard diagnosed as the postmodern condition. The new ICT network (most notably the worldwide web), Martin argues, represents the elementary basis of what he terms the post-human environment or lifeworld: at once the means of socialization, and as such the potential media for new forms of the public sphere.

A final idiosyncratic feature of the new (post-)human condition we collectively face today is the apparent collapse of viable forms of Left-wing political agency in the developed nations. The causes of this development are surely multiple: the Right's neoliberal hegemony since the mid-1970s (seemingly only shaken, not stirred, by the 2007-'09 'GFC'); the New Left's self-fragmentation into a rainbow coalition of single-issue, identity based political initiatives, often unified only by a shared appeal to difference per se; and the collapse of the Soviet Union (and with it the public legitimacy of socialism) in 1989. Whatever its causes, Mario Wenning's paper in this edition of *Parrhesia*, indebted to German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, addresses what he perceives as a

‘motivational deficit’ in the (New) Left: namely, its hesitation to avow *thymos* or rage at injustice as a key motive for political action. In contrast to earlier generations of feminists, socialists, and ecologists, the Left as Wenning perceives it today has ceded the powerful political affect of rage too easily and too much to the Right. His paper challenges us to take a more nuanced, even a more dialectical approach: one that appreciates that, just because the Right has made an art of political outrage in the culture wars and elsewhere, the Left’s “emancipatory prophets [should] draw on indignation as well as hope” as they contest the possibility of a better world.

We have no doubt been fated ‘to live in interesting times’, as the fabled Chinese curse has it. The immense and unprecedented dynamism of the modern age, which long ago melted all that is solid into air, has only accelerated in the last decades. What was air has become airless space; what was the human body has become increasingly ‘wetware’, to be compared somewhat unfavourably to the plastic and silicon based alternatives that the rich at least can consider inserting in its place. In the words of the lead character, Sarah Connor, in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), one of the great dystopian films of the period, a veritable *Frankenstein* for the fast-emerging age of robotechnics: “there is no fate but what we make for ourselves”.

Yet, needless to say, if we are at a loss as to how to manage our new capabilities and address their consequences, this is not a failure of science or scientists. Rather it is, in part, a symptom of the growing gap the first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers already discerned: between, on one side, the specialised knowledges and technological know-how of the industrial-scientific complex and, on the other side, the public spheres with their cultures and institutions of narration, meaning-making, argumentation and norm-governed solidarity. Martin Heidegger famously once made the provocative remark that “Science does not think” (to which Lacan added, “because it knows”—and that is its drive and internal justification). Yet science remains—for the moment!—a human activity, and one which as such falls under the category of those things about which we can reflect, deliberate, and which we can potentially redirect in the light of the same.

If there has been a failure at work in the contemporary trajectories of technoscience, then, it is a failure of *thought* or philosophy, not least to simply keep up. While science and technology have raced ahead according to their own incessant logic of development, public discourse, whose job it is to render human action intelligible, has been left behind. The real challenge we face today, then, is the need to think: not just to think about our biological nature and its possible futures, but also to think about our interactions with the earth, with our cultural world, and with the sciences that are transforming all of these at unprecedented speed and in unprecedented ways—in short, the need to think *what we are doing*. And that means also to render in meaningful, publicly intelligible speech *who we take ourselves to be* and *what we take life and freedom to consist in*. This is perhaps the highest vocation of the public discourse for any society. And it is to this vocation that we hope the essays collected here, drawn originally from papers delivered at the December 2008 conference of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy in Auckland, New Zealand, make their own small contribution ■

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### NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1. Emphasis added.
2. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2.
3. Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, 5. Emphasis added.
4. Ronald Bailey, *Liberation Biology: The Scientific and Moral Case for the Biotech Revolution*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005.
5. Simon Young, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005, 32.
6. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 3.

## TECHNOLOGY'S CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRACY: WHAT OF THE HUMAN?

Nikolas Kompridis, Professorial Fellow

*We do not know what our nature permits us to be.*  
J-J. Rousseau, *Emile*

### PART I

*Retrieving the normative significance of the question: What does it mean to be a human being?*

To say, with Rousseau, that we do not *know* what our nature permits us to be, is to say that our status as natural beings underdetermines our status as normative beings—in other words, that “our nature” does not answer the question of what it means to be a human being, or dictate what it is that we should become. This is somewhat reassuring since it tells us that there is a domain of human freedom not dictated by our biological nature, but it is somewhat unnerving because it leaves uncomfortably open what kind of beings human beings could become. On the other hand, if the question of what it means to be human is unanswerable simply by an increase in knowledge, how is it to be answered? Put another way: What are we prepared to permit our nature to be? And on what basis should we give our permission?

One of the disturbing features of modern life is that we live in times in which it is no longer possible to know what to expect of the future based on what we now know of the past. All we can be sure of is that the future will not be much like the past we have known, and because historical time is constantly accelerating, it is a future that will arrive ever more quickly. The disorientation this causes, the disorientation that comes from living modernity's form of life, can become so intense and perplexing that we find it hard to contain our anxieties. We panic.

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Prompted by the successful mapping of the human genome, and the consequent risks posed by genetic interventions into the basis of human life, the late Jacques Derrida, a philosopher renowned for, among other things, his extremely skeptical attitude towards apocalyptic thinking, expressed the following decidedly apocalyptic worry:

the risk that is run at this unique moment in the history of humanity is the risk of new crimes being committed against humanity and not only... against millions of real human beings as was [previously] the case, but a crime such that a sorcerer's apprentice who was very cunning, the author of potential genetic manipulations, might in the future commit or supply the means for committing... against man, against the very humanity of man, no longer against millions of representatives of real humanity but against the essence itself of humanity, against an idea, an essence, a figure of the human race, represented this time by a countless number of beings and generations to come.<sup>1</sup>

A crime against the essence of humanity, irreversibly programmed to repeat itself over and over again from generation to generation, and so a crime against the very future of humanity? Now, that sounds pretty apocalyptic. What are we supposed to make of this? Should we say that Derrida panicked, unthinkingly reverting to an anthropocentric essentialism whose fierce critic he once was? Did the hyper-skeptical, hyper-critical master of deconstruction go soft in the end, revealing himself to be a sentimental “humanist,” still attached to the hoary old question, perhaps, the oldest philosophical question—the question of what it is to be a human being? Or is it the case that Derrida, along with a number of other philosophers, social scientists, and public intellectuals have awakened to the power of the new technologies—the power of genetics, nanotechnology, robotics, and synthetic biology—to radically and permanently alter what it is to be a human being, and to make what it was to be human potentially unrecognizable *as* human?\_

Until the very recent past, the question of what it is to be a human being was treated as arcane, passé, a question that only thinkers with a conservative, essentialist bent would regard as philosophically obligatory. Today, on the other hand, it is “taking on, here, now, a terribly concrete and urgent form at an infinitely accelerated rate.”<sup>2</sup> So the question that was once so yesterday is all of a sudden a pressing question, a question absolutely pressed for time—since, evidently, the space in which it can still be meaningfully posed, and thus the space in which a meaningful response could be fashioned, is shrinking at an alarming rate.

The implication seems to be that we are quickly running out of time to retrieve the normative significance of this question, thus at risk of losing something absolutely fundamental to the self-understanding of human beings, and losing it before we even had a chance thoughtfully to articulate what it was. The loss would not be like the loss of a cultural treasure or some important historical document; for it would be something belonging to our self-understanding that we had lost, having become permanently disconnected from what we once were—whatever that was.

But is Derrida, or any other philosopher, for that matter, competent to judge the risks of the new technologies? Isn't this panicked response typical of the Luddite-like worries anxious humanists have expressed ever since Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*? Certainly, Derrida is not the only one preoccupied with these worries. In a widely read article in *The Atlantic Monthly* and in a subsequent book with the same title, *The Case Against Perfection*, political philosopher Michael Sandel argues that if we allow genetic technologies to develop unchecked by anything other than such policies and regulations that minimize their risks and their misuse, we shall lose our sense of the “giftedness” of life, “leaving us with nothing to affirm or behold outside of our own will.”<sup>3</sup>

On the other side of the political spectrum from Sandel and Derrida, Francis Fukuyama, warns that the “transhumanist” aspiration to transcend the biological limits of human life is “the world's most dangerous idea.” For Fukuyama, transhumanism is not some wacko techno-utopian cult; rather, “it is implicit in much of the research agenda of biomedicine.”

For the last several decades, a strange liberation movement has grown within the developed world. Its crusaders aim much higher than civil rights campaigners, feminists, or gay rights advocates. They want nothing less than to liberate the human race from its biological constraints. As “transhumanists” see it, humans must wrest their biological destiny from evolution’s blind process of random variation and adaptation and move to the next stage as a species... Nobody knows what technological possibilities will emerge for human self-modification. But we can already see the stirrings of Promethean desires in how we prescribe drugs to alter the behavior and personalities of our children. The environmental movement has taught us humility and respect for the integrity of nonhuman nature. We need a similar humility concerning our human nature. If we do not develop it soon, we may unwittingly invite the transhumanists to deface humanity with their genetic bulldozers and psychotropic shopping malls.<sup>4</sup>

Like Sandel, Fukuyama worries that the aspiration to biologically unfettered freedom expressed in transhumanism threatens us with the loss of something that our self-understanding as human beings requires: humility in face of the natural basis of human life.

There is no question that there is something deeply unsettling about the species altering potential of the new technologies. It was not that very long ago when the vision of the future being sketched by techno-visionaries such as Ray Kurzweil, Hans Moravec, Craig Venter, and Rodney Brooks, would have been treated as junk science, not as the informed statements of notable scientists, which these people are.

It is because the species-altering possibilities of the new technologies are no longer notional but real possibilities that another notable scientist, one of the pioneers of computer technology, decided to speak out in similarly alarming, apocalyptic tones. Bill Joy, co-founder and formerly head of research at Sun Microsystems, published an extremely controversial article early in the decade, entitled, “Why The Future Doesn’t Need Us,” in which he confessed that he hadn’t realized just how imminent was the practical realization of interlocking developments in the new sciences of genetics, robotics and nanotechnology. But a conversation with his friend Ray Kurzweil convinced him that, once again, thanks to Moore’s law, a law postulating and quite accurately predicting an exponential growth in computing power, brought rapidly closer a science fiction future stripped of the fiction. “It is in the nature of exponential growth,” writes Kurzweil in *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, “that events develop extremely slowly for extremely long periods of time, but as one glides through the knee of the curve, events erupt at an increasingly furious pace. And that is what we will experience as we enter the twenty-first century.”<sup>5</sup> Apparently, we are in the knee of this curve, and what it portends is a not too distant future in which we more or less willingly replace ourselves with post-human beings superior to us.

It all sounds like a plot from something playing at the local multiplex, except that it comes from the mouths of serious scientists. For example, Rodney Brooks, the founder of MIT’s Humanoid Robotics Group confidently anticipates that “[t]hose of us alive today, over the course of our lifetimes, will morph ourselves into machines.”<sup>6</sup> Hans Moravec, another leading roboticist, states matter-of-factly that biological species “almost never survive encounters with superior species.”<sup>7</sup> Believing that he has seen the proverbial writing on the wall, Joy, or Kill Joy as he came to be called in Silicon Valley, proposed a policy of “relinquishment,” the purpose of which would “limit development of the technologies that are too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge.”<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, Joy’s proposal sparked an indignant response from the great majority of his colleagues for whom placing limits on scientific and technological progress is a violation of their freedom to pursue truth and knowledge, and un-American, as well.

Joy is particularly terrified of the self-replicating power of a new class of engineered organisms, such as nanobots. The dangers of self-replication, sometimes referred to as the ‘gray goo’ problem, are widely acknowledged to be a frightening problem for which there is yet no solution in sight. It arises from the potentially uncontrollable self-replicating power of nanobots, high-powered micro-computers, capable of manipulating matter at the atomic level, and possessing the “urge” or “will” to preserve and, worse, to perpetuate their own kind. Since their

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energy is produced by eating everyday materials, there is the real danger that due to faulty programming or the malicious mischief of “extreme individuals,” they might not just rest after doing what we want them to do, e.g., eat up a toxic tire dump; they might just go on to gobble all tires and all tire binders on the planet—or any other material they find tasty. Or, in the worst of all possible, but not improbable, scenarios, the little buggers could “consume the entire planet in a matter of weeks, including all the organic material on it.”<sup>9</sup>

In response to the ‘gray goo’ problem, nanoscientists have proposed solving it with ‘blue goo’—i.e., policebots that would detect and neutralize the badbots. This solution is riddled with technical problems that might turn out to be intractable. In any case, given that the Western world’s most advanced police and spy agencies have not yet been able to locate Osama bin Laden, a single, non-replicating individual, why should we expect that we could catch and destroy some rapidly replicating renegade nanobots before they could lay waste to the earth (apparently they would be able to do so in about three weeks’ time)?

While it is surely of interest to us when a prominent scientist’s conclusions about the nature of the apocalyptic threat posed by our new technologies accords with the alarmed conclusions of prominent philosophers, we philosophers do not have the competence to make confident judgments about the actual capabilities of the new technologies. As philosophers and as human beings, however, we do have a stake in the question of what it means to be a human being—now, and in the future. As such, we have an obligation to deepen our understanding of what it is that is actually threatened. It is time to initiate a public discussion on what it means to be human, and how reflection on this question can guide us in determining what kind of future we want for ourselves.

Scientific experts, market imperatives, and the culture of liberal democracy all contribute to a conceptual framework from within which it is extremely difficult to think about technological development except as the welcome expansion in the range of choice available to formally free and equal individuals. Individuals who, quite understandably, would like to have longer and healthier lives, who would also like to be smarter and stronger, not to mention more attractive. Individuals who, in general, would like to exercise greater and greater control over their lives, right down to the biological conditions of their existence. This is a powerful and attractive picture, so powerful and attractive that it makes it seem pointless or unnecessary to put into question the pace and direction of technological change.

Philosophers interested in initiating public reflection on the question of what it means to be a human being would not only have to combat this powerful picture, attractively fusing technological innovation with an expansion of the freedom of choice; they would also have to combat the anti-essentialism and anti-humanism that has become the default stance of 20<sup>th</sup> century European and Anglo-American philosophy. As I believe Derrida himself came to realize, we can no longer afford the luxury of knee-jerk anti-essentialism or unreflective anti-humanism. By remaining complacent and smug, we will let others decide the question of what it means to be a human being for us. Rodney Brooks speaks for just about everyone working in these new research programmes when he declares: “The current scientific view of living things is that they are machines whose components are biochemicals.”<sup>10</sup> If the “current scientific view” is not contested or resisted, then the question of what it *means* to be a human being will be rendered otiose, deprived of all normative significance. When we regard ourselves as “machines whose components are biochemicals,” we not only presume to know what our nature permits us to be, but also that this knowledge permits us to answer the question of what is to become of us.

But even if we go against our late-modern skeptical inclinations and grant that the question of what it means to be a human being does possess normative significance, its practical public value for making sense of how we are to respond to the “dangerous issues now before us” is hardly obvious. Indeed, what normative force can this question have in a world as deeply pluralistic and antagonistic as ours? Given the plurality of visions of what counts as a good life for human beings, and the plurality of visions of what counts as distinctively human, we cannot expect convergence on a single final answer that could be accepted by all. So what can possibly be gained by publicly posing this question? Would it really have more practical value than dealing as soon as we can with the task of instituting the appropriate risk-reducing policies to regulate the new technologies?

If the proponents of genetic engineering are right, we stand to gain a great deal from genetic science and synthetic biology: we may be able to overcome once for all our vulnerability to injury and premature death, to sickness, to physical deformities and psychological maladies, and, perhaps, to our very mortality. In short, we may be able to transcend the biological limits of human life. So why not drop the apocalyptic tone? Why not just relax, as our transhumanist interlocutors urge us to do, and see where the next stage of human evolution takes us? As a species we have already been through some pretty dramatic evolutionary changes, so why resist the next one? Why not get behind the project of genetic engineering, and focus our intellectual energies on what we must do to minimize the potential risks and harms by instituting appropriate policies and regulations?

Well, we might respond, how can any of us really believe that any of these new technologies will be safely and effectively regulated in light of all the evidence pointing to the inadequacies of our current regulatory systems with respect to the safety of the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the medication we take? These new technologies exceed the reach of any of our current regulatory mechanisms, since such mechanisms would have to be international and global in nature, requiring the agreement and compliance of all the nations on the earth, something we have not seen before. Think, Kyoto. Copenhagen. Or, more concretely, Vioxx, the anti-inflammatory drug that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration was reluctant to regulate during the five years the drug was on the market, until it was proven to have caused anywhere between 88,000 and 139,000 heart attacks, 30 to 40 percent of which were likely fatal.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, there are too many new hybrid technologies to monitor and to regulate. Things are moving much too quickly to anticipate what needs to be done: whatever we do on the regulatory side will always be too late. For example, in the area of genetic engineering the kind of normative regulation that is being debated supposes firm and fixed boundaries between therapeutic and cosmetic interventions. But these boundaries are too fluid to be the basis upon which we could propose let alone enforce effective regulation. As Habermas puts it: “in the very dimension where boundaries are fluid we are supposed to draw and enforce clear-cut lines.”<sup>12</sup>

This is why the debate about these new technologies should not be restricted to a debate over appropriate normative regulation. That would be to lose the battle even before it began. The real debate should be over the question of what is to be human, and what is to become of the human. Otherwise we will have to accept a ready-made, undemocratically formulated answer to these questions. Surely we must be given an opportunity consent to, or dissent from, so spectacular and irreversible change as the alteration of our biochemical nature. But more importantly, we must be given an opportunity to pose the question ourselves, prior to having it settled by “experts,” scientific or otherwise.

## PART II

### *Philosophy and The Future of Human Nature*

As in the case of Derrida, faced with the advances in genetic, nano- and robotic technologies, Jürgen Habermas also found himself having to give up one of his strongest philosophical convictions: the “post-metaphysical” belief that philosophy had no business dealing with the question of what it is to be a human being. That question had no place in the modern world, apparently for the very reason that it could not be answered. Awakening from his most recent dogmatic slumber,<sup>13</sup> Habermas came to realize that this question had now acquired an urgency that no one, at least, no philosopher, could have predicted. Thus, in his book, *The Future of Human Nature*, he breathlessly announced that the new genetic technologies “make a public discourse on the right understanding of cultural forms of life in general an urgent matter. And philosophers no longer have any good reasons for leaving such a dispute to biologists and engineers intoxicated by science fiction.”<sup>14</sup>

Most surely, philosophers should be part of “a public discourse on the right understanding of cultural forms of life in general,” and most surely this is “an urgent matter.” But there were *never* any good reasons for philosophy to have given up its interest, its stake, in this question. Having forsaken the question of what it means to be a human being, what can philosophy have to contribute to it now that it is ready to step into the breach

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again? Just what does it have to say that is worth saying, and worth hearing? For Habermas, what needs to be said and heard concerns a set of distinctions that he considers essential to the self-understanding of human agents, essential to their understanding *as* agents: the distinction between having a body and being a body, between what is born and what is made, between organic and manufactured life. Genetic interventions into the biological basis of human life made possible by the mapping of the human genome threaten to collapse these distinctions, and, therefore, to also undermine those distinctions upon which depends our understanding of ourselves as peculiarly human agents. Because of the nature of these new and unprecedented interventions “what hitherto was ‘given’ as organic nature, and could at most be ‘bred’, now shifts to the realm of artifacts and their production ... even the human organism is drawn into this sphere of intervention.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Habermas believes philosophy’s most important response to the challenge of the new technologies is to shore up the threatened distinctions, and to reassert them in a form necessary to keep firm the normative and ontological boundary between “the nature that we ‘are’ and the organic endowments we ‘give’ to ourselves.”<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, what is at stake is the boundary “between persons and things.”<sup>17</sup> However, it appears that Habermas has forgotten just how difficult it now is to maintain boundaries “in the very dimension where boundaries are fluid.” I do not have the space here to treat in detail why Habermas’s attempt to redraw these distinctions fails to be convincing. My impression is that he has rushed, in understandable haste, to answer the question of “the right understanding of cultural forms of life in general.”

We need collectively to go deeper than this, and to reflect more fully, publicly, on what it is that is fundamental to our humanity. To go further with our reflections might just mean taking much less for granted about long-held distinctions. Take for example the boundary between persons and things. Not only has this boundary been progressively blurred since Descartes and the ontology of the emergent sciences of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. We have accelerated the process insofar as we take for granted that an instrumental attitude toward things as such, to all things, is normatively acceptable. So the Kantian distinction between persons and things, ends and means, already concedes too much to this process which cannot but bring about the thing-like instrumentalization of human nature. What we need to think about, then, is not how to reassert more convincingly the distinction between persons and things, but how to redisclose the rich field of *connections* between persons and things, showing their mutual interdependence and imbrication. It would be ironic, would it not, if it were necessary to redeem the being of things in order to redeem human being?

It is not hard to see that there is an elective affinity between modern naturalism and modern liberalism: the former aims to reduce human agency, mindedness, reason, and the whole realm of the normative to causal laws, appealing to whatever currently trendy science facilitates such reduction—be it cognitive science, cybernetics, sociobiology, or evolutionary psychology; while the latter aims to reduce evaluative questions of the good life to matters of individual choice. Together they are meaning destroying systems.

Part of the proof of this claim can be found in the position of the humanities today, the very enterprises that take the meaning and fate of the human as their object of inquiry. At a time when the legitimacy and value of the humanities are being undermined not so much by self-crippling forms of relativism and skepticism (although they too play a role), as by the insidious commercialization of the university, forcibly accelerated by neo-liberal and neo-conservative regimes, themselves willing agents of market forces, there is now the risk, eloquently stated by Bernard Williams, “that the whole humanistic enterprise of trying to understand ourselves is coming to seem peculiar . . . to a point at which any more reflective enquiry may come to seem unnecessary and archaic, something that is best preserved as part of the heritage industry.”<sup>18</sup>

The risk is such that philosophy cannot afford to take its own future for granted: it is as endangered as any other of the humanities so long as it identifies with them. The more philosophy identifies with the lifeworld, and with the merely human, the more it is endangered. But the more philosophy identifies with the merely human, the more able it is to respond to what threatens the human. This does not mean rejecting science, for that would be like those of our colleagues, the majority of our colleagues, who reject the humanities and identify the task

of philosophy with the task of the sciences. What we need is to work with those in the sciences who are also dissatisfied with the restrictive ontology of naturalism, and who would like to create with us a *counter-science of the human*. While it is true that philosophy cannot provide “generally binding directives concerning the meaning of life,”<sup>19</sup> as one of the humanities it can contribute to disclosing *the life of meaning*, human meaning, upon which we depend to make sense of things and ourselves.

### PART III

#### *Towards a Counter Science of the Human: The Concept of the Person*

In a fallibilistic spirit, without beginning from ahistorical or essentialist premises, just what can we say is distinctive (but necessarily exclusive) to human forms of life? And what normative implications could we derive from the unavoidably tenuous and contestable attempt to state what it is? A number of philosophers, e.g., Harry Frankfurt, Charles Taylor, Stanley Cavell, Wilfrid Sellars, and Ernst Tugendhat, among others, have focused on the concept of the person as a key to what is distinctive to human forms of life. Departing from the empiricist tradition for which being a person requires only continuous consciousness and the possession of a body in which it is housed, they propose a non-reductive concept of the person as a being for whom things matter, and matter in a peculiarly human way.

Once “mattering” displaces “consciousness” as the key criterion for personal identity, it is no longer easy to assimilate human beings to living machines, to things that think, for consciousness is no longer primary.<sup>20</sup> But it is *easier* to think about the connection between the concept of the person and what it means to be a human being in a new way, free from anti-humanist skepticism and dogmatic naturalism. As Harry Frankfurt pointed out, the empiricist conception of the person which dominates Anglo-American philosophy to this day, not only diminishes the philosophical vocabulary we need for making sense of persons, it is incapable of grasping the intimate connection between what it is to be a person and what it is to be a human being:

It might have been expected that no problem would be of more central and persistent concern to philosophers than that of understanding what we ourselves essentially are. Yet this problem is so generally neglected that it has been possible to make off with its very name almost without being noticed and evidently, without evoking any widespread feeling of loss.<sup>21</sup>

It is a very short walk indeed from the empiricist/naturalist conception of the person to the one presumed by transhumanism’s proponents. Consider the neo-Humean view of the transhumanist bioethicist James Hughes. Hughes effectively arrived at Hume’s conclusions about the fictional status of the self and of consciousness, not through philosophical thought experiments but “brain research.” Hughes does not entertain even the remotest doubt that the premises of both inquiries are wrong to begin with. This makes his dreamy speculations all the wobblier for remaining conceptually dependent on the very same picture of the person, for which consciousness is primary:

Despite our every instinct to the contrary, there is one thing that consciousness is not: some entity deep inside the brain that corresponds to the ‘self,’ some kernel of awareness that runs the show, as the ‘man behind the curtain’ manipulated the illusion...in *The Wizard of Oz*. After more than a century of looking for it, brain researchers have long since concluded that there is no conceivable place for such a self to be located in the physical brain, and that it simply doesn’t exist.

Just as technology drives us to clarify that we value continuous, discrete self-aware persons more than the biological platforms they come on, so it will also force us to acknowledge that continuous, discrete personhood is a fiction.

Neuroremediation technology and brain-computer interfaces will erode the apparent boundaries and continuity of the self, and the autonomy of the individual and her decisions.

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Threats to the self will develop in many areas. Our control over the brain will slowly make clear that cognition, memory and personal identity are actually many processes that can be disaggregated. We will have increasing control over our own personalities and memories. Full nanorobotic replication of the mental process opens the possibility of identity cloning, distributing one's identity over multiple platforms, [the] sharing of mental components with others, and the merging of several individuals into one identity.<sup>22</sup>

One can only wonder at the motivation that lies behind these speculations. It is sufficiently obvious, however, that the wish that wants to come true here is for a disembodied form of existence, central to the image of the human in Descartes and empiricism. As “ghosts” in ever-substitutable “shells,” happily downloading our “consciousness” across multiple platforms, freed from the prison of our “biological platforms,” we will be as little children again, arranging and re-arranging our personal identities as we once arranged and re-arranged our Lego blocks.

But what if personal identity is not in the head, not in the brain, and not something that can be extracted from the life history of an individual, rendered discrete, and subject to manipulable processes as is any mere “object”? What if personal identity is constituted in, and sustained through, our relations with others, such that were we to erase our relations with our significant others we would also erase the conditions of our self-intelligibility? As it turns out, this erasure, motivated by the wish for painless disembodied existence, is precisely what is experimentally dramatized in the “science fiction” film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, a far more philosophically sophisticated meditation on personal identity than is found in most of the contemporary literature on the topic.

So who is dealing in science fiction? we might ask. Indeed, if philosophers had not given up their interest in the question of what it means to be a human being they would have noticed that the future written about by the great science fiction writers from Philip K. Dick to William Gibson is not anything like the “utopian” future imagined by the transhumanists. The great science fiction writers transform the under-complex and naïve utopian dreams of the transhumanists into dark, unsettling dystopias, to give us pause, to make us more circumspect about the future toward which we are being pulled, and the kind of beings we are becoming.

It is not at all the case that the “biologists and engineers” to whom Habermas referred are intoxicated by science fiction, since intoxication is not what is being offered by this genre of fiction. Rather, they are intoxicated by the potential power—material, symbolic, and economic—of the new technologies to release us from the pain of embodiment. They are intoxicated by an old dream, an Enlightenment dream, perhaps, of complete dominion and mastery over nature, through which humans would be finally liberated from nature, once and for all. Perhaps, we could call this one of the *fictions of science*, at least this particular strain of science, captive to a naturalistic ontology whose “unconscious” fantasy life is the corollary of its reductive view of the person.

Habermas, to his great credit, has been keenly sensitive to the way in which the *naturalisation of the mind* that underlies these transhumanist fantasies and the research programmes from which they arise is co-extensive with the *desocialisation of the person*. As soon as we subsume our description of persons into the “extensional concepts of physics, neurophysiology, or evolutionary psychology,”<sup>23</sup> we effectively desocialize the person, removing the person from the very context, the context of a shared form of life, from which the concept gets its sense and only in which it can be meaningfully applied. Put another way: there are no *second persons* in the transhumanist/naturalist ontology, only first persons. It is a thoroughly fictional (and conceptually incoherent) world of *I*s without *thou*'s—not a world in which persons “may call upon one another to account for themselves,”<sup>24</sup> persons before whom we disclose and justify ourselves. And the site of all this is the *everyday* world in which we encounter one another as second persons:

Understanding the yes or no of the other, the contestable statements we owe and expect from one another, is bound up with this attitude toward second persons. The awareness of authorship implying

accountability is the core of our self-understanding, disclosed only to the perspective of a participant, but eluding revisionary scientific description. The scientific belief in a science which will not only supplement, but *replace* the self-understanding of actors as persons is not science, but bad philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, a lot of bad science follows from bad philosophy. In this case, what they both have in common is the wish to escape the intersubjective conditions of human forms of life. It is as if they both begin from the same premise famously uttered in Sartre's play, *No Exit*: "Hell is other people." And from this premise they arrive at the conclusion that Heaven would mean *no* others, no others who would make demands on us, who would demand we justify ourselves; no others who would challenge us, resist and undermine us, who would stand in our way, and oppress us. Well, yes, Hell is other people, *but Heaven is too*.<sup>26</sup> It would seem that the one does not come without the other, for that is what it is to live under the enabling and disabling constraints of a human form of life.

In his quasi-Hegelian vision of human morality, Habermas partially captures the complex intersubjective conditions from which it arises. These are conditions of finitude, we might say, that Habermas acknowledges in his description of human incompleteness and human interdependence:

I conceive of moral behavior as a constructive response to the dependencies rooted in the incompleteness of our organic makeup and in the persistent frailty (most felt in the phases of childhood, illness, and old age) of our bodily existence. Normative regulation of interpersonal relations may be seen as a porous shell protecting a vulnerable body, and the person incorporated in this body, from the contingencies they are exposed to. Moral rules are fragile constructions protecting *both* the *physis* from bodily injuries and the person from inner or symbolical injuries. Subjectivity, being what makes the human body a soul-possessing receptacle of the spirit, is itself constituted through intersubjective relations to others... This dependency on the other explains why one can be hurt by the other. The person is most exposed to, and least protected from, injuries in the very relations which she is most dependent on for the maintenance of her integrity—for example, when giving herself to a partner in an intimate relationship.<sup>27</sup>

Although Habermas did not intend it to be taken this way, it is easy enough for the transhumanist to read his eloquent expression of the conditions of human life from which this idea of morality springs, not as an explanation of how such moral consciousness emerges but as a *justification* of the transhumanist desire to escape these previously inescapable conditions of merely *human* life, conditions that are now construed as the avoidable contingencies of our inherited biology. Thus, the endpoint upon which these new technologies are expected to converge would involve the obsolescence of the very morality with which Habermas hopes to anchor a response to the threat they pose.

Does that mean he has underestimated the challenge they pose? Perhaps. But the real issue here is not whether such a life as the transhumanists imagine is a practical, livable possibility for beings like us; but, rather, whether beings like us can accept the destructive consequences of sleepwalking our way into a future in which this kind of life is all that life comes to mean. I am by no means sure that an alternative, anti-Cartesian, anti-empiricist conception of the person can offer normative and practical guidance for coping with increasing challenges to our inherited views of human being. If we are to respond effectively, we will need more than one source of resistance to the technological transformation of human being into a being that seeks its satisfaction only in the total transcendence from or complete annihilation of the conditions under which we come to see ourselves and others as *human* beings.

*Towards a Counter Science of the Human: Intercorporeality*

If the concept of the person comprises one source of resistance, one battleground on which competing visions of human being and human possibility are to confront one another, then the concept of human embodiment comprises another. Of course, the two sources of resistance, these two battlegrounds over the future of

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the human, are deeply interconnected. The Cartesian/empiricist conception of the person is inherently disembodied, aspiring to a condition in which the vulnerable human body is inessential to the identity of the human person.

Just how essential to being human are our bodies? Enthusiasts of information technologies and biotechnologies like Kurzweil believe that these technologies will soon allow us to transcend just about all limitations imposed on us by the natural conditions of human embodiment. Whether this is achieved through genetic enhancement or by computerizing the body (e.g. by turning it into a wireless network), the success of this endeavour will confirm the belief that we can get along just fine without our bodies. Not just fine, in fact; better than fine.

This assumption is so deeply anchored in the background understanding of our culture that a great deal of energy and a great deal of ingenuity is required to put it in question. Drawing upon empirical research and the phenomenological studies of Merleau-Ponty, Hubert Dreyfus claims that our sense-making capacities and our capacities for learning arise from the conditions of our embodiment, which he calls *intercorporeality*. I find this term particularly useful, since it makes perspicuous the complementary relation between the conditions of human intersubjectivity and the conditions of human embodiment.

Our philosophical view of human agency is of course shaped by whether we regard ourselves as *having* a body or *being* a body. The more we regard ourselves as having a body rather than being a body, the less concerned we will be about the possible self-instrumentalisation of our bodies that seems to be an inexorable consequence of current technological developments. We will also be less concerned with the imminent fusion of the technologically manufactured and the naturally grown.

This hybrid fusion of the human and artificial (making us 'part biological, part mechanical, part electronic') is given its most provocative contemporary expression in the figure of the 'cyborg', some version of which has captured the intellectual imagination of scientists (Gregory Stock, Lee Silver) and cultural theorists (Donna Haraway) as well as the producers and consumers of popular culture (e.g., Japanese anime). However, the academic exponents of hybridity and cyborg existence in contemporary technology studies and cultural studies fail to address the question of whether we can actually function as agents if we cannot experience some sense of ourselves as embodied, and experience some sense of intercorporeality. That sense is hard to develop if we regard our bodies as possessions, as something that we contingently have, not as something essential to our identity.

Habermas has posed the question of whether the experience of human freedom presupposes the recognition that the origin of human life is not at our disposal. Following Hannah Arendt, he asks whether being able to ascribe our words and actions to our own agency requires that our coming into the world, the beginning of our lives, is not an event at our technological disposal. With the concept of 'natality', central to her theory of action and freedom, Arendt attempted to address this question. She claimed that with the birth of each human child it is not just one more life that begins but a *new* life. The concept of 'natality' bridges the potential new beginning that accompanies each human birth with the self-understanding of human agents as the initiators of their words and actions, as beings capable of instituting new beginnings.

So what we have here is a question that touches on our basic self-understanding as agents: Is embodiment a condition of human agency or is it inessential to agency? Of course, this question is hardly new, having been posed in various ways since classical antiquity and in ways more familiar to us since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. But once again, the pace and scope of developments in information technology and biotechnology give it an inescapable urgency and immediacy. If there is to be a counter-science of the human, it will need the normative and conceptual resources of the concepts of the person, intersubjectivity, and intercorporeality.

## PART IV

*Challenging Technology through Democratic Processes of Public Reflection*

To prevent any misunderstanding, I am not of the view that we can give final or definitive answers to the question of what it means to be a human being; that cannot be the goal of this exercise in public reflection. The goal is publicly to thematise the normative significance of the question, and to sustain our engagement with it, reflecting on the answer our technological civilization is *already* giving to it so that we may enlarge our understanding of the implications of living with this or any other definitive answer to it.

As things now stand, the question of the kind of future we as a species wish to have for ourselves is being decided without consultation or consent. For there to be meaningful public debate about the kind of future we want for ourselves at least two conditions would have to be met. First, we need to insure that democratically organized processes of public reflection can take place in both official and unofficial public spheres, maximising the opportunities for citizens to speak and be heard, to listen and learn. Citizens do not usually begin a process of public reflection as already well-informed citizens, so it requires just such public reflection to create ideally informed public participation. It is surely the case that each and every one of us already has some idea of what it means to be a human being, operative in our lives as a background understanding, regardless of its origin. And just as surely there will not be agreement about what it means to be human—or what it should mean. But that, as I have already stated, is not the point of this exercise in public reflection. The point is to see what is collectively at stake when one particular conception, thus far, surreptitiously, becomes the basis upon which is undertaken a profound and irreversible transformation of human being; especially one that might constitute a crime “against the essence itself of humanity, against an idea, an essence, a figure of the human race, represented this time by a countless number of beings and generations to come.” Rather than seeking to settle the issue of what it means, definitively, to be a human being, we would be testing the implications of what it means to live according to this or that conception; and, more importantly, to resist attempts to make any one conception the absolute conception, erasing the plurality of conceptions that reflect (and preserve) human plurality.

Second—and this is far more challenging—we need to develop, and to comfortably speak, evaluative languages not already structured by the presuppositions of the language of progress, which does not allow us to be critical of progress without appearing to be politically and morally conservative, and so, without appearing to be against science and against reason. The sources for such languages lie in richer and more complex views of what it is to be human, languages that do not sell the human short, or decide in advance the question of the human, foreclosing the intelligibility of other conceptions of the human. Most certainly we do not want to be restricted to languages which naturalize the mind as they desocialise the person. What we need, to use Charles Taylor’s terms, are languages of “strong evaluation” and “perspicuous contrast,” languages that already incorporate and draw upon conceptions of the human good, conceptions they seek to make explicit rather than efface. Any genuine public debate about this question will be one into which each participant enters already, unavoidably guided by assumptions about what it means to be a human being. Furthermore, each participant speaking in their respective language of evaluation will also enter the hermeneutic circle, constrained and enabled to move back and forth, dialectically, dialogically, between and amongst the different conceptions of what it is to be human. Conducted in this way under these conditions, a democratisation and pluralisation of conceptions of the human could be achieved, resisting thereby the absolutisation of any one conception.

It goes without saying that we are not accustomed to engaging in such debate with our fellow citizens, anymore than we are accustomed to speaking in a language of strong evaluation and perspicuous contrast when we debate such difficult issues. This is why I am not only concerned with the question of how to organise the requisite processes of public reflection, but also the question of which languages of public reflection are the most appropriate for dealing with issues of this kind. If we are prepared to acknowledge cultural pluralism, and thereby the existence of plural languages for engaging in public reflection, then we will also be prepared

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to acknowledge just how fateful is our choice of evaluative language when the question of the future of human being is at stake.

Democracy is not only a political system—a set of normative rules, and legal and political institutions, constituted in accord with those rules. It is an ideal, an aspiration, really, intimately connected to and dependent upon a picture of what it is to be human—of what it is a human should be to be fully human (whatever that might mean). If we become more aware that in living out the practices of our form of life we are also living out a certain idea or ideas of what it is to be a human being, we will see more clearly that, whether we like it or not, intend it or not, we are fatefully defining what it is to be human *through* our practices. When we realize just what our practices are doing, we will be far more ready to respond to technology's challenge to democracy. We may even learn the value of keeping open the question of what it means to be a human being; preserving its openness allows us more freely to frame alternatives to what heretofore seemed like its only possible answer. This is not a question we were meant to answer, but, rather, a question to which we must remain answerable<sup>28</sup> ■

NOTES

1. Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 207-08. *Ibid.*, 209.
2. Michael Sandel, "The Case against Perfection" *The Atlantic*, April, 2004.
3. Francis Fukuyama, "Transhumanism" *Foreign Policy* 144, special issue on "The World's Most Dangerous Ideas," (2004), 42-43.
4. Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*. New York: Penguin, 2000, 4.
5. Cited in Bill McKibben, *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*. New York: Henry Holt, 2003, 68. Like many other of the futurist gurus of the new technologies, Brooks is not interested in the question of how their development will not only exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities, but also create a new kind altogether: biomechanical inequalities!
6. *Ibid.*, 68.
7. Bill Joy, "Why the Future doesn't Need Us" *Wired*, 8:04, April, 2000 (<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy.html>) The fact that Joy published this article in *Wired*, the bible of Silicon Valley, tells you to whom it was directly addressed.
8. Colin McGinn, "Hello Hal" *New York Times*, January 3, 1999.
9. Rodney Brooks, "The relationship between matter and life." *Nature* 409 (2001), 410.
10. Karha J and Topol EJ. The sad story of Vioxx, and what we should learn from it. *Cleveland Clinical Journal of Medicine* **71**:12 (2004), 933-939 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rofecoxib>)
11. Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*. Trans. Hella Beister and William Rehg. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, 19.
12. See Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.
13. Habermas, *Future of Human Nature*, 15.
14. *Ibid.*, 12.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 13.
17. Bernard Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*. Ed. A. W. Moore. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 180-199.
18. Habermas, *Justification and Application*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993, 75.
19. Charles Taylor, "The Concept of the Person" *Philosophical Papers. Volume 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 97-114.
20. Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 11-12. Not all that much has changed in the nearly four decades since this essay was first published in the *Journal of Philosophy*. The naturalistic, reductive naturalistic, conceptions of the person remains comfortably entrenched. For example, see this recent entry on personal identity in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal>.
21. James Hughes, "The Death of Death," <http://icet.org/index.php/IEET/more/hughes20040210/>
22. Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 107.

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23. *Ibid.*, 108.

24. *Ibid.*, 107-108.

25. I am now writing a paper with this very title, in which I will be developing this more complex conception of the intersubjective conditions of human life.

26. Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 33-34.

27. I want to thank Robert Sinnerbrink and Matheson Russell for kindly inviting me to give the keynote address at the 2008 meeting of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy, on which this revised paper is based.

## THE BLUSHING MACHINE: ANIMAL SHAME AND TECHNOLOGICAL LIFE

David Wills

At the very end of his 1997 conference suite on the animal, now published as *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, on its last page, Jacques Derrida, very much alive, indeed 'live,' extemporizing after time has run out for any more formal address, speaks of dying: "I can die, or simply leave the room" (Derrida, 160).<sup>1</sup>

The immediate context of his words—if we can presume to know what is meant by that, or any of the other terms I've already presupposed in what I have just said—is a reference to what Heidegger says about the capacity of *Dasein*, in contradistinction to the animal, to let be, exist, or live. The animal supposedly doesn't: "If it is the case that the animal does not comport itself toward beings as such, then behaviour involves no *letting-be* of beings as such," Heidegger writes in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.<sup>2</sup> But Derrida wants to know whether the contrary can in fact be claimed for *Dasein*. Does *Dasein* indeed let be to the extent of being radically absent from, dead with respect to any 'vital design' whose mobilization would impinge upon another being? Quoting from Derrida now: "can one free the relation of *Dasein* (not to say 'man') to beings from every living, utilitarian, perspective-making project, from every vital design, such that man himself could 'let the being be'?" And he continues: "To relate to the thing such as it is in itself [his example is now the sun]—supposing that it were possible—means apprehending it such as it is, such as it would be even if I weren't there. I can die or simply leave the room; I know that it will be what it is and will remain what it is. That is why death is such an important demarcation line; it is starting from mortality and from the possibility of being dead that one can let things be such as they are, in my absence, in a way, and my presence is there only to reveal what the thing would be in my absence. So can the human do that, purely?" (Derrida, 160)

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Having said that, almost at the very end of the tape of the informal session on Heidegger that closed the 1997 Cerisy conference on his work, Derrida effectively left the room, died, and let his words be. So the question I want to begin by posing today concerns what form of life or being that text, and his utterance have, and what they can tell us in more general terms about living. To do that I'll start within a familiar conceptual framework—about which Derrida taught us a great deal—that surrounds the text, its testamentary status as remainder or *restance*, as something that lives on in ways that are sometimes common knowledge and sometimes totally counterintuitive. But in using some of those ideas, familiar at least to readers of Derrida, as my background, I shall be orienting things toward a different point of inquiry, discussion or debate, namely the simple but insoluble question of what it is to live, of what lives, a question that Derrida persistently returned to in later work, but which we would have to recognize as being posed from the very beginning of his thinking.

I said that in July 1997 Derrida spoke, left the room, and died. I don't think I have the time here to unpack that statement in all its complexity, but certain points can easily be made. In summer 1997 Derrida was six years away from the diagnosis of the cancer that would carry him off. He was celebrating his 67<sup>th</sup> birthday, to all intents and purposes in good health, and indeed, he was to survive yet another Cerisy *décade* devoted to him five years after this one on "The Autobiographical Animal."<sup>3</sup> However much he thought, lectured, indeed obsessed about dying, however much it had to happen, its semiophysiological horizon was some way off. Its time remained necessary yet unanticipatable. As a result, the taperecording of his words from that July session remained unexposed. Perhaps 75-100 people heard him then, and I imagine only a very small handful subsequently listened to the tape. Derrida himself, I feel sure, never listened to it again. Whenever I pestered him for the full manuscript of his text on the animal he systematically replied that the Heidegger section needed a great deal of work and he didn't know when he would find the time to get back to it. We now know that he didn't. And when the question of the posthumous publication of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* was raised, the status of the final chapter remained a serious limiting factor. So there is both the naïve and serious matter, regarding the words I am basing my discussion on, of authority, that precisely of an author. Naïve because a whole belle-lettrist tradition of textual genesis, revived most notably today in certain analyses that call themselves historicist, relies on the possibility of assigning a textual origin according to principles whose inspiration remains decidedly creationist. Serious however, because in spite of that naïve tradition, one cannot simply ignore the distinctions between, on the one hand, the three chapters of *The Animal that Therefore I Am* that were written and delivered in formal lecture sessions (and two of which were published during Derrida's lifetime), and, on the other, the final chapter. Nor can one ignore Derrida's intention to rework that chapter and produce a book that may well have had a quite different form from that of the posthumous volume. Derrida was careful to remind us that the death of the author was in many ways too reductive a concept, and that intention could never disappear from the field of differentiated utterances; it simply could no longer be presumed to control that field.

One of the operative distinctions in the text of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that we now have is thus the structural difference between those portions that Derrida prepared in written form, even if the writing was designed for *viva voce* address, and the transcribed taperecording that is the final chapter, unwritten but made 'writing' thanks to phonographic technology; between two types of orality that are also two types of writing. Writing and voice are divided, in more ways than one. Those of us who were familiar with the voice of Derrida hear that voice—its tone and timbre, its humor and pathos—in both the formal (written) portions of the extended Cerisy lecture and the informal (transcribed) portion. And whether it is a case of reading or listening, it is clear that the formal portion subdivides into various levels of formality (and informality), just as the informal portion divides into various levels of informality (and formality). Both contain a whole differential terrain of discursive registers within which any simple opposition between formal and informal becomes impossible to sustain. That would be the case, in fact, with any text: there cannot be any pure discursive homogeneity, any absolutely seamless equilibrium to the utterance. If there were, one could never even raise one's voice sufficient to utter anything at all. Those are all reasons why Derrida called all utterances 'writing', why he considered that anything that self-extended sufficiently to leave a trace consists of an uneven, ruptured and heterogeneous mark or *trait*.

Within the differential terrain of discursive registers that constitutes the final chapter of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the specific utterance “I can die, or simply leave the room,” is similarly hard to classify, but let’s try nevertheless. It could easily be heard functioning on the same level as various formulations from the earlier chapters, such as these: “I dreamed for a long time,” or “I love to watch them sleep” (Derrida, 62). It is arguably less formal, as well as much more homogeneous, than this: “the expression ‘I am living (that is to say as an animal) therefore I am’ is assured of no philosophical certitude” (Derrida, 86); and more formal than this: “caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment” (Derrida, 4).

The question of the utterance’s formality overlaps at a certain point with its performative status. “I can die, or simply leave the room” seems on the face of it to be uncomplicatedly constative, informing us of a matter of fact, or at least the possibility of that fact. Yet it performs in two obvious ways. In the first place, it has the rhetorical force of an example, an instantiation of “my not being there,” as indicated by the context, which I’ll here repeat: “To relate to the thing such as it is in itself...means apprehending it such as it is, such as it would be even if I weren’t there. I can die or simply leave the room.” One can almost hear “for example” being uttered between “even if I weren’t there” and “I can die, etc.” In that respect some other utterance could as well serve in its place—“I can be vaporized, or simply go out of perceptual reach”—which means that the precise information contained in the utterance is replaceable and hence inessential, which deprives it of its constative assurance. And that is not just because the semantic field of “my not being there” is broad enough to allow various synonymous formulations, but more precisely because of the rupture in the discursive surface that takes place at the end of the preceding sentence. For it is not only *for example* that one can hear inserted in the sentence break, signaling the opening of a paradigmatic set and the selection of two possibilities from within that set, so that we hear it like this: *even if I weren’t there could mean, for example, something as anodyne as leaving the room or something as absolute as death*. One can hear also in “I can die” the rhetorical effect of an apostrophe, something like this: “To relate to the thing such as it is in itself...means apprehending it such as it is, such as it would be even if I weren’t there. *Now listen carefully and be sure to understand the full consequence of that: I can die,*” as if Derrida were using his public philosophical discourse to convey a more or less private message, reminding whomever wanted to receive it as a type of warning that he wasn’t going to be around forever.

“I can die” is a performative utterance for a second reason, which will lead us to abandon this meager attempt to classify its status, its register or tone of voice (and as I have already suggested, the possibilities of hearing in it neutrality, irony, cynicism, anxiety, melancholy, and so on, constitute a whole other taxonomic cluster). That reason is the following, as explained early in chapter 1 of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, where Derrida recounts how it is, and how *one is*, indeed how *therefore I am* when I find myself naked before the eyes of my cat in the morning. In accordance with his gesture of refusing the massive totalization of millions of animal species that inheres in the opposition human/animal, Derrida wants the cat that looks at him in his animal nakedness and human shame to be recognized as “*this* irreplaceable living being...an existence that refuses to be conceptualized.” However, in so doing, he cannot avoid infecting the cat with mortality: “a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also, and that disappearance, from this moment to that...is announced each time that...one of us leaves the room” (Derrida, 9). In other words, not only does the subject who says “I can die” affirm its mortality, but so does the cat recognized as a singular existence, for example by being given a name; he/she/it receives that name and receives the status of a singular irreplaceable existence as the announcement of his/her/its own death. Mortality is performed each time one of us leaves the room, but it is also performed with each and every utterance, indeed by every means by which the singular existence of each of us animals is affirmed. Beginning, especially, therefore, when one of us says ‘I.’ Before adding “can die or simply leave the room,” ‘I’ have already performed the necessary possibility of my death; I have already left life and the room to the extent of opening the structure of my leaving. Leaving or dying is no longer just something to come in an unpredictable future, but something that already infects the present of my utterance. So the “I can die, or simply leave the room” of the final chapter of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* comes to be riven by the abyssal effect of a performance of mortality, and the announcement of death: *I, who not only can die, but who is dying at least a little by saying ‘I, can die,*

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*or simply leave the room, which is another way of dying.*

Dying, indeed, is explicitly at stake in the next paragraph where Derrida continues, reinforcing the sense of shame in terms that I'll return to:

But I must immediately emphasize the fact that this shame that is ashamed of itself is more intense when I am not alone with the pussycat in the room. Then I am no longer sure before whom I am so numbed with shame...In such moments, on the edge of the thing, in the imminence of the best or the worst, when anything can happen, when *I can die* of shame or pleasure, I no longer know in whose or in what direction to throw myself. (Derrida, 9-10, my emphasis)

"Beyond" the instability of the discursive register, therefore, beyond the performance of the example, and the abyss of mortality and death, there also exists this uncanny repetition, in the opening pages of Derrida's text, of what is stated on its final page: *one of us can leave the room and I can die* ("[its] disappearance is announced each time that one of us leaves the room...In such moments...I can die of shame or pleasure"). Now that might simply suggest something as banal as a rhetorical tic whereby leaving the room is Derrida's everyday lifetime figure for dying. On the other hand, it necessarily reminds us of what functions as the basis of the whole performative apparatus I have been describing, namely the iterability of the utterance. And it is that disseminative citationality, the utterance's potential for being cited in a radically different context, that finally ruins the possibility of ascribing to the sentence "I can die, or simply leave the room" anything like taxonomic exactitude.

Now a repetition is not the same as iterability, which is the structure of repeatability that invades even the supposed single utterance. Similarly, it is not the chance of this fragmented repetition that loosens the utterance "I can die" from its moorings in the way I have described. Still, the fact of "I can die" being uttered twice, each time in its own context, necessarily creates an echo that has each instance heard in the other, and brings the perhaps casual remark of Derrida's improvised sketch of the final chapter back to the terms being developed in and from the beginning of his address, where the operative theme is not, as at the end, the letting-be that *Dasein* is supposedly capable of whereas the animal is not, but rather the sense of nakedness and concomitant shame specific to the human. "*In my more intense shame,*" Derrida writes, "*on the edge of the thing, I can die of shame or pleasure.*"

Furthermore, the repetition of the syntagm "I can die" enacts a more specific function of iterability, namely its technology or automaticity. Once an utterance is severed from its producer to the extent of being repeated in quite diverse contexts, such as is the case here, capable of being isolated for the simple effect of the repetition itself by being extracted from the larger syntagmatic chain or flow that surrounds and neutralizes it, then language begins to sound or look like a machine at work. It suddenly has inscribed within it a lifeless automatism, finds itself reduced to the smaller or larger syntagmatic elements that we know it to be constituted of: at base a small set of phonemes whose permutations are repeated ad infinitum, combining here to form the clause "I can die" like a tautological mantra no longer spoken by a Derrida referring either to how to really let things be or how intense his shame is, but instead intoned by the linguistic technology itself. By intoning "I can die," the linguistic machine would perhaps be repeating something Derrida wrote a long time ago, in "Freud and the Scene of Writing:" "The machine is dead. It is death. Not because we risk death in playing with machines, but because the origin of machines is the relation to death;"<sup>4</sup> or perhaps, conversely, the linguistic machine would be declaring its mortality in order precisely to give itself a type of life, the type of life we might imagine to animate the machines we call biotechnologies. In one case, then, a lifeless origin, in the other, no clear indication of where or when it will grind to a halt.

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"I can die" echoes across the far from empty space of opening and closing pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. It echoes, and as it were *lives*, something of an animal of an utterance, even if it be a technological animal. If I am paying so much attention to the utterance here it is in the first place because the principal

ethical exhortation of Derrida's book is that we attend to the singularity and irreplaceability of whatever lives. Following that, the sentence also echoes through the question that Derrida raises, and critiques more than once, concerning philosophy's habit of again dividing between the human and every other animal species, this time according to a difference between reaction and response. Animals react, so the habit goes, whereas humans respond. Derrida finds that presumption repeated from Descartes, for whom a machine that "had the outward shape of a monkey or of some other animal" or that resembled "our bodies and imitated our actions as closely as possible for all practical purposes" might be able to utter words and even cry out that you are hurting it, "but it is not conceivable that such a machine should...give an appropriately meaningful answer [*répondre*] to whatever is said in its presence, as the dullest of men can do;"<sup>5</sup> to Lacan, for whom a dancing bee may well accurately indicate to its fellows exactly where the honey is to be found but "its message remains fixed in its function as a relay of the action, from which no subject detaches it as a symbol of communication itself."<sup>6</sup>

The question of a recontextualized "I can die" is therefore also the question of reaction versus response. Does one version or context of the utterance react or respond to the other? I seemed to begin to answer that question in suggesting that there is more to the repetition than a simple repetition, and that what exceeds repetition does not reduce to the manipulation of a canny reader extracting three words from one context and relating them to another context any more than it reduces to the conscious or unconscious intent of an author prompting such a reader. The "I can die" of page 160 is not, to use Lacan's term from the passage just cited, simply a relay of what was said on page 10. The very principle of linguistic iteration, all by itself and before we come to accept a concept or principle of iterability, would seem to be posited on the basis of a type of response. Every time we read or hear a repetition in language, beginning with an alliteration, assonance or rhyme, and going all the way to rhetorical emphases and thematic motifs, we receive them as the text's responding to itself and so animating or livening itself, calling and responding to itself as though it were conversing with, singing or orating to itself. What iterability adds to that idea, transforming it in the process, as I have also argued, is to nevertheless insist on an irreducible automatism within such repeatability, rewriting what I have just called language's self-*response* as an auto*spontaneity*—language functioning *sua sponte*, of its own accord—which is a mode of the automotricity or autokinesis that we understand to be at work in every life form. Iterability means that language moves itself beyond itself at its very origin; that such movement or auto-displacement, such a rupture within the intact closed circuit of non-meaning, is what produces sense and gives to language its force of signification.

Now that is not to say that language is the same form of life as a protozoon on the one hand or a human being on the other, or that it lives in the same way as any of the millions of life forms that exist between the two. It is to insist, again, that criteria of distinction, such as react-ability or respons-ability, founder as means to divide animal from human once the repeatability of iterability is discovered disturbing the limits of one and the other. Derrida is astounded that "what never even crosses the mind of any of the thinkers...on the subject of response, from Descartes to Lacan, is the question of how an iterability that is essential to every response, and to the ideality of every response, can and cannot fail to introduce nonresponse, automatic reaction, mechanical reaction into the most alive, most 'authentic', and most responsible response" (Derrida, 112); or how a Lacan can ignore that "the logic of the unconscious is founded on a logic of repetition which...will always inscribe a destiny of iterability, hence some automaticity of the reaction in every response, however originary, free, critical [*décisive*] and a-reactional it might seem" (Derrida, 125).

The foundering of the reaction/response distinction as a means of separating human life from animal life also means a disturbance of the limits between life and so-called technological non-life. The idea of an autokinetic iterability insists on what Derrida explicitly called for in 1993 as part of the "bond" of a democracy to come, arguing that our dissatisfaction with the present state of the world also requires "at the same time, in the same gesture of thought, rethinking the limits between the human and the animal, the human and the natural, the human and the technical."<sup>7</sup> Much of Derrida's writing, especially in the last ten years of his life, was explicitly involved in that rethinking. It is the arc of a trajectory that connects the animal of 1997 to the wheel of *Rogues* (2002)<sup>8</sup> and the learning to live, finally, of the *Le Monde* interview from less than two months before his death.<sup>9</sup> But, as he was wont to insist, there had never been any other question for him. In *For What Tomorrow*, a series

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of interviews with Elisabeth Roudinesco from 2001, he begins his discussion of the ‘Politics of Difference’ by asking for a step to be taken back, reminding us that *differance* (with an ‘a’) was never about anything else than that rethinking: “What is universalizable about *differance* with regard to differences is that it allows one to think the process of differentiation beyond every kind of limit: whether it is a matter of cultural, national, linguistic, or even human limits. There is *differance* (with an ‘a’) as soon as there is a living trace, a relation of life/death or presence/absence.”<sup>10</sup> There is *differance* as soon as there is a living trace, but as soon as there is *differance* or the trace, then the question of what lives, how it lives, or what life is, is irrevocably posed and interminably problematized. The trace of or as *differance* is a strange and complicated life form—if we can call it that—both a remainder, as with a footprint, of something that self-extends in autokinetic spontaneity, and an inanimate inscription such as could be stamped by a machine; both the chance mark whose producer is dead, lost, unidentifiable and irretrievable, and the minimal impulse that gives rise at the origin to the origin of all things. Without it, there could be nothing like what we call life; because of it, what we call life has from the beginning left something we would normally call dead behind it.

One would be hardpressed to decide, on that basis, which of the two versions of “I can die” has the most life in it: the earlier, formal, more ‘accidental’ version, which, on the surface, seems to have less of an authorial investment, less rhetorical force, and instead appears to have detachment inscribed within it and is as a result already living free of its source? or the later, vernacular, exemplary version, which, for being replete with familiar overtones—recognizable to a greater or lesser extent depending on the level of one’s familiarity—yawns like an emotive chasm in the wake of his disappearance and so speaks its own life as no less precarious than tenacious? But in each case the life of the utterance would be derived precisely from the radical letting-be of a type of death, a letting-be that is a letting-function-on-its-own, under its own steam as we say, in a type of technological automaticity.

Before or beyond anything else, therefore, it is that type of automatic self-generation of “I can die” that operates across the pages of Derrida’s text as the very structure, or force perhaps, that allows for the other forms of echo that one can hear in it. We can therefore recast what we were saying at the beginning about hearing the tone of Derrida’s voice. Before hearing any reminiscent voice of, for example, a departed friend or colleague, one hears, by definition, the death that attaches itself to every utterance the moment it leaves the mouth of its producer. The voice of Derrida that can be heard, with one tone in the formal lecture of chapter 1, another tone in the informal presentation of chapter 4, is necessarily overlaid with an affect or pathos that derives from its becoming the living voice of a dead man. And those effects make the text live on within a particular context of academic exchange and human friendship. But that form of living on, however emotive it be, is a function of the general structure of automatic iterability and of the machine of death at work in every sign whatsoever.

Hence this *retroversal* echo, in the early pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, of the seemingly offhand formulation of its last page, brings us thick into the nexus of animal life, death, and putatively inanimate technology. What mobilizes that nexus, its motor if you like, is shame, and what produces shame, its generator, is nakedness. In this Cerisy lecture, nakedness is Derrida’s subject, from the very beginning. First words: “In the beginning, I would like to entrust myself to words that, were it possible, would be naked. Naked in the first place—but this is in order to announce already that I plan to speak endlessly of nudity” (Derrida, 1). We aren’t made aware of our nakedness by every single protozoon, and not even necessarily by a snake encountered in a garden; but we are ashamed, as Derrida explains in the paragraphs where leaving the room and dying come up, in front of an animal who, by looking at us, tells us that he or she knows that we know that naked we all came into the world and naked we shall return, on the basis of which knowledge, once it becomes our own, we take that animal as a companion, name, feed, in some cases clothe, shelter, and eventually bury it.

Shame is precisely that complicated system of self-reflection that begins with consciousness of our nakedness. No animal knows it is naked. As Derrida says, it “is not naked because it is naked. It doesn’t feel its own nudity. There is no nudity ‘in nature’” (Derrida, 5). For the cat to tell us, by looking at us, that he or she knows that we know that we are naked, the cat would in fact have to be something of a snake. A real cat, not

having any idea about nakedness at all, not having such a concept, couldn't possibly tell us that. Nor, as the Genesis myth suggests, is consciousness of nakedness something that can arise spontaneously, as it were out of nature. Someone has to bring us to that point; someone, some animal, or some thing. Something *supernatural*. Imagine, after all, some prelapsarian and unadorned human animal taking a stroll through a pristine garden and deciding, on the basis of the good advice she seems to be getting, to think nakedness. She would have first to invent the concept out of whole cloth, not having any dialectical foundation for it, not knowing what nakedness was any more than non-nakedness. Which means inventing the concept *tout court*, to begin with, inventing the possibility of a dialectical opposition such as that between nakedness and non-nakedness where before there was only differential hirsuteness or pilosity, degrees of hair or fur. Presuming she got that far, however, she would have to clothe her non-nakedness in the concept of nakedness, to place nakedness like a covering over her originary nudity, which would require her at the same time to invent the concept of covering or clothing as a derivative of the concept of nakedness, itself, as I have just argued, a qualitative derivative leap from the state of the non-concept. No mean feat therefore; indeed a universal overturning to set in motion the dialectical conceptual apparatus itself, what we call knowledge. That sort of heavy industry or high technology is what we call the fall. Before we 'fall' into consciousness of nakedness, of good and evil, before we fall into shame and sin, nature has to have already fallen out of itself into non-nature, into a technology of conceptualization.

What shame therefore is, from this perspective, is the conceptual machinery itself, a machine set in motion by itself, always already on. Before being the automatism of blood rushing to the face, the pure life of spontaneous blush, shame is the originary technicity that is the origin of technology, for it is on the basis of it that we inaugurate the technological drive. Technology begins with a red face, hands covering the groin, a fig leaf quick please, better still sew me a loincloth but make it fast, and it only gets more complicated from there on: "Clothing derives from technics. We would therefore have to think shame and technicity together, as the same 'subject'" (Derrida, 5). To our shame and to our credit—try to hear those terms as neutrally as possible—the human reacts to knowledge of animal nakedness by developing for itself an infinitely expandable prosthetic technology, from clothes to cover that nakedness and shame all the way to, as Derrida will later emphasize, techniques of domestication and domination, agricultural industrialization, genetic and other experimentation, which finally risks adding up to something comparable to a genocidal technology of death to the animal (Derrida, 25-26).

Of course Derrida will also argue that shame and technology are no more pure dividing lines to distinguish the human on one side from the animal on the other, than are any of the other criteria to which philosophy has consistently had recourse in order to impose its reductive delineations. Can we rigorously determine, he asks, that the animal is deprived of language, clothing, laughter, mourning, boredom, deceit, music, hospitality, the gift, and so on (Derrida, 59-61). But more precisely, "if one takes into account...a seduction that is tenderly or violently appropriative, one can no longer dissociate the moment of sexual parade from an exhibition, or exhibition from a simulation, or simulation from a dissimulation, or the dissimulative ruse from some experience of nakedness, or nakedness from some type of modesty...or shame" (Derrida, 60). Thus it would be not only the human animal, but also many other animals, and potentially every sexed animal whose automotricity includes mating, that thereby defined itself as originally technological. Perhaps as soon as an animal no longer reproduces simply by, as it were, fucking whatever it bumps into, but by allowing itself to be seduced, to veer off track towards a mate, and even more obviously once it involves itself in any sort of mating game whatsoever, then that animal is clothing its habits in a type of technology; that mating becomes a technology, however natural we still might consider it to be. And no doubt the same could be said for any ruse whatsoever by which an animal does other essential things, such as obtain its food, however instinctual we might consider that to be.

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"I can die." Anyone can say that; everyone has to say it. As Derrida was suggesting following Heidegger, unless one says it, nothing can really be *as such*, which makes a being strangely beholden to the possibility of being dead, not in the sense of recognizing its own mortality but in the sense of inhabiting the structure of death that comes from every other being having turned its back on it, having died or left the room. That would mean that

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a being can only be once there exists what, in recent work, I have called dorsal space<sup>11</sup>; the space that opens once another being has turned its back, left the room, or died. A being *is*, indeed, by virtue of inhabiting that dorsal space, by being behind the being that has left it behind in order that it might be. It *is* in the space of the unknown, of what cannot be known, for presumptive knowledge about how a being is is precisely what prevents a being from being as it is. Heidegger, Derrida suggests, should have been able to expand his understanding of that to the extent of better questioning his assurance that “the animal does not comport itself toward beings as such.” Dorsal space, because it implies what is unknown, is also the space of surprise and of threat. In letting be by turning one’s back, leaving the room or dying, in declining to presume how a being is, one allows a being to invent what it is as something that precisely cannot be foreseen or controlled. It is the space of our relation—a necessarily ethical relation—to radical otherness such as that represented by the inanimate, functioning outside the realm of our dominant senses. For those reasons—and others that I don’t have time to go into now—I have argued that it is in dorsal space, where a being starts being a being, that there is technology. Specifically, where the human starts being the human, there is technology. For example, where *homo* becomes *erectus*, and so reorients the whole space of and relation to what is behind, exposing a different corporeal configuration and concentrating thereafter on the work of the hands resolutely understood as the definers and manipulators of the frontal. Which is also, Derrida suggests, where shame begins—at least that related to the genital organs, properly human shame therefore—in “the experience of holding oneself upright, of uprightness as erection in general in the process of hominization.”<sup>12</sup> Before the shame of exposing one’s sexual organs in particular there would be the shame of a general exposure in the upright stance, perhaps the shame of abandoning one’s animal past, but perhaps also the shame of vertical or erectile ambition, the shame of a contrived realignment of corporeal articulations, of a technologically enhanced biped refusing to accept the quadruped lot dealt by nature, the autobioengineering back in the beginning that still has us blushing to this day, on cue, whenever we are caught thinking we know what and how we are ■

NOTES

1. This and all parenthetical references are taken from Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Trans. David Wills. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
2. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, 253.
3. Cf. *La démocratie à venir: autour de Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. Paris: Galilée, 2004.  
Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing" *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 227.
4. René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*. Trans. Robert Stoothoff, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 139-40.
5. Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977, 85.
6. Jacques Derrida, "Nietzsche and the Machine" *Negotiations*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 241.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
8. Jacques Derrida and Jean Birnbaum, *Learning to Live Finally: the Last Interview*. New York: Melville House Publishing, 2007.
9. Jacques Derrida and Élisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow...: A Dialogue*. Trans. Jeff Fort. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, 21.
10. Cf. David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
11. Derrida, *Animal*, 61. I note Derrida's insistence on the frontality of nakedness and shame ("Nudity gets stripped to bare necessity only in that frontal exhibition" [11]). A longer discussion would be required to explain how the dorsal displaces at the same time as it recognizes the frontal, or how the face-to-face, particularly in Levinas, is articulated through dorsal effects; or how dorsality works precisely to counter the forgetting that, as Derrida recognizes in the same place, comes about as soon as the back is turned ("a cat that continues to see me, to watch me leave when I turn my back on it, a cat that, from that moment on...I therefore risk forgetting." *Ibid.*) See again *Dorsality*, especially chapter 2.

## TOWARD AN ETHICO-POLITICS OF THE POSTHUMAN: FOUCAULT AND MERLEAU-PONTY

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We live in an age where rapid developments in technologies and environmental catastrophes increasingly question the limits and meaning of the human and human “agency,” the inevitability of human “progress,” and the capacity of humanity to control its world. In response, there have emerged a number of different *ontological* ideas of the “posthuman.” These continue a critical history emerging from nineteenth century philosophies, such as those of Hegel and Nietzsche, where conceptual reconsiderations of human “animality,” critiques of the classical notion of human agency based in reason, free will, and/or conscious intentionality, and theoretical challenges to the classical subject-object culture-nature distinctions, combine to challenge conventional grounds for distinguishing the human from the non-human. Contemporary versions of these ontologies of the posthuman, such as in “actor’s network theory” (ANT), aim at giving the non-human some kind of “agency,” some say in opening new and more collective ways of thinking and living. The welcome consequence of this levelling out of human and non-human “life” is that it undermines the privilege afforded the human that has justified its dominance over everything else. A less welcome consequence is that we are left without the conventional basis of normativity underlying ethics and politics. It is this issue that this paper addresses.

If, in the wake of ontological definitions of the posthuman, “agency” is no longer viewed as the exclusive property of human beings with reason or “free will,” then these capacities no longer provide unquestioned grounds for attributing moral worth to an entity (e.g. human “dignity”), or the source of conscience, moral judgment, or responsibility. Hence, the question arises: on what basis can humans be said to be any more responsible than non-human life for justice or the future of the planet? Moreover, from a political perspective, some would argue that the same kind of levelling out of “agency” of all forms of human and non-human life accounts for modern forms of oppression. Michel Foucault’s analyses of disciplinary and biopower, for instance,

suggest that the source of domination and oppression in contemporary democracies is not human agency understood in the classical sense, but dispersed networks of power and governmentality that “regularize” and pacify human and non-human “life” effecting the subjection of both. In the light of this political account of the posthuman, how might we understand human “agency” in a way that provides a foundation of normativity and the means of redressing subjection, without recourse to classical notions? In answering this question, I draw on Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of intercorporeality, especially his notions of “institution” and “passivity that is activity.” This provides a way of restoring to human elements of “life,” not control over life, but the burden of responsibility for keeping the world open for ethics.

For the purposes of this analysis, I am setting aside what I call the *technological* concept of the posthuman that tends to dominate popular debates about the ethics of bio—and other technologies.<sup>1</sup> One dominant technological view of the posthuman “configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals.”<sup>2</sup> On this account, we are “post” human in the sense that technological advances (in cybernetics, for example, but also nanotechnology, molecular genetics, artificial intelligence, and cryonics) potentially or actually enhance human capacities with the effect of liberating human existence from limitations associated with what is classically understood as human. This approach actually does little to challenge liberal humanist notions of the human and human agency. Technology is viewed in instrumental terms as that which is added to, or incorporated by, the individual human being. As a consequence, the ensuing debate about the ethics of these technologies involves either condemning or celebrating the power of these technologies to transform what is assumed to be either a natural or socially shared self-image of the human.<sup>3</sup> Given that both assumptions of the notion of the human are questionable, I begin the analysis instead with one of the more prevalent *ontological* approaches to the posthuman, that emerging from a combination of “actor-network theory” (ANT) and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. This takes seriously the way that technological developments and environmental challenges question the limits and meaning of the human and the human capacity to control its world.

## 1. THINKING THROUGH THE POSTHUMAN WITH THE ASTHMA INHALER.

This ANT account of the posthuman is ontological in that it redefines agency, extends agency to non-humans, and refigures the human-nonhuman relation (including relations with technology) in terms of a network rather than a hierarchy with human agents on top. Kay Anderson and Bruce Braun introduce their collection of classic essays in human geography with a graphic and wonderfully simple indicator of the ANT claim to the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between the “agency” of human beings, non-human life, and their physical environment: “evocative and symptomatic of this dense entanglement, the mix of human and non-human agencies [is] the row of ‘puffers’ [asthma inhalers] at the local pre-school,” all labelled with the name of the child to whom they belong.<sup>4</sup> Their point is to demonstrate the coincidence of the human and the technical and the need to rethink the relation beyond an instrumental idea of technology. Thinking “with,” rather than “about,” the inhaler mixes the two: it “explodes the subject-object distinction that gives excessive primacy to humans” as observers of an environment from which they stand apart. With the help of Bruno Latour<sup>5</sup> and Deleuze and Guattari,<sup>6</sup> this tactic forces us to think the device, less as a thing that humans use, than an “agent” that “enrols heterogenous elements from the textual to the technical, the human to the non-human” in an *assemblage* (*agencement* or “actant”).<sup>7</sup>

The agency afforded the inhaler through this idea of *assemblage/agencement* is not too ambitious. ANT ontology debunks the idea of agency as the exclusive province of human will or conscious intentionality. By “decentering ... social agency” away from the human,<sup>8</sup> it positions the inhaler as one of many elements of an assemblage that *cause effects*. The inhaler is an agent only in the sense that it makes a difference: it can “generate[] *transformations* manifested by the many unexpected *events* triggered in the other mediators [elements] that follow [it] along the line.”<sup>9</sup> But it does not cause effects by itself or according to some causal law of nature. Technology and

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environmental elements generate transformations only by virtue of a dynamic assemblage of heterogeneous human and non-human elements and they do so in unpredictable ways.

The emphasis here is on the “event,” or how these networks of posthuman becoming open new paths for thinking and living. This ontology of the posthuman also emphasises the *collective* aspect of perception, thinking, and living in a world: human agency and thought are decentred such that the social can be reassembled through a “network” or collective practice that gives non-humans a central role.

However, there is a problem with this notion of assemblage, at least in the way that Latour formulates it. I have no argument with this ontological questioning of the subject-object, human-nonhuman distinctions. And giving non-human elements credit for forcing open new paths for thinking and living is to be welcomed. But levelling out human agency, perception, and thinking as equivalent to many other multifarious elements in an assemblage that generates the “event,” also *lets humans off the ethical hook*. Surely, if new paths for thinking are indeed opened through the “event,” it is within humans, not inhalers or other non-human elements, that these openings are actualised. Moreover, the worlds of significance that are transformed through assemblages are also worlds of value—these are *ethical* worlds. It is human activity, thought, perception and agency (albeit in different forms to how these are conventionally understood) that render the world ethical. Hence it is up to human elements of assemblages to keep the world open for ethics.

This point can be arrived at in another way. The “event” matters as much for ethical and political reasons as it does for epistemological reasons. The event is “the event” because it consists in opening a gap in what may otherwise be a continuity between past and future. It therefore consists in the interruption of determinism that would predetermine the future of *all* the elements of an assemblage, including the human. In contemporary liberal-democratic worlds the risk of determinism that would foreclose the event does not come only, or even primarily, from the privilege afforded the human through the classical notions of human agency and intentionality as ANT seems to imply. Rather, determinism can be equally biological, technological, and/or political. Indeed, it is the combination of all three that best characterises the determinism and subjection that is the focus of Foucault’s work. Individual human beings fall prey to this determinism alongside non-human elements, but humans are also in the best position to do something about it. The question remains: how?

Raising these ontological issues is not to return to naive humanism or a Kantian notion of the moral self based on autonomous practical reason, the supremacy of which is supposedly affirmed, rather than challenged, through the unsettling experience of the sublime (the experience of the absolutely great and powerfulness of “Nature”). Rather, it is to acknowledge that, just as things can “object to their social enrolment” in assemblages,<sup>10</sup> so can humans refuse to think “with” the thing. Habitual perception and sedimented modes of evaluation enframened by political contexts are at the core of such refusal. Considering the ethico-political dimensions of the “event,” and the role of human perception/agency in it, puts the onus back on the human-perceptual elements of assemblages to remain responsive to, and “do the right thing” by, things, non-human life, and other humans. That is, thinking “with” the inhaler in the context of ANT’s concept of “assemblage” does not attend to the question of “how we should conceive of ethical responsibility or political practice in this world” of biopoliticized amalgams of bodies, technologies, and other non-human environmental elements.<sup>11</sup> Nor does the technological understanding of the posthuman assist us here: it still assumes a non-technological individual human agent as its norm, to be enhanced or preserved depending on one’s ideal of a moral human being.

Attending to the ethics and politics of the post-human requires also acknowledging that assemblages, as dynamic and transformative as they are, have a history, that the socio-political meanings that may be challenged through them are often specific to place, and that the transformations in “life” and ways of living that may result are not automatically “good” (or “bad”) and they are not distributed equitably. To demonstrate the importance of considering the social-political context of “events” and the transformations they effect, I return to the example of the asthma inhaler.

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If Anderson and Braun witnessed the inhaler-parade in Australia, then what it should have signified is the prevalence of a serious health problem. Asthma rates in Australia are high by international standards (10.2% of the population in 2005).<sup>12</sup> In many cases the condition is life-threatening (402 deaths in 2006)<sup>13</sup> and, because it inhibits breathing, in all cases asthma impinges upon quality of (human) life. The situation was worse thirty years ago. There was an “epidemic” of asthma in the 1960s and 1970s and the current mortality rate represents a 70% decrease since 1989 when the mortality rate “peaked.” While in the 1980s it was children, in various contexts, who died of the condition, it is now more likely to be the elderly and/or the socio-economically disadvantaged who may have other chronic conditions. Consideration of the current prevalence and distribution of asthma in relation to age, sex, indigeneity, and place turns up some surprising results that challenge simplistic explanations of cause (such as particular allergens, pollen or pollutants, in the environment) or assumptions that disease consists in non-human elements contaminating a universal body traversing a uniform earth. In other words, the condition itself, as much as the medical technologies mobilised to treat it, unsettles the human-nonhuman distinction by raising questions about belonging to place and about particular bodies, at particular times, being challenged by their socio-political and non-human environments. Space does not allow a detailed examination of the epidemiological studies and demographic aspects of the occurrence of the illness. Just one statistic helps to make my general point about the importance of considering the socio-political context of the technology-human-nonhuman relation. Surprisingly, asthma is the second most common self-reported illness affecting the Australian Indigenous population (26%) after eye and sight problems (30%).<sup>14</sup> Further, contrary to the rest of the population, the prevalence of asthma in the Indigenous population is higher in remote and inner-city areas than it is in areas in between (so-called “inner-regions”).<sup>15</sup>

Even though the turnaround in asthma mortality rates since 1989 cannot be attributed to the inhaler alone, it has certainly played a major role.<sup>16</sup> Part of the attraction of this device is its simplicity, its immediate proximity just in case, and the independence from medical experts that its carriage allows. The inhaler does not thereby promote freedom from the medical gaze in any simplistic sense. As Kane Race has shown, self-administration in medicine is caught up in discourses of consumerism, self-responsibility, and the privatisation of health care.<sup>17</sup> Still, in terms of a more modest understanding of freedom and in ANT language, the inhaler has and does enrol human bodies in collectives with other forms of life, human and non-human, in ways that open different possibilities for living. That is, the inhaler has enabled “the event” that breaks with biological determinism. On the other hand, this is not true for everyone. It is hard to imagine these inhalers lined up in pre-schools in remote Indigenous communities (it is hard to imagine the pre-schools). The absence of “inhaler events” among Indigenous groups<sup>18</sup> is due to biopolitical factors in a basic sense: a scarcity of healthcare services in remote regions and, equally relevant, living conditions (remote and urban) unconducive to compliance with systematic asthma treatment regimes of which these inhalers are a large component.

There are at least two points to take from this brief excursion with asthma and its inhaler. First, the inhaler participates in what Foucault would call “political technologies of the body.”<sup>19</sup> On this account, the development of biotechnologies is not itself a political or ethical problem. Technical devices, medication, and human bodies are always already entangled with political priorities, knowledges, practices, and measuring regimes. Given this, what matters on a Foucauldian account is the extent to which the inhaler is part of the political and medical normalisation and subjection of bodies (which would mean no “event,” no break with political determinism, or not much). Second, there is a wider political context that parcels out meaning and value, thereby enframing assemblages. Political technologies of the body are not spread uniformly: the inhaler is not available for enrolment of all collectives of human and non-human bodies and elements in all places; nor is it necessarily appropriate that it participate in effecting transformations in the lives of everyone. In the case of Indigenous health in Australia, this wider context is provided, most recently, by the so-called “Northern Territory Intervention” of early 2007 where the (now former) Federal Government suspended parts of the Racial Discrimination Act and sent in the army and teams of medical practitioners to attend to the health of members of remote Indigenous communities. Despite the fact that asthma and eye and sight problems are by far the most common self-reported illnesses affecting Indigenous peoples, neither figured in the justifications for the Intervention, which was primarily in terms of a reported “epidemic” of sexual abuse of children. As

this claim, at least by the end of the first twelve months of the Intervention, appears to be a gross exaggeration, many view the Intervention to be little more than a spectacular exercise in demonising Indigenous Australians. As such, it falls squarely into the “regularization of life” that, according to Foucault characterizes “biopolitics.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, if we consider the ethical side of biopolitics, it is clear that the long-term neglect of the social, economic, and health needs of Indigenous Australians requires urgent redress. It is to the following question then that I now turn: where does the “event” that breaks with *political* determinism fit into Foucault’s characterisation of “political technologies of the body” and “biopolitics”?

### 2. FOUCAULT, TECHNOLOGIES OF SUBJECTION, AND BIOPOLITICS

Foucault is indispensable to the question of the relation between human bodies, non-human elements (including technical devices), and the politics of “life.” In an advance on technological notions of the posthuman, Foucault’s account of “*political* technologies of the body” proposes that human bodies are already technological (*techné*) by virtue of being enmeshed in the networks of power and circulating knowledges, quite apart from, and as a precondition to, being attached to particular technical devices (such as the inhaler). In an advance on ANT, Foucault, by formulating his revision of the human-technology-nonhuman relation in the context of the political, brings the question of political power to bear on an ontology of the posthuman. What he highlights is how human bodies—their capacities, powers, desires, and biological processes (rather than human agency understood in the classical sense as being centred on consciousness)—have become central to contemporary politics as the targets of both disciplinary power and biopower. Politics targets the corporeal domain of the posthuman and it is here that habits form and subjection takes place. On his account, disciplinary and biopower render human bodies “docile,” subjectivities compliant, and “life” regular. In other words, power within regimes of governmentality forecloses the “event.”

Just as biotechnologies, including the inhaler, intervene into bodies at the muscular, neurological or molecular level to reorganize corporeal processes, disciplinary power operates at the micro-level of the body’s movements, spatiality, and temporal rhythms to realign the body’s forces and powers.

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude’, a ‘capacity’, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.<sup>21</sup>

Subjection and docility, for Foucault then, turn not so much on rendering the self passive in the sense of negating agency, understood as free will or conscious intentionality. Rather subjection, through discipline, turns on the political harnessing of the body’s “powers” and energy to form aptitudes and habits that serve social and economic ends.

Biopower, on the other hand, operates through political concerns about population health. It has “taken control of life in general—with the body as one pole and the population as the other.”<sup>22</sup> Biopower does not so much aim at an individual human body to render it compliant; it aims at regulating the “species body” of the population. Nevertheless it forecloses the “event” in assemblages of power, biotechnologies, knowledges (including epidemiological studies), and biological processes by leveling out biological life. Through practices that attend to population health and welfare, biopower aims at curtailing “unpredictable,” “random events” and “achieving overall equilibrium” in a population with the promise of protecting “the security of the whole from internal dangers.”<sup>23</sup> It is in this “regularization of life” that biopower is as normalizing and “hierarchizing” as discipline—judgments about which biological disabilities, random events, and kinds of life present a “danger” to the population get aligned with discriminatory norms of race, sex, sexual reproduction, family, sexuality, body size, national identity, and so on. Biotechnologies may well save lives and enhance human capacities, but not without inserting us into totalizing and discriminatory regimes of government. It is in these terms that we can best understand what is “wrong,” in part, with the Northern Territory Intervention and how it forecloses

the possibility of new ways of living for Indigenous Australians, with or without the inhaler. On the other hand, continuing to neglect the health needs and poor socio-economic conditions of many Indigenous communities is not a desirable alternative.

While Foucault has revolutionized the way we understand the operation of regimes of subjection in contemporary politics and population health, he fares less well on how to enable “the event,” how to break with habitual perception and political determinism to open new ways of thinking and living within posthuman assemblages. The reason for this shortfall, I argue, is that he tends to assume an instrumental notion of political technology and, connected to this problem, he tends to assume that the body is a *tabula rasa* upon which socio-political norms are inscribed and that alongside this lie as yet unsocialized corporeal forces. He relies on this assumption of a realm of corporeal innocence to explain the “event” and, hence, the means of escaping the less savory dimensions of biopolitics. So, while Foucault calls for us to contest the kind of individualizing and totalising governmentality he describes, this is in terms of resistance to, or disruption of, the relatively stable “governmentalized” mechanisms and their “endlessly repeated play of dominations.”<sup>24</sup> The emergence of corporeal powers and new assemblages of forces that would contest the status quo is, on Foucault’s account, a matter of confrontation and accident. Moreover, while his account of the relation between power, knowledge, and human-nonhuman corporeal “life” implies, as in “actor-network theory,” that resistance to totalising government would involve *collective* practice, this is not the path he takes. Instead, corporeal “points of insubordination” and means of escape provide the basis for an *ethics* of experimental *techniques of self* as practices of freedom that, while considerate of others (including non-human “others”), are only so as an afterthought.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. MERLEAU-PONTY’S ONTOLOGY OF THE POSTHUMAN

Formulating an ethics for the posthuman world requires a more considered ontology to supplement that which is apparently assumed in biopolitical analysis. The challenge is to better understand what kind of collective practices allow the emergence of the “event” within assemblages of human, non-human, meaning, and technical elements without ignoring the mediating role of (historically conditioned) human perception, receptivity, and responsiveness. Ignoring the latter risks falling back into a schema that privileges either the “thing” (including technical devices) or new “life,” on the one side, and/or, on the other side, the figure of a pioneer at the frontier of life practicing freedom against normalisation. While Merleau-Ponty’s ontology does not resolve all of these dilemmas, ideas centering on his concept of the divergence of “flesh” go some way toward providing the basis for an ethico-politics of the posthuman—his ideas of “institution” and “passivity that is an activity” in particular.<sup>26</sup> This ontology figures human perception and “agency” as based in intercorporeality characterised by a historicity of the intertwining of “life” and meaning (what Merleau-Ponty refers to as “existence already instituted”). It also highlights the receptive affectivity of entanglements of human-nonhuman existence. While the regularization of corporeal “life” is an ever-present possibility in this amalgam of vectorial matter, affectivity, and socio-political meaning, also central to this ontology is an idea of the “event” or the transformation of the institutions that condition “life” and its perception.

The first aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology to consider is the relation he posits between socio-political norms, scientific knowledge, and corporeal “life.” Merleau-Ponty, in his lectures on *Nature*, says that socio-political meaning is not imposed on material “life” (human or non-human) by a perceiving subject and, yet, it “is only within the perceived world that we can understand that all corporeality is already a symbolism.”<sup>27</sup> He is not replacing “agency” centred on human consciousness, will, or reason, with agency centred on a (symbolised and symbolising) corporeality (or human body) that thereby governs its world from which it stands apart. Merleau-Ponty’s ontology is directed toward overturning this distinction between subject and object, immanence and transcendence, interiority and exteriority, and the related distinction between culture and nature. We cannot assume either that cultural meaning is imposed on “nature,” as some forms of idealism or “social constructionism” have it, or that, conversely, “nature” (or even technical devices) determines “culture” (which would be naturalism or realism). As Leonard Lawlor explains, referring to Merleau-Ponty’s lecture notes on *Nature*,<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty advocates neither the separation nor the coincidence of these extremes of idealism

and realism, culture and nature; rather, “there must be ‘a hiatus’ *un écart*,” or an intertwining of the “two.”<sup>29</sup> So with Merleau-Ponty we find that the meaning of “life,” while always socio-political and historical, is actualised and lived by human bodies entwined with other elements of “life.” “Corporeality is already a symbolism” and already technological without meaning being simply imposed on biological processes or on sensible “nature” by either a socio-political order that comes before us, or by one’s own conceptualising consciousness.

Second, on the issue of docility and political subjection with respect to perception and “agency”: Merleau-Ponty claims that it is “possible to speak of passivity” with respect to a person’s relation to her environment, cultural milieu, or past, providing we do not equate “activity” or “agency” with consciousness or “will” and “only on the condition that ‘to be conscious’ does not mean ‘to give a meaning,’ which one projects onto an ungraspable object of knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> But nor should passivity be understood simply in terms of compliance with outside forces, a formulation that then views political “agency” as a *struggle* against those forces.<sup>31</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, within the hiatus of meaning, human and non-human “life,” human life “continues a vortex of experience which was set up at our birth, at the point of contact between the ‘outside’ and he who is called to live it.”<sup>32</sup> While, like Foucault, for Merleau-Ponty, this “point of contact” with the “outside” is a body, Merleau-Ponty’s body is not an assemblage of active forces and powers in a relation of struggle with the powers of normalisation that would tame it. Rather, the human body is “called to live” by elements that are not itself: this is a “non-decisionary project” where I am “inspired” and “overcome” by the “thickness of the sensible,” which may include technical devices.<sup>33</sup> But, in this project of living, the body is neither simply active or passive, dominating or docile, in relation to the “outside” that calls it to live, whether the “outside” is understood as the norms and meanings embedded in forces of governmentality, consciousness, asthma inhalers, or the rest of material life. This is because, as Merleau-Ponty puts it later in *The Visible and the Invisible*, there is a “double belongingness” to human “life:” “the body sensed and the body sentient” are “two phases” of “flesh,” and between the world and my body “there is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.”<sup>34</sup> Hence, as perception or experience is “a feeling that is felt”, a seeing that is seen,<sup>35</sup> then “*my activity is equally passivity*.”<sup>36</sup> Conversely, *passivity is equally activity*; human corporeality intertwined with the rest of “life” is not alternatively active and passive, but both, simultaneously. In passivity, whether in sleep (Merleau-Ponty’s most extreme case) or enacting habits and trained capacities, with or without the assistance of technical devices, power is not dissociated from the body, as Foucault would have it. Rather, what we view as passivity or docility is “a certain variation in a field of existence already instituted, which is always behind us and whose weight, like that of an object in flight, only intervenes in the actions by which we transform it.”<sup>37</sup> The apparently passive incorporation of social norms through, for example, disciplined or compliant behaviour, is simultaneously an activity by which those norms and meanings are not only actualised, but also transformed. It is not that some corporeal powers are tamed and biological processes “regularized” and that these coexist with other corporeal forces that remain free and a means of escape. Even in sleep or habit, which are “cluttered with the debris of the past and present,” the body “plays among them.”<sup>38</sup>

Third, in elaborating how this play of activity and passivity is related to the historicity of human existence (“existence already instituted”), Merleau-Ponty introduces his notion of the “event” that disrupts determinism (whether political, biological, or technical). Here, without re-centring “agency” back upon human conscious intentionality, he nevertheless puts the onus back upon human poles of intercorporeal assemblages to keep the world open for the “event,” and, therefore, as I will shortly argue, for ethics. In his lectures on “Institution in Personal and Public History,” Merleau-Ponty equates “activity-passivity” (which is the closest he gets to an idea of “subject” or “agency”) with the idea of complexes of human-nonhuman life being simultaneously “instituted and instituting.”<sup>39</sup> This is decidedly “not a constituting subject,” which would imply that my consciousness constitutes the meaning and value of my world.<sup>40</sup> This concept of “institution-instituting” also adds consideration of temporality to activity-passivity—the historicity and futurity of intercorporeal intertwining. The vortex of experience lived by a human body always involves a past, a tradition, that is, encounters within a social milieu “which sediment in me a meaning” such that I will tend to perceive and respond to my world in a similar way to how I have before.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, every level of existence, the “animal,” the “biological,” the interpersonal, carries, from the time of our birth, an element of “existence already instituted,” where “institution” refers to

“those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, sedimentation is not just meaning surviving as a residue in an activity that repeats the past or that duplicates a social convention. “Institution” also involves beginning something new, initiating, innovation. Every experience involves “a simultaneous de-centering and recentering of the elements in our personal life, a movement by us toward the past and of the reanimated past toward us.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, institution itself, “being exposed to ...,” or receptivity to elements and significances, initiates the present and simultaneously “opens a future.”<sup>44</sup> This is Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the “event,” the break with determinism that opens a gap between past and future and transforms meaning. Being “exposed to ...” and “overcome by” that which is not oneself inspires “those events which sediment in me a meaning as *the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future.*”<sup>45</sup> This institution-instituting aspect of the thickness, intertwining, and divergence of bodily being prevents me from coinciding with myself, or the present with past and future, or me with the other in any form. It is within this “divergence” of “sense” and “flesh,” this “deformation, which is proper to institution,” that “a future,” new concepts, and therefore new paths for thinking and living arise.<sup>46</sup> This intercorporeal opening of “a future” is the basis for ethics.

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As Merleau-Ponty emphasises that “being exposed to ...” is central to the “event,” he would agree with contemporary “actor-network theory” (ANT) that any element (human, non-human, or technical) can generate transformations in meaning and being through its impact on other elements of an assemblage. But, unlike ANT, for Merleau-Ponty such transformations are only actualised in any meaningful way through the human poles of intercorporeal assemblages. It is within humans, not inhalers, who care that they have a future and that this future is not determined. While animals are futural and may also care about their worlds,<sup>47</sup> this would be in ways and temporal flows that humans cannot control and can only access by being receptive to ways of becoming that we pick up from dwelling in animal worlds. From the perspective of a human world it is human corporeal poles of entanglements (with non-human organisms, animals, and things) that keep the world open for ethics. This point is not lost on an earlier Foucault who, in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” indicates some agreement with Merleau-Ponty about both the historicity and futurity of the “event” and its emergence through the human body.<sup>48</sup> Genealogy is a political practice in that it targets historical determinism that is aimed “at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity—as a theological movement or a natural process”<sup>49</sup> But even in this earlier work we can see signs of Merleau-Ponty’s departure from Foucault: the “event” that emerges to disrupt descent is, for Foucault, accidental and born of a struggle of forces. So, while, like Merleau-Ponty, Foucault gradually locates the human body and biological “life” as the sites where the “event” emerges, for him, unlike Merleau-Ponty, keeping the body open to the event will become an ethics of individual practice (of techniques of self or care for self, mentioned earlier) rather than collective practice.

What then does Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of “institution” and “passivity that is activity” say about an ethics of the posthuman in the context of biopolitical regularization of life? On Merleau-Ponty’s account, “resistance” to normalization and regularization is built into the very structure of the affective intercorporeality of existence, which is indeterminate or ambiguous to its core. As the human body is always embedded in a material and semiotic world, human existence is at once biological and socio-political-historical. This means that social norms, value judgments about preferred forms of life, and prohibitions, come to us in incarnate fragments from the bodies of others—“through gestures that condemn by the curl of a lip or through words that shame by timbre and tone”<sup>50</sup>—others who mediate one’s reception of biotechnologies and other non-human elements, whether at an interpersonal or macro-political level. To the extent that I take up these significations and make them my own, I will develop a style of becoming that responds to the impact of the world in familiar ways. But no body is thus rendered docile, reduced to biological processes, or engulfed by sedimented meanings. Passivity that is activity is always in play, as is the receptivity and transformation of meaning and being that this play involves.

Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty's ontology does allow for human bodies to refuse a transformation by the sensible (my body may not be receptive to the inhaler, for instance). This is less about "resistance" to normalization (which, for Merleau-Ponty, is not the salient issue) or an ethical stance (no technical device or biotechnology is 'good' or bad' in itself) than an indication of variations in habitual comportments toward a world and attendant limitations on what transformations individual bodies are open to. Although, even in that refusal I am transformed and, once a technical device or biotechnology is encountered, I would continue to be situated in terms of what it means.<sup>51</sup> More central to my concerns here is how Merleau-Ponty's ontology acknowledges the possibility of subjection or socio-political discrimination. It is at this level of political enframing of assemblages that Merleau-Ponty's ontology can provide a foundation for an ethics of the posthuman. Subjection would result, not from "normalization" in Foucault's sense, but from the way some forms of political enframing of material-semiotic environments impact on bodies (human and non-human) to foreclose the "event" and, hence, the opening of "a future." Conversely, it is by way of asserting the existential necessity that human poles of entanglements remain open to the "event" that Merleau-Ponty's ontology provides politics and ethics with a normative basis. Human "institution" (public as well as personal) and, therefore, ethics and politics should be geared toward that which things and animals may not be capable of doing alone: making a situation "indefinitely open" thus reversing what may otherwise seem like "irreversible duration."<sup>52</sup> And only if human bodies are open to the "event" can they refuse an encounter or make value judgements.

While Merleau-Ponty does not lay out an ethics of the posthuman in any systematic way, he does point toward this fundamental basis of one. For instance, he consistently objects to philosophical, social, and political regimes that tend to reduce human existence to one of two extremes: either mere biological life or active constituting consciousness (idealism). The former would amount to determinism while the latter detaches human existence from its environment and (unjustifiably) grants it unconditional freedom. He objects to political regimes that are totalitarian for the way they pre-determine the future of the lives they govern (which amounts to foreclosing the possibility of the "event"). And he objects to perceptual "rigidity" born of treating others as either "absolutely other" (some forms of idealism) or "identical" (some forms of liberalism).<sup>53</sup> Alternatively, on the basis of Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeal ontology, we could practice collective openness to the "event." Initially, he describes this practice as exercising "good ambiguity" in relation to others, whether human or non-human.

There is a "good ambiguity" in the phenomenon of expression, a spontaneity which accomplishes what appeared to be the impossible when we observed only the separate elements, a spontaneity which gathers together the plurality of monads, the past and the present, nature and culture into a single whole. To establish this wonder would be metaphysics itself and would at the same time give us the principle of an ethics.<sup>54</sup>

Given his idea of the "divergence of flesh," Merleau-Ponty is unlikely to mean to base an ethics of "wonder" on gathering existence into a "single whole" in the sense of a homogeneous unity. According to Merleau-Ponty, in his discussion leading up to this passage, the only shared fact in any culture is the "thought" of a "plurality of beings" and "wonder" is receptiveness to this plurality.

While Merleau-Ponty does not elaborate, we could conjecture that, as an ethical principle, "wonder" involves being receptive to the multiplicity of becomings encountered in our entanglements, and, to take up his work on the "event," being receptive to the transformations other entities or persons effect in us. But this could also imply politico-ethical quietism or indifference to the plight of others.<sup>55</sup> There are at least two indications in Merleau-Ponty's lectures on "institution" and "passivity" that, on the contrary, an ethics derived from his ontology *compels* human existence to preserve the world for the expression of multiplicity and therefore for the other to express their uniqueness. The first indication is the emphasis he places on affective responsiveness to what one is "exposed to ..." in the opening of the "event." There is a kind of compulsion toward the other, or "communication through lateral enthusiasm," inspired by this exposure, an affective compulsion that also drives the resulting divergence or deformation of meaning that opens "a future."<sup>56</sup> Second, in a move that foreshadows Emmanuel Levinas' ethics, Merleau-Ponty suggests that this responsiveness to the dynamic multiplicity one is exposed to makes one *responsible for the other*. With regard to this point, he makes the following criticism of Sartre's

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ethics, in particular his notion of freedom, a criticism that could equally be directed against the individualism apparent in Foucault's later aesthetic ethics and technological notions of the posthuman:

Here [in the relation Sartre posits between the For-itself and the For-others] there is a bond that is distance because it is created by me, where there needs to be distance that is a bond; [rather than] a "respect" for the freedom of the other [that] is non-intervention of others in me, ... what is needed is to take responsibility for the other, not as infirm and impotent, but without rejecting everything that one thinks. This is because ... I am also others and that they are also me. The relation to conceive is like that of coupling <*l'accouplement*>, or like that of gestation, or like that of projection and introjection, or like that of speaking and hearing (Lagache, *Hallucinations verbales*), or like that of writing and reading, the relation of "transcendence in my sense" or of "transcendence in his sense" of me by others or of others by me.<sup>57</sup>

An ethics based on "taking responsibility for other[s] ... without rejecting everything one thinks," provides no prescription about what sorts of biotechnologies, technical devices, or organisms would be "good" or "bad" for humanity as a whole. Nor does it either celebrate or warn against the medicalization of the body or political regulation of technological development or of population health. Nor could such positions be taken in any absolute way without remaining blind to the multiplicity of becomings that make up assemblages and without imposing one's values or what one thinks on the ways of living of those with whom one dwells. What this ethics does warn against is precisely that: *forcing* one's convictions, oneself and what one thinks, or particular technical devices on others, human or non-human. On the other hand, and more positively, this ethics compels us to take up the call of "life," the invitation to live with others and things in such a way that attempts to keep all existence open to an undetermined future. This principle supports forms of government regulation and social services that attend to the health and welfare of all, providing this does not demonise any particular group ahead of or during the "event" and providing those being cared for have some say in how. Perhaps most important, taking responsibility for others and a world without rejecting everything one thinks implies a commitment to dynamic collectivity. Central to collective existence that keeps open an undetermined future is a dialogical practice (central to public and personal institution) that heeds the uniqueness of others (human and non-human) without giving up everything that one thinks.

This is not as easy as ANT seems to assume. On the basis of Merleau-Ponty's ontology, "wonder" that also takes responsibility for the other must involve a kind of speaking and hearing, touching and being-touched that is also self-criticism. It involves what Merleau-Ponty finally calls "hyper-reflection:"<sup>58</sup> an awareness of the pre-reflective play of "activity that is passivity" (or "instituted-instituting") discussed above without knowing what ideas come from the other or the world and what comes from me. Hyper-reflection "plunges into the world instead of surveying it" and takes into account "the changes it introduces" into the entanglements and perceptual field with which it is engaged.<sup>59</sup> This ethical principle is hopefully in play among those medical practitioners, health-care workers, and Indigenous peoples currently participating in the so-called Northern Territory Intervention. But it was noticeably absent from the way the former Federal Government instituted, initiated, announced, and first implemented the policy ■

## TOWARDS AN ETHICO-POLITICS OF THE POST HUMAN

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### NOTES

1. It is generally accepted that the contemporary technological definition of the posthuman began with Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" first published in *Socialist Review* in 1985 and reprinted in Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
2. Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 3.
3. Jürgen Habermas takes the view that the ethics of genetic engineering, for example, should be guided by the extent to which such technologies damage our shared self-understanding as moral beings. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
4. Kay Anderson and Bruce Braun, eds, introduction to *Environment: Critical Essays in Human Geography*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009, xii.
5. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
6. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
7. Anderson and Braun, xii & xv
8. Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces*. London: SAGE Publications, 2002, 4.
9. Latour, *Reassembling*, 107.
10. Whatmore, *Hybrid*, 5. The point is elaborated by Bruno Latour in "When Things Strike Back" *British Journal of Sociology* 51:1 (2000), 107-23.
11. Anderson and Braun, xiii.
12. *Asthma in Australia 2008*, Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring (ACAM), 2008. AIHW Asthma Series no.3, xii. All information and statistics about asthma rates in Australia are taken from this comprehensive report. It is available at <http://www.asthamonitoring.org>, (accessed 30 Nov 2008)
13. *Ibid.*, 50.
14. *Ibid.*, 5.
15. *Ibid.*, 4. "Inner regional" is an Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) of the remoteness of a place purely in terms of geographical accessibility, and excludes urban/rural, socio-economic and related considerations. "Inner regional" refers to places where "geographic distance imposes some restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction." *Ibid.*, 189. Hobart for example is classified as "inner regional." Asthma rates are also much higher among Indigenous women (not men) aged 15-54 (compared to the non-Indigenous women) and higher among Indigenous men over 55 compared with everyone else. *Ibid.*, 6.
16. While the first modern form of the asthma inhaler appeared in the US in 1956, courtesy of 3M HealthCare, it was not until the 1970s that it came with a safe and relatively effective asthma medication. See Graham Crompton, "A brief history of inhaled asthma therapy over the last fifty years" *Primary Care Respiratory Journal* 15:6 (2006), 326-331. It was available in Australia by 1975, in a primitive form called the "spinhaler," although only by prescription to those in the know. I am leaving aside the question of "events" in the development of the asthma inhaler. Presumably that would be a very long story involving many dynamic assemblages.
17. Kane Race, *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.
18. *Asthma in Australia*, 122.

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19. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979, 26.
20. Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*. Trans. David Macey. Eds Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. New York: Picador, 2003, 239-64.
21. Foucault, *Discipline*, 138.
22. Foucault, *Society*, 253.
23. *Ibid.*, 249.
24. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Vol.2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Ed. J Faubion. London: Penguin, 2000, 377.
25. For Foucault's answer to the question of the place of others in his ethics of "care for the self" see, for example, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" and "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Vol 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. J Faubion. London: Penguin, 2000.
26. Merleau-Ponty develops these two ideas in two lecture courses at the Collège de France (1952-1960), the notes from which have only become available in French in 2006. I am grateful to Leonard Lawlor for making his English translation of these available to me ahead of publication. See, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution in Personal and Public History and The Problem of Passivity: Sleep, the Unconscious, Memory. Course Notes at the Collège de France (1954-55)*. Preface Claude Lefort. Text established by Dominique Darmaillacq, Claude Lefort, and Stéphanie Ménasé. Trans. Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009. My analysis also draws on the summaries of the themes of these courses, which have been available in print since 1968. See Merleau-Ponty, "Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. John Wild, James Edie, and John O'Neill. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
27. Merleau-Ponty, "Themes", 166. See also his discussion of "institution and life" in Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 49-50.
28. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, compiled with notes by Dominique Séglaard. Trans. Robert Vallier. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003, 157 & 121.
29. Leonard Lawlor, *The Implications of Immanence: Toward a New Concept of Life*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, 113.
30. Merleau-Ponty, "Themes", 115.
31. Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 160-1. Merleau-Ponty directs this criticism at Sartre's idea of passivity and bad faith, where the For-itself is engulfed by the In-itself or by the For-others and "agency" is understood in terms of the For-itself struggling against and transcending the In-itself and being-for-others. However, his point about a struggle between passive (tamed) and active forces could also be directed against Foucault.
32. Merleau-Ponty, "Themes", 115.
33. Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 34.
34. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, 137-8.
35. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" *The Primacy of Perception*. Trans. Carleton Dallery, Ed. James M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 162-3.
36. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 139 (emphasis added).
37. Merleau-Ponty, "Themes", 115.

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38. *Ibid.*, 116.
39. Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 35.
40. *Ibid.*, 35 & 37.
41. Merleau-Ponty, “Themes”, 108.
42. *Ibid.*, 108.
43. *Ibid.*, 112.
44. Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 35.
45. Merleau-Ponty, “Themes”, 109 (emphasis added).
46. Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 36 & 41.
47. *Ibid.*, 49.
48. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” Foucault laid out this definition of genealogy (which is also a critical appropriation of Nietzsche) in this paper in 1971 prior to his accounts of disciplinary power, biopower, and the practices of freedom that he hoped would serve as an antidote.
49. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, 380.
50. Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 104.
51. I explore this issue of localised refusals and prohibitions in more detail in *Corporeal Generosity* (chapter 5) and I provide a more detailed analysis of the complexities of the politico-ethics of a particular biotechnology, RU486, in Rosalyn Diprose, “The Political Technology of RU486: Time for the Body and Democracy” *The Stuff of Politics: Technoscience, Democracy and Public Life*. Eds Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 216-64.
52. Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 57 & 50.
53. Merleau-Ponty, “The Child’s Relation with Others,” *The Primacy of Perception*, 103-6.
54. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “An Unpublished text by Merleau-Ponty: *A Prospectus of His Work*” *The Primacy of Perception*, 11. This statement ends the prospectus of Merleau-Ponty’s work up to 1952 (which he submitted at the time of his candidacy at the Collège de France). It therefore frames his later philosophy that I have drawn on for my analysis.
55. Levinas criticises Merleau-Ponty on precisely this point—that his ontology is marked by indifference to difference. For my defence of Merleau-Ponty against this criticism see Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity*, chapter 9.
56. Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 35 & 52-3.
57. *Ibid.*, 162-3 (emphasis added).
58. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 38.
59. *Ibid.*, 38-9.

## PRODUCTION OF THE POST-HUMAN: POLITICAL ECONOMIES OF BODIES AND TECHNOLOGY

Jon Seltin

### INTRODUCTION

The post-human and cyborg are now very familiar figures, both in popular culture and the academy. Representations of en fleshed machines, technologically augmented bodies and artificial intelligences are a cornerstone of contemporary science fiction, from Fritz Lang's robot Maria in *Metropolis*, to the Replicants of Phillip K Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and more recently in the post-cyberpunk novels that have proliferated in the wake of William Gibson and Neil Stephenson. The canonical figures of The Borg in *Star Trek* and Darth Vader in *Star Wars* have become pop-cultural signifiers of the dehumanising effects of technology, while simultaneously the *Six Million Dollar Man*, and Major Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* offer emancipating and transcendent visions of technological prosthesis.

Parallel to their appearance in fiction and myth, the cyborg and post-human appear in a range of academic disciplines as symbols of radical change, signifying a range of breaks with past bodies, past modes of subjectivity and past Humanisms. The post-human and cyborg metaphors have been deployed by theorists occupying a range of (often antipodean) political positions, from Donna Haraway's famous "Cyborg Manifesto", in which her 'cyborg myth' represents an opportunity for a radical new brand of socialist-feminism, to Francis Fukuyama's bio-conservative invocation of the post-human to argue for tighter legislative regulation of biotechnologies which he perceives as corruptive threats to 'our human nature'.

At one end of the spectrum we find the technophilic or hyperbolic post-humanists. This brand of post-humanism is both a popular movement and body of literature which encompasses figures such as Nick Bostrom

(Director of Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute), Ray Kurzweil, Hans Moravec, Max More and groups such as Humanity+ (formerly the World Transhumanist Association), the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies (IIEET) and the now-defunct Extropy Institute. Although taking different approaches, these authors and groups address the post-human in positivistic and dyadic terms; it is understood as the ultimate techno-evolutionary *telos* of the Human. According to this perspective the post-human represents the next stage in evolution, in which the haphazard turns of "fumble-fingered Nature"<sup>1</sup> are displaced by deliberate biotechnological evolutionary choices exercised through precise genetic modification and technological augmentation. Hyperbolic post-humanist texts are often deeply hubristic; death, disease, abnormality, and even embodiment are seen as barriers that can be overcome through technological innovation and intervention. In the most extreme accounts, bodies are abandoned and 'the human' gives way to transcendental omnipotent and omniscient super-beings, until "ultimately, the entire universe... [is] saturated with our intelligence."<sup>2</sup>

While there is a common tendency for hyperbolic post-humanism to posit itself as an entirely new phenomenon or historic rupture which completely displaces the human, it becomes clear that it is in fact shot through with Enlightenment humanist values and ideals. Indeed the teleology implicit in these accounts of the post-human is distilled directly from Enlightenment discourses of progress and perpetual self-improvement towards an end-state of perfection. Far from displacing the discourses, subjectivities, epistemologies and ontologies of Humanism, hyperbolic post-humanism relies on and ultimately rearticulates them—repackaging discourses of imperialism, Cartesian dualism, unitary and rational subjectivity and neo-liberal political-economic relations for the new millennium.

On the opposite side of the spectrum there exists a range of apocalyptic, conservative reactions to the threat the post-human poses to essentialist understandings of the human and human nature. This apocalyptic mode of post-humanism encompasses authors such as Francis Fukuyama, Jürgen Habermas, Bill McKibben, and Paul Virilio<sup>3</sup> and includes many religious and social conservatives who view technological intervention and augmentation of bodies as eroding some essential component of human nature. The apocalyptic and hyperbolic modes of post-humanism share a common view of technology as heralding a new historical epoch, however instead of eagerly anticipating this future, the apocalyptic mode views it as a dire threat to be avoided, retreated from, or legislated against. Apocalyptic post-humanism recuperates essentialist notions of a fixed, natural Human Nature with definite, sacrosanct limits. Transgenics, xenotransplantation, genetic engineering, neuropharmacology and machine/flesh cybernetic amalgams are all understood as threatening the ontological purity of the human, where the essence of humanity is understood in biologically essentialist terms.

This paper seeks to interrogate some of these popular positions on the post-human, in particular the ways in which technophilic and apocalyptic understandings of the post-human function with an internally contradictory logic, reliant on the subjection and production of bare life. The paper is structured in three broad sections. The first offers a critical overview of the technophilic/hyperbolic and apocalyptic accounts of the post-human. The second section of the paper looks at some of the ways the post-human has been deployed as a critical/deconstructive metaphor or theoretical tool. The final section then looks to the material processes of production through which these understandings of the post-human are instantiated. Throughout the paper I will be relying on a kind of methodological phase-shifting, switching between symbolic and material modes of critique in an attempt to underscore the inextricability of figural/metaphorical imaginings of the post-human and the economic and material basis which underpins their production. While past studies have focussed on the political, ethical, technical and philosophical dimensions of the cyborg and post-human, few have specifically linked these with the networks of labour, capital, trade and geopolitics that allow for post-humanisms material and discursive instantiation. To understand 'post-human' simply in terms of a fictive subgenre, critical metaphor or futurist fervour would be to obscure these global networks of labour, capital and power which produce the conditions for its formation.

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## I. HYPERBOLIC AND APOCALYPTIC POST-HUMANISM

In *Mind Children* Hans Moravec describes mind-uploading made possible by a future armamentaria that includes robot-surgeons, atom-by-atom scanning techniques and technologies that allow for the digital capture and virtual reconstitution of an entire brain. Once uploaded, Moravec envisages the original body as superfluous flesh to be discarded, as the subject now exists in an eternal digital domain, free from not only senescence and disability, but also from the prison-house of corporality and limitations of time and space. Technological intervention presents us with the possibility of being “rescued from the limitations of a mortal body.”<sup>4</sup> Moravec’s futurism serves as provocation and point of departure for N. Katherine Hayles’ *How We Became Posthuman*, which deals exhaustively with (dis)embodiment in hyperbolic and technocentric post-human literature. Hayles identifies Cartesian dualism as the foundational axiom of hyperbolic post-humanism. The four conditions she identifies as defining hyperbolic post-humanism warrant quoting here at length:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the 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.<sup>5</sup>

Hayles highlights how the hyperbolic post-human seems to offer a thoroughly postmodern escape from Enlightenment-humanist conceptions of subjectivity, and from the tired binaries of human/machine, nature/culture etc. In some of the more creative hyperbolic accounts, the post-human does not necessarily elevate human agency or dominance, but rather reconfigures ‘human’ within a web of cybernetic relationships with its environment and machines. However Hayles resists the seduction of this postmodern iconoclasm, and focuses instead on problem of disembodied information as the basis subjectivity. While all modes of signification, theorising and mediation necessarily involve abstraction, Hayles demonstrates how cybernetics and bio-informatics assert the *primacy* of the abstract over the material. That is, theories which conceptualise consciousness, subjectivity, DNA-code, molecular and cellular function purely in terms of *disembodied information* do so by strategically downplaying the importance (or even necessity) of material instantiation. This disavowal or downplay of materiality and embodiment can be traced, according to Hayles, to Platonic idealism and its modern mirror-image operating in informatics, in which disembodied information (e.g. the digitised human-genome) is understood as the “originary form, from which the world’s multiplicity derives.”<sup>6</sup> Far from representing a structured break or rupture, this erasure of embodiment can be understood as an *extension* of Enlightenment humanism, with its universalising claims also based on the dualistic nature of rational consciousness. The normalising and colonising power of Enlightenment humanism rests on this erasure of bodily difference, especially markers of race and gender. Thus the very idea of ‘mind-downloading’ is, in the words of Neil Badmington “...itself downloaded from the distinctly humanist matrix of Cartesian dualism.”<sup>7</sup> Badmington highlights this “problem of what remains... [as] a problem of [human] remains;”<sup>8</sup> persistent humanist residue within what is meant to be a thoroughly post-human future.

Badmington’s article highlights a common tendency in critical literature on post-humanism to write as if this humanist residue lay latently hidden under the surface for critics to uncover.<sup>9</sup> However the majority of hyperbolic post-humanists are overt about their dedication to the project of humanism. For Nick Bostrom, Director of the University of Oxford’s Future of Humanity Institute, and co-founder of Humanity+, transhumanism<sup>10</sup> is:

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[T]he intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate ageing and to greatly enhance human intellect, physical and psychological capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

Freedom, rationality and constant self-improvement are acknowledged by Bostrom as the ideals upon which the transhumanist movement is founded. According to Bostrom, “Transhumanism can be viewed as an extension of humanism, from which it is partially derived.”<sup>12</sup> Thus the task is not to uncover some hidden extension of Enlightenment-humanism (which was blatantly declared from the start), but rather to think through the political and economic implications of such a rearticulation.

A suitable metaphor for thinking through the hyperbolic post-humanist’s conceptualisation of the body is that of *possession*. Here possession takes on the double meaning of being-possessed (in the supernatural sense) and possession-as-owning. The technophilic post-humanist possesses *his* body in the same way a disembodied spirit would; the flesh is rendered subordinate to an abstracted consciousness, which sits comfortably on the other side of a Cartesian ontological crevasse issuing orders. Simultaneously the body is possessed in that it is an *owned possession*; the very concept of the liberal humanist subject is contingent on a possession-of-self articulated by Hobbes, Locke, and John Stuart Mill. In their political philosophy, Hobbes and Locke conceive of society as a set of market relations between individuals, who wholly *own* themselves and the products of their labour. The materialist analysis developed in the final section of this paper will examine a very different understanding of the post-human, in which this presupposed possession of oneself is violently inverted.

By *possessing* a body, technophilic post-humanists such as Moravec see no political, ethical or ontological hazards in upgrading, augmenting or simply abandoning them. However this configuration of bodies as infinitely malleable and disposable is available only to a specific subset of humanity, namely to those privileged subjects who already possess transparent, normalised bodies. This understanding effaces the daily situation of those many millions of people who currently rely on embodied labour for subsistence, and whose lives are structured by racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of violence which function through bodily inscription.<sup>13</sup> Further, this fixation on the liberating potential of emergent technologies effaces the often illiberal and exploitative commodity chains, labour relationships and material processes of production through which these commodities are instantiated.

Liberal post-humanists reassure those who possess sick, disabled, female, non-white, intersexed or other supposedly sub-prime embodiments that they will be welcome in the post-corporeal age, since issues of embodiment will no longer matter. In attempting to transcend the body and its associated politics, liberal hyperbolic post-humanists effectively (re)inscribe their vision of normalcy on the deficient bodies of their others.

Bostrom’s *Transhumanist FAQ* offers the following reassurance to those who may be wary of the dangers of genetic modification:

[If] a would-be parent wished to undertake a genetic modification that would be clearly harmful to the child or would drastically curtail its options in life, then this prospective parent should be prevented by law from doing so.<sup>14</sup>

The normalising logic of this legislative oversight could presumably be used to eliminate queer, autistic, non-white and other ‘marginal’ offspring on the grounds that each of these categories would undeniably “curtail options in life”.

The need for legislation governing our techno-evolution is, however, understood as only necessary during these transitory stages as we move beyond the transhuman present into the boundless post-human future. Transhumanist movements readily acknowledge the normative nature and ethical dimensions of their project, however their ultimate *telos*, the post-human, would require no politics or ethics because it will have simply

transcended them. The post-corporal post-human is imagined to exist in a digitised cornucopia where issues of scarcity, (bio)politics and power no longer are considerations.

*The Apocalyptic Reflex: (Post)Human Nature*

As with technophilic posthumanism, Apocalyptic posthumanism can be understood as both a body of literature and a popular movement which views humanity as situated astride a critical historical rupture, approaching an epoch in which technology has so enmeshed itself with humanity that the two are now (or soon will be) indistinguishable. In contrast to hyperbolic imaginings, the apocalyptic position views this new era as fraught with danger, and sees technological intervention as corrupting or eroding a central aspect of ‘our’ essential humanity.

In *Our Posthuman Future*, Francis Fukuyama (of *The End of History* notoriety) calls for a “return to the pre-Kantian tradition that grounds rights and morality in nature.”<sup>15</sup> He sets about defining human nature (derived from “genetic rather than environmental factors”<sup>16</sup>) as an aggregation of quantifiable human qualities that can be statistically distributed along a bell curve. Unlike Kant, who locates human uniqueness in the capacity for rational moral choice,<sup>17</sup> Fukuyama suggests that the Human is instead based in a common genetic endowment that gives rise to a broadly similar distribution of phenotypical instantiations, emotional responses, moral instincts and social institutions. Since “Moral order comes from within nature itself, and is not something that has to be imposed on human nature by culture”<sup>18</sup> it follows that any technological pollution or augmentation of our genotype could potentially erode our unique human nature, and thus the moral order that derives from it. The original violence of this manoeuvre lies in its effacement of the margins of the ‘normal’ distribution. Individuals whose genotypes, phenotypes or behavioural characteristics lie outside statistical standard deviations are relegated to the realm of the subhuman or inhuman, to whom we owe reduced or even no moral consideration.

Fukuyama positions technology as outside of and distinct from human nature, the normative foundations of which are perceived as under threat from (bio)technology’s corrupting effects. While Fukuyama’s argument is not entirely contingent on a strict body/technology dichotomy, he nevertheless is unable to adequately disentangle (human) nature from technicity, nor does he coherently delimit precisely what technologies do not bare the high moral risks he associates with genetic engineering and neuropharmaceuticals. For example even the most seemingly natural, banal technologies such as cooking and crop cultivation have fundamentally altered us on a genetic, physiomorphological and evolutionary level. This unproblematised positioning of technology as ontologically and materially distinct from the human is a common and highly problematic feature of many technophilic and apocalyptic understandings of the post-human.

## II. LIMITROPHY AND THE POST-HUMAN AS DECONSTRUCTIVE METAPHOR

The liminal bodies of the post-human and the cyborg make them ideal deconstructive metaphors for thinking across obliques separating body/technology, internal/external, natural/artificial etc. A large body of work has been growing over the past twenty years from postcolonial, feminist, poststructuralist and queer theory scholars who deploy the cyborg metaphor as a deconstructive tool. Unlike thinkers within the technophilic or apocalyptic modalities, these authors are generally less concerned with the technical details of what would constitute a future post-humanity; rather they recognise that the very articulation of post-human calls for a critical re-examination of its antecedent—the Human, Humanism, and by extension Man. Rather than articulating ‘Man’ as an ontologically uncomplicated *a priori*, the deconstructive modality of post-humanism often positions it in triptych alongside technology and the non-human or animal, and through this positioning interrogates and complicates their limits.

These approaches explore how the disavowals, erasures and violences perpetrated in the production of the human are repeated and mirrored in the formation of the hyperbolic and unproblematised post-human, and demonstrate the ways in which both the human and its post-human *telos* are contingent on the production of

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the ahuman, nonhuman and subhuman.

As with postcolonialism and postmodernism, the critical/deconstructive modality of the post-human does not mark a specific empirical condition or style of embodiment, neither does it name a specific historical moment or movement; rather it represents a subversive way of reading that interrogates the body as a politicised and contested site of meaning-making. Thus, critical post-humanism can be read as a kind of limitrophy; it is not a brand of simple postmodern iconoclasm, rather it interrogates the limits and boundaries of the human and its others, without banal appeals to the transcendental or attempts to establish homogenising continuums. These approaches develop the theoretical resources needed to read the post-human resistively, highlighting its many contingencies. However they rarely interrogate the material consequences of these contingencies or the material conditions from which technocentric and apocalyptic discourses of the post-human arise.

### *Technologies and Bodies*

*If anything the modern collective is one in which relations between humans and non-humans are so intimate, the transactions so many, the mediations so convoluted, that there is no plausible sense in which artefact, corporate body, and subject can be distinguished.*<sup>19</sup>

In *Pandora's Hope* Bruno Latour gestures towards a zone of indeterminacy and a confusion of the limits between Object and Subject, between the 'who' and the 'what', which has been brought into sharp relief by 'our' supposed increasing intimacy with technological artefacts.

Throughout much of the history of (pre-Heideggerian) western metaphysics, the ontological status of technology, machines and technical knowledges has been contingent on a structured break, or a "supervening opposition between *physis* and *nomos*, *physis* and *techné*,"<sup>20</sup> guaranteeing human ontological primacy *before* and agency *over* 'its' externalised technologies. This distinction was built upon the stratifications and divisions between the physio-empirical and the transcendental, body and soul, form and materiality present in Aristotle and Plato's writing. These divisions, articulated at the very inception of western metaphysics automatically render *techné*, technology, and machines intelligible only alongside or in opposition to the Human; as instruments, instrumental knowledges or as means-to-ends.

In the opening lines of his magnum opus, *Technics and Time* Bernard Stiegler points to the politicised and historically located origin of this cleft:

... the philosopher accuses the sophist of instrumentalising the *logos* as rhetoric and logography, that it, as both an instrument of power and a renunciation of knowledge ... philosophical *epistémé* is pitched against the sophistic *tekhné*, whereby all technical knowledge is devalued.<sup>21</sup>

As well as being ontologically distinct, *techné* is here rendered *subordinate* to *epistémé*, Truth and the transcendental.<sup>22</sup> The human (as *homo faber*) is set aside from non-humans in its capacity to deploy *techné* for instrumental ends, but in the process it is never affected ontologically by the use of its tools.

Thus the very definition of the human is located precisely within this classical cleft between *epistémé* and *techné*, *physis* and *nomos*. What we name as technology, technical artefact, or animal (and so simultaneously disavow as non-human) are all essentially "part of an interactive stabilisation of the human."<sup>23</sup>

There has been much work done in contemporary continental philosophy on re-examining and complicating this technology/body cleft, often through the deconstructive logic of the supplement.<sup>24</sup> Bernard Stiegler has staged one such intervention and has used the work of French paleoanthropologist Leroi-Gourhan in tandem with Derridean deconstruction to point to the inextricability and mutual-constitutive supplementarity of the human and *techné*. The first volume of Stiegler's *Technics and Time* is largely devoted to a close reading of the work of Leroi-Gourhan, whose work is based on the discovery of early tool-using pre *homo sapiens* hominids (formally

*Zinjanthropus boisei*, now *Paranthropus boisei*). Despite their use of tools, these hominids had a relatively small brain capacity, which led Leroy-Gourhan to invert the commonly held belief that increased brain development led to tool use. It was not the evolution of a larger brain capacity that led to the development of tools, rather it was the evolution of an upright posture which freed the hands and face for tool use, gesture and later speech. Expanded brain capacity and cognitive capability was not the origin of technicity; *they were its beneficiary*.<sup>25</sup> Leroy-Gourhan asserted that “[i]t is the tool, that is *techné*, that invents the human, not the human who invents the technical.”<sup>26</sup> Stiegler goes on to tease out the implications of this shift in evolutionary understanding in a passage that is worth quoting at length:

The human invents himself in the technical by inventing the tool—by becoming exteriorized technologically. But here the human is the interior: there is no exteriorization that does not point to a movement from interior to exterior. Nevertheless the interior is inverted in this movement; *it can therefore not precede it*. Interior and exterior are consequently constructed in a movement that invents both one and the other... The interior and the exterior are the same thing, the inside is the outside, since man (the interior) is essentially defined by the tool (the exterior).<sup>27</sup>

Technology is *invented by and invents* the human, the two cannot be dissociated because they exist in a transductive relationship, operating along an axis of supplementary logic. By temporalising or presupposing the ontological primacy of the Human, one effaces the co-dependency and inextricability of *techné* as the supplement, as always already inside, just as it is externalised. Derrida makes a similar point in *The Rhetoric of Drugs* interview when he suggests that:

The natural, originary body does not exist: technology has not simply added itself, from outside or after the fact, as a foreign body. Certainly this foreign or dangerous supplement is ‘originarily’ at work and in place in the supposedly ideal interiority of the ‘body and soul’.<sup>28</sup>

Though it may be anathematic to those who occupy an apocalyptic position on posthumanism, the human is originally, thoroughly and on every level produced through entanglements with technology. Language, memory, cultural artefacts and physiomorphology must all be thought alongside the technical, as they each share a common trace.

Bruno Latour’s once provocative assertion that “our very body is composed ... of sociotechnical negotiations and artefacts”<sup>29</sup> seems flaccid in light of Stiegler’s analysis; technologies not only shape, regulate and define our bodies, they are constitutive of our very humanness, and the capacity for knowing of that humanness—they grant us access to the ‘already-there’ by rendering ‘human’ a culturally intelligible construct. The human *as such* is physiomorphologically formed *but also made accessible* (revealed or unconcealed, as a function of *alētheia* in the Heideggerian sense) through delimiting discourses, which are themselves always both technical, and intermeshed with fields of power. This refusal to dissociate material technics from discursive technologies marks a central theme in the critical/deconstructive modality of post-humanism. The focus for Stiegler and Derrida (and thereafter Donna Haraway, Elaine Graham etc.) is not restricted to the material differences and outcomes of infolded technics and bodies, but also directed towards those discursive technologies which sequester the human and maintain its solid ontological footing, often through the division, subjugation and purging of the non-human, animal, ahuman, abject and monstrous.

#### *Stabilisation-Through-Caesurae, Biopolitics and Bare Life*

The clefts between human and animal, *physis* and *nomos*, *physis* and *techné* etc. can thus be understood as strategies of stabilisation through opposition, as a necessary function of *Différance*. The unitary human can only be articulated through these ceaseless divisions and definitional oppositions, the most immediate of which, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, “passes first of all as a mobile border within living man.”<sup>30</sup> Here Agamben speaks of that most fundamental and intimate of caesurae which separates out and differentiates between vegetative, bare life (*zoē*) (as proper to all living beings), and relational, subjectified, political life (as that which is proper to man) (*bios*). The delineation and maintenance of this border is named by Agamben as the foundational activity

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of the biopolitical state. The intelligibility and effectiveness of the oppositions separating and elevating Man from bare, vegetative/animal life and technologies is contingent, according to Agamben, on the fact that these mobile and contingent borders lie *within living man*:

it is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place.<sup>31</sup>

Anaesthesia, debates about the provision of life-support technologies, and the very definition of life itself are all contingent on this structured break and the separation of whole, political Man from mere bare life.<sup>32</sup> However just as bare life is marked (through techno-scientific, medical and judicial discourse) and excluded from the *polis*, it is simultaneously and paradoxically included, precisely by means of its exclusion. The whole human-as-inside is “obtained through the inclusion of an outside, and the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal... the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form.”<sup>33</sup> This caesura, and the manufacturing of sub-human bare life as always already inside the human, is not an innocuous or apolitical artefact of technoscientific taxonomy, rather it allows for the strategic reduction of human to sub-human, such as is the case with the Jew, “that is, the non-man produced within the man, or the *néomort* and the overcomatose person, that is, the animal separated within the human body itself.”<sup>34</sup>

It is precisely this subsumption of the *zoê* into the *polis*, and the subsequent “subjugation of bodies and...control of populations”<sup>35</sup> which marked for Foucault the birth of the modern state, in which the principle manifestation of power was “the administration of bodies and calculated management of life.”<sup>36</sup> For Foucault the task then was to establish a radically new conceptualisation of power, outside of the frameworks of traditional political science and philosophy. Foucault (and thereafter Agamben) focussed on the place of the body within the body politic, on bodies as the very locus of power and sovereignty. While the institutions, disciplinary practices and discourses focussed on by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish* were all relatively recent inventions (i.e. asylums, psychiatry etc.), the disjunction of *zoê* from *bios* and subsequent subsumption and subjection of specific bodies to state power is by no means a modern phenomenon. Rather this caesura-and-conjunction marks the foundational condition of sovereignty,<sup>37</sup> and of becoming-citizen and becoming-human. The increasing visibility of biopolitics in the modern state highlights the far-older foundational inextricability of power from bare life. The manufacturing of bare life, and its “inclusion ... in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power... [T]he production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power.”<sup>38</sup> The border politics of the human are reliant on these practices of inclusion-through-exclusion, supported by elaborate politico-judicial, scientific, medical and economic technologies of demarcation, observation and control. As the citizen-subject is called into being by its inclusion in the state/law (through the exclusion of bare life in its capacity to be killed), so too the human is called into being through a similar double-movement: through the inclusion within technologies of taxonomy, medicine and bio-science, and simultaneous exclusion and exteriorisation of technology *as such*.

To this we can now add that, just as the human emerges through the subjugation, exclusion (which is always already an inclusion) and slaughter of sub/a/non-human bare life, the ‘post-human’ (understood in emancipatory, hyperbolic or eschatological terms) emerges from the erasure of embodiment, bodily markers of difference, and the denial of certain subjects to the very category of the fully-human. This marks a key reversal of the meanings of post-human where the diacritical hyphen now signifies denial of access to the fully-human, produced through the utter separation of *bios* from the subjugated *zoê*. Technophilic and hyperbolic figurations of the post-human produce (and are also produced by) bare life, both discursively and materially. It is precisely this relationship of dependence and disavowal which needs further unpacking and attention at a material, situated level.

Following Foucault and Agamben, it becomes clear that material bodies are the contested sites upon which the post-human is inscribed, divided and extruded. Despite this, the post-human is most often invoked in theory as a purely textual deconstructive trope, with only the most limited and obligatory nods to its materiality economic situatedness. Those few discussions of the post-human which do recognise this disavowed material underside rarely engage in detail with material bodies and their socioeconomic contexts.

The final section of this paper will look to some of these specific sites and specific bodies upon which the post-human is projected. It will look at the ways in which transcendental and voluntarist understandings of the post-human (the goal of which is ultimately liberation) are in fact contingent on reduction and subjection of specific bodies to bare life, and are reliant on a series of highly illiberal networks of power, labour and reliance.

### III. POST-HUMAN POLITICAL-ECONOMIES

Almost two decades after it was first written, Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" remains one of the most relevant and critically-cutting interrogations of the politico-economic implications of machines and their integration with bodies. Haraway devotes large sections of the *Manifesto* to interrogating the feminisation and international division of labour, and the impacts of communications and the global information economy on structuring the social, economic and bodily relations of women worldwide. However, her analysis focuses primarily on the *figure* of the cyborg (described throughout the work as a 'cyborg myth') as the foundation for a radical new politics of affinity. The figure of the technologically augmented *trans*-bodied cyborg serves as a resistive metaphorical resource which offers "a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves."<sup>39</sup> Haraway outlines the intricate entanglements of labour, communications, biotechnologies, capitalism, globalisation and international production, all wound into an "informatics of domination" in which capital and labour are configured alongside (as transductively constituting and constituted of) material bodies. For Haraway, the intimate interfaces and co-pollution of technologies and bodies can only be understood in terms of capital and capital production; the very body of the cyborg is structured and dictated on every level by capital. She resists traditional Marxist understandings of labour as the "pre-eminently privileged category enabling the Marxist to overcome illusion and find that point of view which is necessary for changing the world."<sup>40</sup> Instead of relying on an outdated, exclusionary and *humanising* conception of labour-as-identity, Haraway's cyborg metaphor opens up a new way of conceptualising the relationships between workers (particularly women), technology, information and bodies. However, despite the central place of labour and capital in the *Manifesto*, the work is curiously devoid of the singular material bodies of those women whose work serves as the basis for contemporary digital economies and the '*informatics of domination*'.<sup>41</sup>

Another watershed in the field, Elaine Graham's *Representations of the Post/Human*, deals explicitly with the maintenance of the 'ontological hygiene' of the Human through the exclusion of the "non-human, monstrous, abject or alien."<sup>42</sup> Despite dealing primarily with fictive representations of the post-human in film and literature, the spectre of capitalism and the place of economics and capital in machine/human relations can be seen operating in the subtext of her work. Early in the text Graham marks the fact that our relationship with technology needs to be thought alongside capital:

Technologies emerge from particular economic relations of production, bearing the marks of particular (often gendered) divisions of labour, the objectification of nature, disciplining of bodies, accumulation of capital, and pressures of commercialisation.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the text Graham continually returns to the economic base upon which the hyperbolic superstructures of disembodiment, immaterial information (in particular genetic code and immaterial capital) are constructed. For Graham, the cyborg metaphor signals an economic shift in late capitalism from traditional production and consumption to the processing and circulation of information, in which wealth creation and the production of capital are less tethered to processes of material production, and more focussed on information flow.<sup>44</sup> She rejects the hyperbolic assertion that digital information technologies will establish global post-industrial

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economic prosperity in which the very material problems of distribution and scarcity will simply be transcended by the shift to information economics, characterised by their supposed “technologically-driven abundance and democratisation.”<sup>45</sup> Instead Graham draws attention to issues of access to the high-tech artefacts, economics and symbolic spaces taken for granted by hyperbolic trans/posthumanists:

To the privileged first-world citizens, the digital and biotechnological developments bring with them an expansion of selfhood beyond the limits imposed by finite bodies and minds. To those unable to participate, however, it means further exclusion, compounded by the possibility that due to globalization, the wealth of Western cyborgs rests on the cheap labour of their Third-World sweatshop fellows... Despite their iconoclasm and self-styled radicalism, transhumanist principles have little to say about human evolution as involving the eradication of poverty, disease and discrimination.<sup>46</sup>

The transcendental hyperbolic accounts of post-human economic, bodily and political futures are predictably devoid of this disavowed underside; there are no material bodies marked by poverty, sickness, disability etc. or situated within global economic hierarchies of domination and subordination; there is only the limitless ‘emancipatory and egalitarian’ potential. These teleologies operating within hyperbolic accounts of the post-human obscure the multitude of people whose lives (and deaths) are currently structured by a lack of access to even the most basic of life-sustaining technologies (clothes, food, water sanitisation, malarial prophylactics, etc.). Discussions of biotechnological innovations, life-extension technologies, gene therapies and genetic engineering as heralding the end of sickness and senescence appeal to a transcendental ‘outside’, in which systemic problems of poverty and inequity can simply be ignored. Instead, Graham argues that the “primary *cause* of much disease is poverty; but such lavish attention to the gene effectively cloaks alternative routes in preference for the prestigious, high-profile ‘big science’ of biotechnology.”<sup>47</sup>

While Graham invokes the situated bodies which are left out of hyperbolic accounts of the post/human, her work focuses on representation and does not unpack the economic infrastructure or processes at play in post-human production. I want to move beyond Graham here by suggesting that hyperbolic post-humanism not only obfuscates and ignores this disavowed material underside; it is structurally reliant (both ontologically and materially) on the separation/subjugation of *zōē*, and the production of bare life.

### *Flexibilisation, the Global Production and the Global Information Network*

In tandem with massive structural changes in global capital flow and dramatic reductions in trade barriers, the nature of global labour markets have been fundamentally restructured over the past century. Global production chains have resulted from increasingly liberalised labour markets, particularly in those developing nations that have adopted export-oriented economic development strategies. IMF assistance and World Bank loans to developing countries are usually conditioned on economic restructuring projects, which often entail labour-market deregulation and liberalisation, the reduction of import tariffs and the elimination of domestic industrial subsidies.<sup>48</sup> As a result domestic industries are often displaced by export-processing, funded by foreign direct investment (FDI) seeking to capitalise on cheap labour costs. This shift to export-processing in less developed countries is characterised by post-Fordist ‘just-in-time’ production and delivery strategies and increasingly ‘flexibilised’ patterns of employment, in which work is often casual, informal, subcontracted and inherently insecure.<sup>49</sup>

These flexible and informal working arrangements are becoming the norm in those export sectors dominated by global value chains and FDI, particularly in manufacturing industries, electronics assembly and textile industries.<sup>50</sup> Flexible employment allows employers to externalise many of the risks and costs associated with global production by transferring them to their subcontracted, casual or informal and thus interchangeable employees.<sup>51</sup> For those employees whose labour is central to the functioning of these global chains of production, the experience of flexibility is often synonymous with ongoing financial instability, little job security and poor government regulation of domestic labour markets.

Following Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" which established the indissociability of (women's) labour, technoscience and globalised information economies, it becomes clear that flexibilised, feminised production (i.e. in electronics assembly industries) serves not only as the basis for the processes and flows of globalisation, but also for the formulation of the hyperbolic, transcendental post-human. Coco Fusco takes the analysis further by focussing specifically at the sites at which electronics are actually assembled; at specific factories which provide much of the hardware upon which digital fantasies are enacted.<sup>52</sup> Fusco rejects the emancipatory and democratising claims that information technologies lead to liberation, and that "'we' don't need to be concerned with the violent excise of power on bodies and territories anymore because 'we' don't need to carry all that meat and dirt along to the virtual promised land."<sup>53</sup> Instead she focuses her attention on those assembly workers whose integration with technologies and machines is marked not by liberation and transcendence but their absolute antitheses: by crippling poverty, an absolute lack of economic and personal security, and a complete alienation from the symbolic spaces that their labour produces. While many electronics assembly workers may have no access to the internet, their cheap labour provides the material basis upon which the dreams of digital disembodiment of transhumanists are based.

These electronics assembly workers are rendered post-human in that their technological augmentation situates them *beyond human*, and denies access to the very category of the 'human', as codified in international labour standards, international law and human rights conventions. The supposed fluidity, transcendence and liberation associated with digital technologies and hyperbolic post-human futures are structurally contingent on the cheap labour and de-humanisation of these other post-humans.

#### *Export Processing Zones and Post-Human Production*

In an attempt to attract FDI many developing countries establish export processing zones (EPZs)<sup>54</sup>—economic enclaves which are often fenced-in and offer free trade conditions, liberal regulatory environments, minimal customs and duties, tax incentives as well as ready-made manufacturing, communication and transport infrastructure.<sup>55</sup> Over the past forty years there has been explosive growth in both the number of EPZs (from a mere 79 EPZs in 25 countries in 1975 to 3500 zones in 130 countries in 2006)<sup>56</sup> and the number of employees (currently over 66 million worldwide).<sup>57</sup> EPZs further represent a fundamental shift in the gendered division of labour, with the majority of factory-floor assembly and textile workers being female. 'Feminisation' has become synonymous with export-oriented manufacturing, particularly in electronics industries where women constitute the vast majority of factory-floor staff.<sup>58</sup> An International Labour Organisation working paper expounds on this shift:

Whereas the typical industrial worker in the Fordist era after the Second World War was a European or American male working in capital-intensive "heavy industry", who could expect lifelong job security in a reasonably tight labour market, the right to join a union, some statutory or firm-based benefits and protections and a "family wage" which assumed full-time housework for women, the typical manufacturing worker is now more likely to be a young single Asian woman employed in labour-intensive, low value added stages of production, paid wages too low to cover a household's basic costs and enjoying very little social protection.<sup>59</sup>

'Feminisation' in EPZ employment thus not only describes increases in the proportion of female workers, but moves towards flexible modes of employment, lower wages, low job security and generally low labour standards. As EPZs are structurally dependant on highly fluid, mobile FDI and are open to global competition, any significant increases in labour standards or worker-protection legislation often precipitates foreign capital flight. Countries which have achieved some degree of increased labour standards and higher minimum wages (i.e. South Korea, Hong Kong and Malaysia) have lost a substantial amount of their low value-added FDI labour markets to countries with less developed economies and suppressed labour standards (i.e. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Vietnam). This tendency for capital flight and the subsequent need for systemically suppressed labour standards, coupled with continual international competition between essentially interchangeable labour

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markets means that EPZs do not necessarily lead to increased development or aid in industrialisation, rather they may simply perpetuate cycles of economic dependence and hegemonic domination.

The workers in EPZs are often subject to strict biopolitical regimes of control, regulation and observation. For example, in an ethnographical study of Mexican electronics *maquiladoras* workers, Melissa Wright describes how female workers are favoured because of their “naturally subordinate”<sup>60</sup> nature, their “inherent untrainability,”<sup>61</sup> and a range of other essentialised physiomorphological traits (i.e. “dexterity and the ability to work with small components are reputedly described as ... natural feminine traits”).<sup>62</sup> Wright describes how the female employees are expected to, very literally, “embody the concept of flexibility”<sup>63</sup> in that they are regarded as incomplete subjects, as untrainable bare life whose bodies serve “merely a conduit for the supervisor’s knowledge”.<sup>64</sup> Thus the *maquiladora* floor-worker is produced through the utter differentiation of *zoē* from *bios*, that is, as a body which is governed and operated through what Wright describes as a “prosthetics of supervision.”<sup>65</sup> The bare life of the electronics assembly worker is subordinated and appropriated first by way of the prosthetic relationship with her (almost always male) supervisor, and then at a second-level by the technologies and flows of global capital.

Despite their total integration with technological artefacts and instantiation within global networks of information and capital flow, Fusco rails against the labelling of the women working in *maquiladoras* as ‘cyborgs’, since such a naming would “natural[ise] the economic order to which they are subjected and myth[ify] the political nature of their interface with technology.”<sup>66</sup> Employing the augmented, hyphenated typography of post-human may serve as a better metaphor for understanding EPZ workers, as it signals their position as outside of the fully-human. This reappropriation of ‘post-human’ confounds transhumanist understandings of the emancipating and transcendent potential of technology, and serves to highlight what is left behind in these fantasies of transcendence.

The EPZ is by its very definition a ‘state of exception’, the logic of which establishes the conditions for the production of instrumentalised bare life. The definitional feature of an EPZ is that the laws and policy framework governing its operation are “distinct from what applies elsewhere.”<sup>67</sup> While the EPZ exists physically within a sovereign territory, it remains outside the regular juridical order of the state and is excluded from the tax laws, customs conditions, labour legislation, and environmental protections standards that apply elsewhere.

Similarly EPZ workers are excluded from the body politic physically (by strict security controls to prevent smuggling into domestic customs territory, usually by way of large fences and walls) and symbolically (through their exclusion from the regular juridico-political order, and through the lack of unionisation, international labour standards and independent monitoring).

As such, the EPZ can be seen to function with the same exceptional logic as the camp (as described by Agamben<sup>68</sup>). As with the inhabitants of the camp, EPZ workers are ushered into a zone outside of regular citizenship and the normal legal order. This exclusion is effected by a simultaneous inclusion, as EPZs are often established in special legislation, but also because they form key nodes in the globalised commodity chains, and are essential for the functioning of globalised capitalism.

As with the camp, the fenced-off enclave of the EPZ represents an absolute biopolitical space in that it allows for the unmediated application of power directly to bare life.<sup>69</sup> Here I do not mean to collapse the obvious and abysmal difference between the camp (which represents not only the production of bare life, but its genocide extermination) and the EPZ. Rather I aim to highlight the common divisional logic between the EPZ and the camp, both as paradoxical zones of exception and sites of production of bare life.

Agamben here provides us with a way of thinking ‘post-human’ “not as a unitary subject but as a dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles.”<sup>70</sup> On one pole exists the liberated pure *bios* of the transcendental tech-enhanced post-human, the personification of free-floating disembodied capital, while the other pole represents the deficient bare life of those post-human workers who are defined explicitly through their violent exclusion

from the symbolic and juridical order, who are post-human in a very different sense, in that they are excluded from what counts as human elsewhere.

Thus ‘post-human’ should be heard in its contradictory valencies; the situated and subaltern post-human and the transcendent technologically augmented cyborg are articulated in a double-movement, and are structurally reliant on each other at every level (materially, economically, politically, judicially, and symbolically). The post-human hyphen thus begins to represent that internal, fundamental biopolitical fracture between *zoē* and *bios* upon which these opposed understandings of the post-human are founded—the internal contradiction which is always already at its core.

The point here is not to resurrect some essential or normative notion of the human which should be extended to EPZ workers, nor to suggest that the borders of precisely what counts as human need to be renegotiated. A materialist analysis highlights the internal contradictions, inconsistencies and relationships of domination upon which the post-human is founded. The normative weight and usefulness of this phase-shifting methodology is not derived from some prescriptive or positivist notion of the human which *ought* to be extended to EPZ workers, rather it simultaneously troubles the terms on either side of the post-human hyphen. (Post)Humanist discourses of liberation, autonomy, individualism, emancipation and progress are *materially and symbolically contingent* on (re)producing the illiberal, violent, and inhuman conditions they propose to transcend.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

To suggest that it is somehow ‘more important’ to focus on the material underside of the post-human would be to reinscribe yet another unproductive limit between the figurative and the material, or between rhetoric and flesh. By instead deploying the post-human in a contradictory and pluralistic manner, by using it elliptically to explore the nuanced and layered interconnections, co-dependencies and transductive co-constitution of bodies and technologies, material economies and metaphors, one can begin to see that the transcendental promises of ‘post’ are in fact contingent on the production of bare life. Here, and throughout the paper I mean ‘production’ to be heard in its multiple valencies to signify the discursive production of sub-human bare life, but also the material production of bare life itself, in conditions such as EPZs.

A methodology which phase-shifts from a symbolic/deconstructive to a material/sociological perspective helps highlight the danger and violence of any transcendental or universalising languages, whether they come from hyperbolic promises of digital immortality, or from the false-exits from humanism offered by critical deployments of ontologically subversive cyborg imagery. This mode of theoretical pluralism accommodates bodies and technologies, which are always already co-constitutive and are together always already ensnared within hierarchical networks of labour, capital, and power.

By practicing this mode of methodological phase-shifting, the post-human may be revived as a useful critical tool and conceptual rubric which highlights the transduction of ‘body’ and ‘technology’, but also the central importance of materiality and political economy, while flagging the danger of the transcendental ‘post’. Such an analysis allows us to begin excavating the sites at which both the discourses and the material fabric of post-humans are produced, the technologies (discursive, material, juridical etc) which go into their production, and their economic and ethico-political consequences. Furthermore, this type of analysis holds at its core a disavowed underside of singular, material bodies—rendered non/barely/post/human by the very same technologies, logics and flows which go into producing the hyperbolic post-human. By refusing to ignore or obfuscate these material conditions and situated bodies, and highlighting the economic and political networks within which they are instantiated, a critico-materialist approach to the post-human forces a reassessment of the ethics and mechanics of our uses of technology ■

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### NOTES

1. Ed Regis, *Great Mambo Chicken And The Transhuman Condition: Science Slightly Over The Edge*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1991, 148.
2. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. New York: Penguin Viking, 2006, 29.
3. Virilio's concerns and focus are obviously wildly divergent from those of the other authors listed here—I include him only because of the apocalyptic (sometimes deployed literally) tone he adopts in discussions of technology.
4. Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988, 5.
5. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999, 2-3.
6. *Ibid.*, 12.
7. Neil Badmington, "Theorizing Posthumanism" *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003), 11.
8. *Ibid.*, 12.
9. See especially Badmington, "Theorizing Posthumanism" and Eugene Thacker, "Data Made Flesh: Biotechnology and the Discourse of the Posthuman" *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003), 72-97.
10. 'Transhuman' is the teleological descriptor used by many hyperbolic thinkers (especially Bostrom, Kurzweil etc.) to describe a transitory, intermediate stage in the techno-evolution from human into 'posthuman'.
11. Nick Bostrom, "The Transhumanist FAQ: A General Introduction," 2003, 4. Available at: <http://www.transhumanism.org/resources/FAQv2.pdf>.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Sherryl Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 9.
14. Bostrom, "Transhumanist FAQ", 22.
15. Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. London: Profile Books, 2003, 112.
16. *Ibid.*, 130.
17. Rational choice as proper only to humans is an increasingly untenable concept considering the increasingly intelligent nature of machines.
18. *Ibid.*, 156.
19. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, 1st ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
20. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, 33.
21. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 1.
22. Here I use *epistémé* in the Platonic (as opposed to Foucauldian) sense to signify the knowledge of the Forms, transcendental realities through the sciences (i.e. mathematics and physics), and metaphysics in general.

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23. Adrian Mackenzie, *Transductions: Bodies and Machines at Speed*. London; New York: Continuum, 2002, 43.
24. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the problematisation of the technology/human distinction only began with post-structuralism and deconstruction. This would be to ignore the (already all too often overlooked) thinkers who had, centuries before, already begun to think technology central to and constitutive of the human. For the sake of concision I can only gesture towards thinkers like Lamarck (who laid the foundations for both Stiegler and the emerging field of epigenetics), La Mettrie (whose *L'homme Machine* could be read as a 1747 precursor to Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto") and Henri Bergson, who as early as 1907, stated that artificial objects and mechanical invention are "from the first...[the] essential feature" of the Human. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Dover Publications, 1998, 138. By suggesting that the interactions of technologies and bodies are only *now* being understood in supplementary terms would be to caricature Enlightenment thought and efface the tacit, embodied knowledge of humans who have always lived intimately and inseparably with *techné*. Alison Muri's 2006 book *The Enlightenment Cyborg* is one of few accounts which offer a corrective to what she terms the "misappropriation of the Enlightenment in postmodernist readings of the cyborg" (Allison Muri, *The Enlightenment Cyborg: A History of Communications and Control in the Human Machine, 1660-1830*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006, 7) by highlighting heterogeneity present in Enlightenment medicine and philosophy and illustrating its many non-Cartesian undercurrents.
25. Steigler, *Technics and Time*, 134-179.
26. Leroi-Gourhan in Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 141.
27. Steigler, *Technics and Time*, 142. Emphasis added.
28. Jacques Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs: An Interview." *Differences* 5 (1993), 1-25.
29. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007, 64.
30. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2004, 15.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 37.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 140.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
38. *Ibid.*, 6.
39. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991, 181.
40. *Ibid.*, 159.
41. This absence of singular bodies is particularly obvious when read in parallel with Haraway's most recent book, *When Species Meet* (2008), which abounds with references to specific bodies and the political-economic contexts that shape and constitute them.
42. Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, 18.
43. *Ibid.*, 30.

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44. *Ibid.*, 202.
45. Elaine Graham, “‘Nietzsche Gets a Modem’: Transhumanism and the ‘Technological Sublime’” *Literature and Theology* 16:1 (2002), 67.
46. *Ibid.*, 69.
47. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, 121.
48. Jean Pyle, “Sex, Maids, and Export Processing: Risks and Reasons for Gendered Global Production Networks” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15:1 (2001), 55-57.
49. S. Barrientos, N. Kabeer, and N. Hossain, “The Gender Dimensions of the Globalization of Production” *International Labour Organisation Working Paper* (2004), 17.
50. *Ibid.*, 1.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Coco Fusco, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours: And Other Writings*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001, 194.
53. *Ibid.*, 188.
54. Different countries employ different names for these zones; ‘Maquiladora’ in Mexico, ‘Special Economic Zone’ in China, ‘Free Economic Zone’ in the ROK, ‘Foreign Trade Zones’ in India etc.
55. See M. Engman, O. Onodera, and E. Pinali, “Export Processing Zones: Past and Future Role in Trade and Development” *OECD Trade Policy Working Papers*, No.53. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2007; World Bank, “Export Processing Zones.” *Policy and Research Series* No.20. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1992.
56. Engman, et. al. “Export Processing Zones”, 12.
57. *Ibid.*
58. See Melissa Wright, “Desire and the Prosthetics of Supervision: A Case of Maquiladora Flexibility” *Cultural Anthropology* 16:3 (2001); Engman, et. al. “Export Processing Zones”; Barrientos et. al., “Globalization of Production”.
59. Barrientos et. al., “Globalization of Production”, 4.
60. Wright, “Desire and the Prosthetics of Supervision”.
61. *Ibid.*, 359.
62. *Ibid.*, 362.
63. *Ibid.*, 354.
64. *Ibid.*, 363.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Fusco, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours*, 200.
67. Engman, et. al. “Export Processing Zones”.
68. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

69. *Ibid.*, 171.

70. *Ibid.*, 177.

## RE-PROGRAMMING LYOTARD: FROM THE POSTMODERN TO THE POSTHUMAN CONDITION

William Martin

### INTRODUCTION

The work of Jean Francois Lyotard has often been interpreted as the philosophical justification for a certain concept of “postmodernism”—namely, the idea that science and culture provide competing narratives for understanding reality—yet such an interpretation fails to understand the function that the techno-scientific system is supposed to perform in “computerized” societies, or the manner in which the diffusion of new technologies alters the cultural infrastructure of the life-world. In order to respond to this situation, I propose to adopt the new perspective outlined by Lyotard in *The Inhuman*,<sup>1</sup> a series of lectures that reflect upon the cultural significance of the “dialectic of scientific research” described in *The Postmodern Condition*.<sup>2</sup> Now, while it would be a mistake to describe the tone of *The Inhuman* as “optimistic” (for the reason that Lyotard maintains his critique of the functional integration of science, technology and education in advanced capitalist societies), there is nevertheless an acceptance that the future of humanity will be determined by its capacity to negotiate a more creative, symbiotic relationship with these technologies. It is for this reason that he turns to the “saving” power of art to counter the dehumanizing effects of technology, for he suggests that the invention of new language games and practical techniques remains dependent upon the creative impulse that motivates the production of artworks.<sup>3</sup> Taking into account this change of perspective, it might therefore be more accurate to describe the tone of the *Inhuman* as one of “resignation”, in the sense that the critique of scientific discourse in *The Postmodern Condition* must now be accepted as an adequate description of the social function of the knowledge-system in

“computerized” or “information” societies. If we are to take this new perspective seriously, then we will necessarily have to abandon the popular conceptions of “postmodernism” that have been spawned by the appropriation of this book in the Anglo-American scholarly community.<sup>4</sup> Rather than accepting the naive view that both scientific and mythic world-views are legitimated by narratives (a position that tends to level the distinction between science and society), the purpose of this paper is to investigate the “performative” manner in which human subjects are directly *socialized* by the invention and use of new technologies. Indeed, if technologies of communication are understood as the medium in which the structure of the life-world is reproduced, then the dialectic of science and technology can no longer be simply understood as a form of instrumental rationality, but rather as a productive force that supplies the media of social interaction in computerized societies. Perhaps “the posthuman condition” provides a better expression to connote the interaction between science, technology and culture in computerized societies, because it captures the new perspective on the “postmodern condition” implied by Lyotard’s notion of the “inhuman”.

Rather than seeking to formulate Lyotard’s own position on the “postmodern condition” or the “inhuman”, this paper will attempt to extend the description of the techno-scientific-industrial complex to the point at which the scientific knowledge embodied in technology begins to transform the habits of users and the cultural infrastructure of the lifeworld. Seeking to re-interpret Lyotard’s description of scientific research through the concept of the inhuman, I shall use the term “posthuman condition” to describe the cultural effects of the expansion of science and technology in computerized societies. By focusing upon the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) through the market-place, I would like to suggest that *the privatization of the knowledge use to construct networks of communication leads paradoxically to an increase in the possibilities of public communication*.<sup>5</sup> By pointing to a new configuration of the “public sphere” in computerized or information societies, it would appear that I am contradicting the explicit intentions of Lyotard himself, for much of his work has been interpreted as a polemic against Habermas’ notion of a rational society unified by the tri-partite structure of communicative action.<sup>6</sup> While it would be true to say that Lyotard constantly seeks to differentiate his own position from Habermas’, it must be recognized that Lyotard’s description of “the pragmatics of scientific research” is heavily indebted to the discussion of the same topic in Habermas’ *Knowledge and Human Interests*.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, to the extent that both thinkers adopt the concept of the rule-based language games from Wittgenstein,<sup>8</sup> and the notion of the “performative” from the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin,<sup>9</sup> it can be concluded that both are operating within a tradition of pragmatic thought that shares many of the same preoccupations. As it is well-known, Lyotard disputes the idea that any cultural narrative can legitimate the knowledge of the sciences, for the fragmentation of scientific discourses into a multiplicity of heterogeneous language games causes such knowledge to withdraw from public view (becoming accessible only as private “information” stored in a memory bank). Although Lyotard believes the Habermasian notion of the public sphere to be an outdated concept, he nevertheless traces the issue of legitimacy to the capacity of “humanity” to formulate its own laws through the use of reason:

Knowledge finds its validity not within itself, not in a subject that develops by actualizing its learning possibilities, but in a practical subject—humanity. The principle of the movement animating the people is not the self-legitimation of knowledge, but the self-grounding of freedom or, if preferred, its self-management. The subject is concrete, or supposedly so, and its epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself. It is assumed that the laws it makes for itself are just, not because they conform to some outside nature, but because the legislators are, constitutionally, the very citizens who are subject to the laws. As a result, the legislator’s will—the desire that the laws be just—will always coincide with the will of the citizen, who desires the law and will therefore obey it.<sup>10</sup>

Citing Habermas’ historical study of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Lyotard suggests that the scientific community retains the power to criticize the instrumentalization of knowledge by the state, for as he puts it, “this type of legitimation grants them the authority, as practical human beings, to refuse their scholarly support to a political power they judge to be unjust.”<sup>11</sup> While it is the explicit intention of the *Postmodern Condition* to suggest that the fragmentation of scientific knowledge makes such public critique impossible, I would like

to suggest that this normative concept of “humanity” returns to haunt the remainder of the work. Indeed, in the final chapter of the book, Lyotard suggests that post-modern science can still perform a *critical* function in society, for there is a potential conflict between the instability of the language games invented by the post-modern scientist (who is oriented towards the “truth” of the theory) and the stability of the social system run by the technocrat (who is oriented towards the “efficiency” of the performance). Although Lyotard adopts the perspective of Luhmann’s systems-theory, analyzing the “performative” manner in which the system legitimates itself, he still retains this normative concept of humanity in order to critique the *dehumanizing* effects of the techno-scientific-industrial complex.<sup>12</sup> While the theory of communicative action cannot supposedly replace the function of a meta-narrative in a “post-modern” society, the loss of “humanity” as a collective political subject nevertheless become the central theme of the discussion in *The Inhuman*. In the latter text, we shall see that the development of information and communication technologies alters the structure of the lifeworld in such a manner that individuals are directly *socialized* by the expanding infrastructure of the techno-scientific system.

### HABERMAS, LYOTARD AND THE CRITIQUE OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE

In seeking to bring about a *rapprochement* between Lyotard’s description of techno-science and Habermas’ theory of modernity, we need to clarify the supposed difference between these two thinkers. On the one hand, Habermas’ theory of communicative action<sup>13</sup> is supposed to mediate between the cultural institutions that become differentiated in rationalized societies (science, religion and art), for by performing speech-acts that integrate cognitive, normative and expressive attitudes, and raising corresponding claims to validity (truth, rightness and sincerity), speakers oriented towards reaching understand can arrive at a consensus that allows them to co-ordinate social action. On the other hand, Lyotard’s conception of the *differend* entails that the two parties engaged in a conflict should not be judged according to the rules of a single discourse (which constitutes rules for linking “phrases” of the same regimen), for the parties speak incommensurable genres of discourse, and the adjudicating discourse cannot resolve the conflict without causing an injustice to one or both of the parties. “As distinguished from litigation,” writes Lyotard, “a differend would be a case of conflict, between at (least two) parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments.”<sup>14</sup> In short, the central point of contention seems to be the claim that the linguistic structure of communicative action can provide a meta-discourse that is capable of mediating between the expert discourses produced by the differentiated sub-systems of a rationalized or modernized society. According to the argument put forward by Lyotard in *The Differend*, it is impossible for speakers “to come to an agreement on which rules or metaprescriptions are universally valid for language,”<sup>15</sup> for the different genres of discourse remain incommensurable with another. Furthermore, consensus cannot be interpreted as the end of communication processes in a technocratic society, for “consensus” is simply a transitional state of an ongoing dialogue that is ultimately oriented towards the end of efficiency.<sup>16</sup> At an even higher level, it would seem that the two competing forms of legitimation give rise to a differend, for as Forester puts it, “the forms of discourse oriented towards truth and efficiency represent incommensurable configurations of rationality.”<sup>17</sup> When interpreted in the light of his later work, Lyotard’s account of the postmodern condition can be interpreted as staging the struggle between the cultural and technocratic modes in which scientific knowledge can be legitimated. While the legitimation of scientific knowledge in the public sphere has been traditionally achieved through a narrative of emancipation that promises citizens the “right” to science, the evolution of the education system in computerized societies introduces a dislocation between science and society, for the language games invented by scientists remain incommensurable with one another, and cannot be reduced to a meta-discourse that bridges the difference.

Rather than focusing upon the dispute between Lyotard and Habermas, which is centred around their different conceptions of linguistic interaction, I would like to focus upon the pragmatic description of the scientific method that both thinkers use to criticize the knowledge of the scientific community. As we shall see, Lyotard’s description of the “pragmatics of scientific knowledge” builds on the account already given by Habermas *Knowledge and Human Interests*, a text which the former cites to articulate the practical interests that motivate

the production of knowledge.<sup>18</sup> In a chapter titled “The Self-Reflection of the Natural Sciences”, Habermas argues that the progress of the natural sciences is in fact motivated by a form of instrumental action whereby scientists measure and control nature for the practical purpose of verifying hypotheses. Following the logical model adopted by Peirce, Habermas suggests that the process of making inferences allows the scientist to transform his beliefs into “synthetically valid statements”, i.e. categorial judgments that are verified by sensations, and distinguishes three forms of inference that in their unity constitute “the rules of synthesis”: abduction, deduction, induction.<sup>19</sup> In very simple terms, abduction involves the formation of new hypotheses, deduction the formulation of a syllogism to express the law-like relationship between cause and effect, and induction the verification of the law through experimentation and observation. To the extent, however, that the natural scientist limits himself to a monological form of discourse (the syllogism) when formulating hypothesis, deducing proofs, and inducing laws, Habermas remains broadly critical of the scientific method, for he argues that “truth” of a particular theory can only be verified through a public dialogue conducted by the scientific community as a whole. While it might be naively assumed that this public discourse can be described as an open-ended, interactive process, oriented towards reaching understanding and agreement, Habermas makes it clear that the “truth” of the scientific method is ultimately motivated by a collective belief in the progress of science.<sup>20</sup> To the extent that the “transcendental necessity” of these rules is bound to a belief in the ultimate progress of science, the public discourse of the scientific community becomes structurally coupled to the rational action of the experimenter who controls nature in order to observe it. In the same way that Lyotard criticizes the genre of scientific discourse for limiting itself to the meaning of denotative statements, we can see that Habermas also remains critical of the tendency to assume that logical statements have a monopoly on the description of “reality”.

Following Peirce, Habermas describes the procedure of verification as a form of instrumental action in which the scientist seeks to increase his technical control of nature and thereby reduce the uncertainty of the surrounding environment. While the rules of inference do not necessarily guarantee the truth of a particular theory at a particular point in time, they nevertheless “establish a procedure that increases intersubjectively recognized beliefs if it is carried out continuously under empirical conditions.”<sup>21</sup> When placed in the objective life-context of the scientific community, the rational-purposive action of the scientist is guided by beliefs, and such beliefs have the status of behavioural rules. If recognized as valid by the scientific community, a belief becomes a habit that functions as a plan of action. Significantly, Habermas adopts the model of a feed-back controlled, cybernetic system when describing the progress of science, for as he puts it, “the results of synthetic reasoning have a function only in the behavioural system of this purposive-rational, feedback controlled, and habitual behaviour.”<sup>22</sup> According to this logic, the scientific community as a whole can be understood as a cybernetic organism that attempts to reduce the uncertainty of the environment by falsifying old theories and inventing new theories. To the extent that the formation of habits involves the repetition of verification procedures, the scientific system becomes bound to a form of experimental action that involves the technical control over nature:

Experimental action is only a precise form of instrumental action in general that has been made possible by operations of measurement. The behavioural system of experimental or quasi-experimental action has the function of a transcendental framework: under conditions of experimentation, reality is objectified such that an observable reaction to initial conditions is with transcendental necessity a singular event that *per se* represents a universal effect.<sup>23</sup>

When it comes to analyzing the legitimacy of this procedure, Habermas points out that the transcendental structure of instrumental action possesses an internal source of legitimacy, for the rules of synthesis provide a procedure that can guarantee the truth of science *in the long run*.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the syllogisms of the individual scientist remain a private language that can only attain the status of a belief (and habit) when accepted in public by the scientific community. As a consequence, the cognitive and normative truth-claims of science seem to be bound up with a system of action that is ambivalently oscillating between the ends of technical control and public communication.

Despite Lyotard's skepticism towards the idea that the knowledge of science can be effectively communicated to the subject of "humanity" in the public sphere, an ideal that he attributes to Habermas, his description of the scientific method draws upon the tradition of American and British pragmatism (Peirce, James, Mead, Dewey, Austin), and relies upon the concept of the "language game" developed by the later Wittgenstein. In describing the rules of the language game known as science, Lyotard specifies three conditions: (1) the rules of a discourse cannot legitimate themselves, but are legitimated by a social contract between speakers who agree to obey the rules of the game; (2) changing the rules of the game changes the nature of the game; and (3) every utterance is understood as a "move" in the game.<sup>25</sup> With respect to the pursuit of scientific knowledge, these three rules correspond to (a) the requirement that the scientific community reaches consensus about the truth of a theory, (b) the imperative to invent new theories to progress the state of scientific knowledge, and (c) the proof required to verify the "reality" of a scientific theory. In formulating the manner in this way, Lyotard stresses the social basis for the legitimation of scientific knowledge, the practical interest that motivates the progress of science, and the calculative reasoning that is used to actually prove a theory. When it comes to describing the actual rules of the scientific language-game, Lyotard draws upon the distinction between the "performative" and "constative" dimensions of a speech-act. While the latter purport to represent the "reality" of the world, the former invokes conventions that regulate the social interaction between speakers. More specifically, Lyotard analyses scientific discourse as a language game in which a speaker raises a truth-claim about a factual situation and calls upon the listener to accept or deny the statement: "the utterance places (and exposes) the sender in the position of 'knower' ... the addressee is put in the position of having to give or refuse assent, and the referent itself is handled in a way unique to denotatives, as something that demands to be correctly identified and expressed by the statement that refers to it."<sup>26</sup> This is effectively a re-formulation of Habermas' notion of a truth-claim.

In the context of scientific discourse, the normative foundation of scientific discourse is systematically repressed, yet this contradiction between the performative and constative aspects of the language game may help us to reconcile the positions of Lyotard and Habermas. Despite the fact that the genre of scientific discourse is limited to the utterance of denotative statements that either identify referents or express meanings, it nevertheless relies upon the *performative* dimension of speech-acts in order to raise a truth-claim, for the act of making an assertion introduces a social contract that *constitutes* the genre of scientific discourse. Despite the fact that scientists must adopt a performative attitude in making denotative statements, and frequently use prescriptives when proving a theory,<sup>27</sup> Lyotard argues that they must systematically repress the normative foundation of the discourse. This form of communicative pathology is reinforced at a structural level, for the rules of the scientific language game dictate that participants in the dialogue must act *as if* they were engaged in monological discourse, excluding from the "denotative" meaning of their propositions any "connotative" meaning that the same terms may have derived from their use in the context of cultural narratives. Indeed, insofar as a scientific statement ("the path of the planets is circular") needs to be proved in order to command the assent of the scientific community, the dialectical or rhetorical manner in which the proof is articulated must be repressed from the actual meaning of the theorem, for as Lyotard puts it, "Scientific knowledge requires that one language game, denotation, be retained and all others excluded. A statement's truth-value is the criterion determining its acceptability."<sup>28</sup> Of course, one must not confuse Lyotard's description of the scientific language game from the actual intentions of the scientists, for it is precisely the aim of *The Postmodern Condition* to expose the problem of legitimation as the normative foundation of scientific discourse.

In Habermasian terms, the scientific language game might be analysed as a form *systematically distorted communication*, for the goal of reaching understanding cannot be achieved by appealing to the shared cultural knowledge of the speakers, but can only be artificially produced by performing upon a verification procedure that remains bound to the transcendental structure of experimental action.<sup>29</sup> In a lecture titled "Reflections on Communicative Pathology"<sup>30</sup> Habermas defines systematically distorted communication as the situation in which at least one of the three validity claims of linguistic interaction is suspended, and yet communication is maintained under the false *presupposition* that the speakers are oriented towards reaching mutual understanding.<sup>31</sup> In the context of scientific discourse, the normative rightness of each denotative statement is suspended from

the discourse, yet the appearance of communicative action is still maintained by means of an appeal to the direct observation of nature.<sup>32</sup> Systematically distorted communication may be caused by the pathologies of individual speakers or the norms of social institutions, but in most cases the two are caught in a negative feedback loop that amplifies the distortion. By splitting scientific discourse into a private and a public process, the logic of instrumental action becomes differentiated from the legitimation of science in the public sphere. As we shall see, Lyotard rejects the idea that the scientific community can provide a public forum in computerized societies which could decide upon the competency of a scientist or the truth of a theory. Under the new discourse of “performativity”, he argues that denotative statements are directly legitimated by the efficiency of experimental procedures. Consequently, the so-called “post-modern condition” can be analysed as a form of systematically distorted communication, for the pathology of the individual scientist (the repression of connotation) becomes structurally bound to the social function that scientist is supposed to perform in order to reproduce the technological infrastructure of research (the experimental control of nature). The concept of systematically distorted communication therefore provides us with a means of reconciling the theoretical differences between Habermas and Lyotard.

### CIRCUMVENTING DIALOGUE; OR PRODUCING “COMPETENT” SCIENTISTS

If we turn to the social problem that Lyotard confronts in *The Postmodern Condition*, then it can be seen that the issue of legitimacy is centred around the structural separation of science and culture, for Lyotard foregrounds the question of whether the scientific method possesses an internal mechanism for legitimating the knowledge that it produces. At the beginning of the book, Lyotard identifies the field of inquiry as “knowledge in computerized societies”, and from an empirical point of view, observes that the knowledge produced by science can no longer be separated from the infrastructure that is used to produce it. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Lyotard focuses upon the invention of the computer to designate this social field of this new era, for this tool involves the integration of software and hardware components that makes the mental activity of programming dependent upon physical activity of performing calculations (and vice-versa). When the production of scientific research becomes bound to the operation of computers, quantification and calculability become the minimum conditions for the production of knowledge as information. Although Lyotard never makes the distinction explicit, it can be inferred that knowledge becomes information when the means of producing it becomes bound to the possession of fixed capital (the computer), and the means of distributing it dependent upon the market (the commodification of knowledge as information).<sup>33</sup> Traditionally, the knowledge of science has been communicated to the citizens of a democracy through the education system or the public sphere, but with the computerization of scientific research access to information becomes restricted, either because the general public lacks the infrastructure to process it, or the competence to understand it. When Lyotard was writing *The Postmodern Condition* in the 1970s, access to computers was still limited to state institutions and large corporations, for the “personal computer” (PC) had not yet been invented, and the internet was still in its infancy. For this reason, he interpreted the structural differentiation between science and culture as the source of a “legitimation crisis”,<sup>34</sup> because he believed that the knowledge of science could no longer be unified by the university system or disseminated via the public sphere. In his later lectures on *The Inhuman*, however, Lyotard recognizes that the growing information network becomes capable of directly socializing subjects to the techno-scientific system, such that the “performativity” of individuals becomes a measure of their adaptation to this new informational environment. Taking into account this change of perspective, I will use the term “posthuman condition” to refer to the state of society in which individuals are directly socialized to the techno-scientific system by means of their performance of operations that not only draw on the resources of the information network but also contribute to its expansion.

As we shall see, the concept of “performativity” provides an alternative mode of legitimating the knowledge of natural sciences, for it circumvents the requirement that the competency of scientists be judged by the public discourse of the scientific community. When it comes to analysing the concept of legitimation, however, Lyotard makes it clear that the *cognitive* statements of scientific discourse have been traditionally legitimated by means of *normative* rules that distinguish between scientific and non-scientific statements:

Legitimation is the process by which a legislator is authorized to promulgate such a law as a norm. Now take the example of a scientific statement: it is subject to the rule that the statement must fulfill a given set of conditions in order to be accepted as scientific. In this case, legitimation is the process by which a “legislator” dealing with scientific discourse is authorized to prescribe the stated conditions (in general, conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification) determining whether a statement is to be included in that discourse for consideration by the scientific community.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the fact that scientific community believes itself be an autonomous system of society, capable of legitimating itself through the repetition of verification procedures, Lyotard here suggests that there is a “strict interlinkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics or politics.”<sup>36</sup> While the genre of scientific discourse appears to be limited to the formulation of logical propositions, denotative statements that refer directly to the “reality” of nature, Lyotard here argues that the *rules* of this genre are determined by a social contract that not only regulates the status of speakers, but also determines the kinds of statement that can be made within this discourse. By exposing the normative foundations of science as a genre of discourse, Lyotard makes it clear that the legitimation of science can only be achieved by the appeal to a tribunal that lies beyond its discursive boundaries. As a consequence, the generic distinction between “science” and “politics” would seem to problematize the claim that the truth of a scientific theory is dependent simply upon the verification natural laws through experimentation and observation.

By introducing the concept of the “performative” in his account of the scientific statement, Lyotard not only reveals that the rules of discourse are governed by a social contract shared by participants, he also shows that the reproduction of scientific discourse requires that speakers must be *socialized* in order to perform the roles of sender and addressee in the communication network. In a chapter titled “The Pragmatics of Narrative Knowledge”, Lyotard points out that the meaning of the French word for “knowledge” (*savoir*) must not be reduced simply to the “learning” (*connaissance*) that it produces as its content, but rather must include the “know-how” (*savoir-faire*) or competence that makes possible the production of such learning. The discussion here is not simply linguistic, for it points to an essential distinction between capacity and performance.<sup>37</sup> According to good Aristotelian logic, the capacity to do something is an actual potentiality that can be actualized through work. Although the content of scientific knowledge can be expressed in denotative statements, the capacity to produce such statements can only be determined by a juridical discourse that distinguishes between good and bad statements. “What is a good ‘prescriptive’ or ‘evaluative’ utterance, a ‘good’ performance in denotative or technical matters?” asks Lyotard, “They are all judged to be good because they conform to the relevant criteria (of justice, beauty, truth and efficiency respectively) accepted in the social circle of the knower’s interlocutors.”<sup>38</sup> Here we can see that the cognitive content of a scientific statement is judged by a normative discourse that distinguishes between competence and incompetence. In the context of narrative knowledge, the competence of the story-teller to reproduce a narrative is simply dependent the fact that he has heard the story. The “authority” of the story-teller is determined by the extent to which he is perceived to be faithfully transmitting the story.<sup>39</sup> In the context of scientific knowledge, however, legitimation is not immanent to the process of transmission, for the truth of a denotative statement can only be verified by recourse to a “proof”. As the validity of the “proof” requires that it be expressed in scientific discourse, it necessarily excludes other types of language game, yet it still needs to be legitimated through a process of transmission in which the knowledge of the “expert” is communicated to his “student”. It is at this stage of Lyotard’s account that the field of education or “didactics” becomes crucially important, for the public discussion of the scientific community does not simply concern itself with the truth or falsity of theories, but it also decides upon the competence of speakers. As Lyotard points out, competence does not precede the event of communication, but is rather produced via the transmission of the message:

Not only the truth of a scientist’s statement, but also his competence, is at stake in that debate. One’s competence is never an accomplished fact. It depends upon whether or not the statement proposed is considered by one’s peers to be worth discussion in a sequence of argumentation and refutation.<sup>40</sup>

Not only does the determination of competence constitute a *precondition* for a public discussion concerning the truth of the theory (and presumably an on-going process of falsification), but it also ensures the social reproduction of the language game, for the student becomes a “competent” scientist when he receives and internalizes the messages sent by his teacher. In this way, we can see that the “competence” can never be simply established through the pursuit of the scientific method, but can only be brought upon through a process of transmission in which the “expert” communicates his knowledge to the “audience”.

Despite Lyotard’s skepticism concerning the emancipatory potential of human freedom in the public sphere, Habermas’ notion of a communicative space between the market and the state can nevertheless provide us with an effective way of interpreting the relationship between scientific research and education, and the “performative” manner in which both action-spheres are legitimated. From the perspective of scientific research, the axiomatic rules of particular language games can be legitimated through the consensus of the scientific experts engaged in public dialogue.<sup>41</sup> When it comes to supplying a proof for each theory, however, the accurate perception of reality remains inseparable from the technology used to measure, record and control the motion of nature. As Lyotard points out, the functioning of this technology obeys a logic that is indifferent to the consensus of the experts, for the criteria of competence is not socialization to the language game, but rather the principle of optimum performance: “maximising output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process).”<sup>42</sup> It is the subordination of the public dialogue to the ends of efficiency that is ultimately responsible for the structural differentiation of science from society. Not only does this reliance on technology transform the scientific method into a form of instrumental action, but the wealth required to purchase the infrastructure links the progress of science to the reproduction of fixed capital in the market-place. There are two ways in which the technological infrastructure can produce enough “surplus” value to ensure that the dialectic of research continues. On the one hand, the knowledge of science can be used to produce technological appliances that are distributed as commodities in the market-place.<sup>43</sup> The cultural effect of this process is to transform the structure of the life-world, for through the diffusion of “innovations”, the habits and values of consumers become entrained towards the functioning of tools that solve practical problems and reduce uncertainty.<sup>44</sup> This application of scientific knowledge to the resolution of practical problems and the development of new technologies can be interpreted as a *privatization* of science, for the production of commodity is motivated by the *private interests* of the developers. On the other hand, the state can promote research in specific areas of expertise through the provision of subsidies and grants, yet such research must contribute to the stability of the social system or the efficiency of the economy. This can also be seen as a form of *privatization*, for the technical knowledge of such experts is beyond the competence of the general public. Despite the fact that these two processes are pursued by both private corporations and public authorities, both bring about the privatization of science, for not only does the “know-why” withdraw from public view, but the search for truth is subordinated to the reproduction of the means necessary to undertake research.

The privatization of the knowledge system is also accompanied by a transformation in the education system, for it leads to the creation of a new class of “technical” elites who service the new infrastructure of scientific research and development. When the goal of education is reduced to the function of training skilled professionals in new industries, the education system becomes legitimated by the role that it performs in the social system as a whole, for “the desired goal becomes the optimal contribution of higher education to the best performativity of the social system.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, to the extent that Keynesian economic policies can create linkages between public investment and private profit-making, the technical specialization of scientific research can explain the tendency of the public sphere to become “refeudalized” in the context of the “welfare state mass democracy”.<sup>46</sup> While the goal of a technical or vocational education is to produce professionals that can perform a function in the social system, the re-orientation of the education system to the ends of technical efficiency also has effects on educators, for the stock of knowledge possessed by individual minds can effectively be replaced by a memory bank. Under such conditions, the critical task of questioning discourses and institutions is struck from the curriculum, and the oral medium of the lecture becomes obsolete, replaced by ICTS that give students access to the memory bank. With no direct process of transmission to socialize students to the performativity

of the scientific language game, the reproduction of knowledge becomes reduced to the process of selecting information and inventing new ways to manipulate the data. This new form of education is essentially tied to the development of the computerized infrastructure required to undertake research. Despite the conservative politics that motivate the reduction of education to a part of the social system, Lyotard asserts that post-modern science is motivated by the search for instabilities, posing a potential threat to the stability of the system. For this reason, the technocratic elite tend to suppress new or controversial theories, silencing dissent either through threats, or simply by withdrawing funds.<sup>47</sup>

As we have seen, Lyotard associates the concept of “humanity” with the collective political subject of a capitalist democracy, which not only believes in the right to science, but also has the capacity to formulate its own laws and indirectly govern social action (albeit through the mediation of elected representatives). Despite the personal freedom that this idea of “humanity” entails, the use of public opinion to legitimate the formal laws of the state can perform a repressive function in democratic societies, for the majority can use the so-called “voice of the people” to coerce the minority. The philosophy of liberalism is one response to this paradox. Indeed, only when the minority have the capacity to express their opinion through the public use of reason is there any mechanism for avoiding the tyranny of majority rule. When we analyse the functioning of the techno-scientific system, however, it can be seen that the reduction of research and education to the ends of efficiency can have a similar repressive effect. The reliance of research upon investment in the technological infrastructure has the capacity to alienate the working population, for the progress of the scientific system is motivated by the ends of efficiency and the extraction of surplus-value. Nevertheless, the functionalization of the education system compensates for these ill effects by socializing workers to the new technologies. We can theorize the relationship between research and education as a dialect of *dehumanization* and *rehumanization*, for as Lyotard puts it, “the system seems to be a vanguard machine dragging humanity after it, dehumanizing it in order to rehumanize it at a different level of normative capacity.”<sup>48</sup> From this account, we can see that the techno-scientific-industrial machine has no sympathy for the suffering of the weak or disenfranchised, for incompetence can be supplied through education. As the progress of science is dislocated from the public use of reason, humanity must be understood as the “will” of a political subject that can only adapt in order to survive. What emerges from Lyotard’s account of the postmodern condition is therefore the idea that the development of science and technology is governed by the internal logic of scientific discourse and the external logic of the market. Without the narrative of emancipation to counter the dehumanizing effects of technology, Lyotard has no option but to accept the advance of techno-science as the condition of both knowledge-production and socialization in “computerized societies”.

### THE INHUMAN AND “THE POSTHUMAN CONDITION”

Between the writing of the *Postmodern Condition* (1979) and the *Inhuman* (1988) it seems that Lyotard slightly modifies his perspective, for he no longer appeals to the concept of humanity as a normative critique of the techno-scientific system, but embraces the evolution of technology as part of the essential destiny of the human species. This change in perspective is perhaps most marked with regard to the question of language, for rather than focusing upon the public discussion of the scientific community, which implies a spoken form of interaction, Lyotard now links the principle of performativity to the technique of writing.<sup>49</sup> In general terms, this shift from a spoken to a written model of human communication can be linked to the reduction of knowledge to information in computerized societies, for Lyotard conceptualizes writing as a means of selecting, storing and retrieving information. In the field of culture, the task of storing information has been traditionally performed by narratives, which remain rooted to a specific locale, language and population. With the expansion of the techno-scientific system, however, the knowledge contained in cultural narrative becomes increasingly supplanted by the information circulating in a global communications network, for as Lyotard puts it, “the electronic and information network spread over the earth gives rise to a global capacity for memorizing which must be estimated at the cosmic scale, without common measure with that of traditional cultures.”<sup>50</sup> Comparing the information network to the “great Monad” (God) of Leibnizian metaphysics,<sup>51</sup> Lyotard analyses the advance of the techno-scientific system as a form of instrumental rationality that increasingly reduces the contingency

of temporal events to economically motivated forms of calculation and control.<sup>52</sup> The only form of resistance to this system of control seems to be the phenomenon of the sublime in art, a pure experience of the event that exposes the limits of the imagination, and reveals an alternative destiny for the future of the human species.<sup>53</sup> Despite his belief in the “saving power” of art, Lyotard remains skeptical that the aesthetic of the sublime can actually overcome the hegemony of the techno-scientific system, for the “culture industry” tends to reduce the function of art to entertainment, programming the audience to perceive the world through a fixed system of stereotypes.<sup>54</sup> Under such conditions, human subjects are no longer socialized through the transmission of narratives, or the performance of speech-acts, but are rather acculturated to the technoscientific-system through the consumption of commodities that are distributed through the market.

While Lyotard remains skeptical that the spread of this information network can lead to a reconfiguration of the public sphere, I would like to maintain that *the privatization of the information-network paradoxically leads to an increase in the possibilities of public communication*. Although users lack the “know-why” to build or program the new technologies of distance communication, they nevertheless possess the “know-how” to establish a line of communication. In order to understand why the advance of techno-science can increase the possibilities of public communication, it is necessary to make a fundamental distinction between practical technologies and communication technologies.<sup>55</sup> In the case of the former, the design of the tool is oriented toward the resolution of practical problems, for the use of the tool makes human behaviour more efficient (satisfying the principle of “performativity”), and reduces the uncertainty of the surrounding environment. When using a practical tool, the user is engaging in purposive-rational activity, for the successful performance of the task is guided by the actor’s self-conscious intention. Although the actor may not know “why” the tool works, i.e., he lacks the theoretical knowledge to design the tool, he nevertheless knows “how” it works, and the repeated use of such tools modifies the capacities and habits of the user. As we have seen, the distribution of practical tools in the market-place is one of the driving forces of scientific research in capitalist societies, for the diffusion of practical tools generates surplus-value that can be subsequently re-directed into scientific research.

With regard to the use of communication technologies, however, the user is not engaged in rational-purposive activity, but is engaging in an open-ended process of social interaction that remains dependent upon the contingent responses of other individual human subjects. Even if the inventor is acting purposively when designing the communication technology (the telephone, the PC, the modem, the internet, email, applications etc...), the interactive use of such technologies re-orientes the private interests of the producers towards the public interests of the consumers. While the technical expert is concerned with the problem of efficiently transmitting a message over a noisy channel, the everyday user is concerned with establishing a line of communication at a semantic and pragmatic level.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, the knowledge division between “technical” experts and citizens does not prove to be a diremptive force in rationalized or modernized societies, but in fact provides a more efficient way of organizing the processes of public communication, for the practical interests of the producers is continually *appropriated* by the public interests of the consumers. While the use of practical technologies tends to alter the habits of the users, and thereby transforms the knowledge of science into a form social engineering, the use of information and communication technologies alters the *habits of the mind*, such that processes of thought become interwoven with the networks of information that they inhabit. Rather than analyzing ICTs as tools that solve practical problems in the external environment, one must recognize that telephones, modems and the internet now constitute the real “environment” of the posthuman condition, for it is precisely through these lines of communication that human subjects are now socialized. To the extent, furthermore, that the evolution of the information network automatically memorizes the interactive behaviour of citizens engaged in public communication, it can be argued that the “Great monad” provides the cultural infrastructure of the life-world, for it is this archive of information that now provides the stock of theoretical paradigms of interpreting the meaning of any action situation.

Despite the divergence between the views expressed by Lyotard and the conclusions reached in this paper, I would like to maintain that my own position remains concordant with the logic expressed in *The Inhuman*. Indeed, when it comes to defining the concept of the “inhuman”, Lyotard argues not only that human beings

are socialized through language, but furthermore that the essence of the language (the *logos*, or *techné-logos*) cannot be separated from the technology of writing conceived as spatial inscription. Significantly, Lyotard traces the origin of the concept of “publicity” to the invention of writing, for as he puts it, “inscription, putting into traces, on the one hand ... opens a public space of meaning and generates a community of user-producers, and on the other (?) because it is endowed with persistence by its being marked on a spatial support, conserves the sign of a past event, or rather produces it as available, presentable and reactualizable memory.”<sup>57</sup> According to this definition, writing can either be interpreted as public knowledge that founds a community of user-producers, or an archive of information that remains accessible. In fact, when it comes to defining the essence of “humanity”, Lyotard argues that it is the socializing force of language that transforms the first nature of the child into the second nature of the adult, for as he puts it, “What shall we call human in humans, the initial misery of their childhood, or their capacity to acquire a ‘second nature’ which, thanks to language, makes them fit to share in communal life, adult consciousness and reason.”<sup>58</sup> By phrasing the question in this way, Lyotard suggests that the concept of humanity is either identified with the innocence of the child (humanity as nature) or the maturity of the adult (humanity as culture), yet to the extent that the technological medium of language is responsible for facilitating the transition from one state to the other, it would appear that the process of becoming-human is guided by the destiny of the “inhuman”.<sup>59</sup> While this concept of the inhuman is associated with the advance of the techno-scientific system, which socializes individuals as “functions” of the industrial machines, it nevertheless also contains a creative principle that not only drives the invention of new language games, but also threatens to de-stabilize the system. According to this double meaning of the concept of the inhuman, the expansion of the information network can either bring about the *privatization* of scientific knowledge or the *publicization* of interpersonal communication. In truth, the two possibilities are never simply opposed, but are rather interwoven with one another. Indeed, when the mathematical theories of the post-modern scientist become motivated by the search for instabilities in the system (exemplified by the development of chaos theory and fractal geometry), the progress of scientific research becomes synchronized with the search for new forms of human communication and organization. Rather than simply taking a positive or negative view of the role of the information network as socializing post-human subjects, I would suggest that the technology of inscription remains essentially ambiguous, either contributing to the rationalization of society (through the development of the communicational infrastructure) or to the unification of the life-world (through the formation of interpersonal networks and virtual communities).

## CONCLUSION

In arriving at this description of the “posthuman condition”, it should be noted that I have almost entirely overlooked the discussion of the Kantian sublime in *The Inhuman*.<sup>60</sup> Contrary to the intentions of Lyotard, I have tried to suggest that the privatization of knowledge as information does not lead to the absolute demise of the public sphere, but rather leads to a new configuration of the public sphere in which there exists a structural divide between the inventors and users of information and communication technologies. As Lyotard interprets the “theory of communicative action” as a form of rationality that attempts to reduce the heterogeneity of language games to a single, meta-discourse, he can only appeal to the occurrence of singular events that appear to transcend the capitalist market and the techno-scientific system. By appealing to the Kantian notion of the beautiful, Lyotard suggests that aesthetic feelings can create human communities that precede any form of communication. On the other hand, the feeling of “pleasure in pain” associated with the experience of sublime exposes the human subject to the materiality of the event, revealing not only limits of the imagination, but signifying an idea of Reason that commands the subject to obey. While there is certainly something to be learned from Lyotard’s aesthetic theory, the opposition between the beautiful (the conventions of taste) and the sublime (the avant-garde) tends to reinforce the humanistic distinction between social control and individual freedom. In order to be productive, the difference between the beautiful and the sublime must be reconfigured in terms of the theory of rationalization developed by Weber and Habermas.<sup>61</sup> If we were to reconfigure the Kantian problematic as an expression of the problem of modernity, then the conflict between the beautiful and the sublime might be interpreted as an allegory for the conflict between the understanding (theory, science) and reason (practice, technology) through the medium of aesthetic feelings. For the time being, however, we

must be content to observe that the increasing specialization, technicization and professionalization of science is creating the infrastructure of a global communications network that is both increasing the privatization of scientific knowledge and the possibilities of public communication ■

## REPROGRAMMING LYOTARD

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### NOTES

1. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
2. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
3. Describing the role of the imagination in the production of art and writing, Lyotard asserts that “such an imagination plays no less role in science itself, the role of the heuristic moment it needs if it is to progress.” Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 73.
4. In *Deconstruction and ‘The Unfinished Project of Modernity’*, Christopher Norris suggests that Lyotard’s version of the post-modern condition has become the basis for “The tolerant postmodern-pluralist view that there exist any number of ‘first-order natural pragmatic narratives’, each of them having a right to express its own distinctive values, belief system, or criteria for what should count as ‘truthful’ or ‘valid’ statement.” Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction and ‘The Unfinished Project of Modernity’*. London: Athlone Press, 2000, 11.
5. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas makes it clear that the public sphere is located between civil society and the state, so it should not come as any surprise to discover that the infrastructure of the public sphere has become privatized in information societies. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.
6. In the “foreword” to the *Postmodern Condition*, for example, Frederic Jameson claims that Lyotard's discussion of scientific research is "a thinly veiled polemic against Jürgen Habermas' concept of a 'legitimation crisis' and vision of a 'noise-free', transparent, fully communicational society." Frederic Jameson, Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*, vii. Such a judgment was quickly re-iterated by Richard Rorty (see his “Habermas and Lyotard on Post-Modernity” *Praxis International* 4 (1984), 32-44.), who reinforces the opposition between Habermas and Lyotard. Rorty quotes heavily from Habermas’ article on “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment” (with Thomas Levin. *New German Critique* 26 (1982), 13-30) and identifies Lyotard with Adorno and Horkheimer, who are justly criticized by Habermas for lacking any rational basis of critique.
7. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Trans. Jeremy Shapiro. London: Heinemann Educational, 1972.
8. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe. New York: MacMillan, 1958.
9. J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
10. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 35.
11. *Ibid.*, 36
12. Following Richard Beardsworth, I believe that the philosophical legacy of Derrida, Levinas and Lyotard must be situated within a theory of modernity that analyses the institutional structures that produce differences. Focusing on the divide between the finite and infinite in French thought, he suggests that their central preoccupation has been “the idea that difference and individuality are to be affirmed less through their conceptual and institutional apprehension and determination than through negotiation with the excess of such apprehension and determination.” Richard Beardsworth, “Modernity in Recent French Thought” *Telos* 137 (2006), 68. Rejecting this search for an outside beyond the system of capitalism, Beardsworth concludes that we must turn to the theory of rationalization developed by Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action* to articulate how such differences can be represented and articulated within democratic nation-states. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Vol. I Trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

13. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, xi.

14. *Ibid.*, 65.

15. "This double observation (the heterogeneity of the rules and the search for dissent) destroys a belief that still underlies Habermas' research, namely, that humanity as a collective (universal subject) seeks its common emancipation through the 'regularization' of the moves permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation." Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 66.

Roger Forester, "Strategies of Justice: the project of philosophy in Lyotard and Habermas" *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25 (1999), 90.

16. Lyotard cites Habermas to support the assertion that "Knowledge is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its 'use value.'" Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 5.

17. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 113.

18. "The modes of inference cannot be viewed simply as transcendently necessary because they are not valid universally, at all places and times. They only justify the validity of a method that leads to true statements in *the long run*. The synthetic forms of inference allow justifiable conclusions that are not necessarily true or probable. They owe their validity exclusively to the circumstance that they are the results of a method "which if steadily persisted in must bring the reasoner to the truth of the matter or must cause his conclusion in its changes to convert to the truth as its limit." *Ibid.*, 118-119.

19. *Ibid.*, 119.

20. *Ibid.*, 120.

21. *Ibid.*, 128.

22. "How is scientific progress possible? Pragmatism answers this question by legitimating the validity of synthetic modes of inference on the basis of the transcendental structure of instrumental action." *Ibid.*, 121.

23. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 10.

24. *Ibid.*, 9.

25. "Of course, we find other classes of statement, such as interrogatives ('How can we explain that ...?') and prescriptives ('Take a finite series of elements ...'), but they are only present as turning points in the dialectical argumentation, which must end in a denotative statement." *Ibid.*, 25.

26. *Ibid.*, 25.

27. In a lecture titled "Truth and Society: the discursive redemption of factual claims to validity", Habermas rejects Kamlah and Lorenzen's claim that competent judges must have expert knowledge that enables them to perform appropriate verification procedures, for the reason that "we cannot specify any independent criteria for what counts as 'expertise'; deciding on the choice of these criteria itself depends on the outcome of a discourse." Jürgen Habermas, "Truth and Society: the discursive redemption of factual claims to validity" *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*. Trans. Barbara Fultner. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, 95.

28. In Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, 131-170.

29. "Communication can be systematically distorted only if the internal organization of speech is disrupted.

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This happens if the validity basis of linguistic communication is curtailed surreptitiously; that is, without leading to a break in communication or to the transition to openly declared and permissible strategic action." *Ibid.*, 154.

30. Of course, one should not confuse the performative attitude of a cognitive statement ("I assert") from the constative meaning of the proposition ("that the path of the planets is circular"). Although the content of a theoretical discourse is cognitive, and refers exclusively to the objective world, the interaction of speakers is still governed by the normative rules of linguistic interaction.

31. "Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major—perhaps *the* major—stake in the worldwide competition for power." Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 5.

32. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*. Trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975.

33. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 8.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, 18.

36. *Ibid.*, 19.

37. When applying the pragmatics of narrative knowledge to the legitimation of science, Lyotard pays specific attention to the genre of the *bildungsroman* developed, for it deals with the education of citizens and their relationship to society as a whole: "the popular stories themselves recount what could be called positive or negative apprenticeships: in other words, the success or failures greeting the hero's undertakings." *Ibid.*, 20. Depending upon the outcome of the narrative (socialization or alienation), these narratives have the capacity to either legitimate social institutions or represents models of biographical development (positive or negative). With the development of the idea of the university as a social institution charged with the responsibility of integrating scientific knowledge with practical behaviour, Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* performs the tasks of combing theory and practice, for it provides a metanarrative in which the life of the individual is subsumed by the historical development of "Spirit" or "Life". *Ibid.*, 33.

38. *Ibid.*, 24.

39. With the subordination of scientific discussion to the ends of technical efficiency, the concept of performativity undergoes a radical transformation. Indeed, when Lyotard first introduces the notion of the "performative", it is borrowed from the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin, and is designed to distinguish the social contract between the speakers from the "constative" meaning of the "denotative" meaning of logical statements used to prove the validity of a scientific theory. With the binding of such proofs to the efficient operation of a machine, which minimises input and maximises output, the legitimation of scientific research becomes dependent upon the "performativity" of the machine, which has nothing to do with the socialization of speakers, and everything to do with the generation of "surplus value" to ensure the reproduction of capital. For further discussion see Chris Rojek, "Lyotard and the Decline of Society" *The Politics of Jean Francois Lyotard: Justice and Political Theory*. Eds Chris Rojek and Bryan Turner, 10-24. London: Routledge, 1998.

40. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 44.

41. *Ibid.*, 45.

42. See Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

43. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 48.

44. Jürgen Habermas, S. Lennox, and F. Lennox, "The Public Sphere: an encyclopaedia article" *New German Critique* 3 (1974), 49-55.

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45. “By terror I mean the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened (there are many ways to prevent someone from playing). The decision makers’ arrogance, which in principle has no equivalent in the sciences, consists in the exercise of terror.” Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 63-4.

46. *Ibid.*, 63.

47. “All technology, beginning with writing considered as a techné, is an artefact allowing its users to stock more information, to improve their competence and optimize their performances.” Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 62.

48. *Ibid.*, 64.

49. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

50. *Ibid.*, 66-68.

51. See *Ibid.*, Ch. 5.

52. *Ibid.*, 63-64.

53. The distinction between rational-purposive action and linguistic interaction is taken from Habermas’ essay on “Actions, Speech Acts, Linguistically Mediated Interactions, and the Lifeworld” *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Ed Maeve Cooke, 215-56. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998.

54. In an introductory essay to Shannon’s *Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Warren Weaver distinguishes (1) the technical problem of efficiently transmitting information over a noisy channel from (2) the semantic problem of composing a message and (3) the pragmatic problem of persuading an audience. Warren Weaver, “Introductory Note on the General Setting of the Analytical Communication Studies” *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, 3-28. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949.

55. Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 48.

56. *Ibid.*, 3.

57. In his article titled “Lyotard’s and Posthuman Possibilities”, Richard White has argued that the concept of humanism can be traced to either the relativism of Protagoras or the Creation myth of the Old Testament. Richard White, “Lyotard and Posthuman Possibilities” *Philosophy Today* 50 (2006), 183-189.

58. For a good discussion of the Sublime in *The Inhuman*, see Temenuga Trifonova, “The Question of the Appendix: The Kantian and the *Inhuman* (Postmodern) Sublime” *International Studies in Philosophy* 35 (2003), 51-92.

59. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*.

## HUMANISM AFTER ALL? DAFT PUNK'S EXISTENTIALIST CRITIQUE OF TRANSHUMANISM

Chad Parkhill

### INTRODUCTION

The French dance music production duo Daft Punk have, since the pre-release publicity for their second album, *Discovery* (2001), used their music (and the accompanying paratexts of video clips, publicity photos, liner notes, and the costume and stage design of their tours) as an occasion to meditate on the relationship between technology and the human. Although their early efforts at exploring this relationship seem at best naïve—they initially claimed that an accident in their recording studio in September 1999 had transformed them into robots<sup>1</sup>—their later texts, such as the video clips that accompany their third album, *Human After All* (2005), display an increasing level of sophistication, not only in artistic but also in philosophical terms. Despite the fact that their music and its commercial success rely extensively on technologies of sound manipulation, digital reproduction, and new forms of online media, Daft Punk's recent examinations of the relationship between technology and the human are, to say the least, ambivalent. On the one hand, songs such as “Technologic” can be read as paeans to the possibilities that technology opens up to human existence, and the fact that the song was swiftly seized upon by advertising executives to sell Apple's iPod music player would support such a reading. On the other hand, the visual codes and semiotics of the song's video clip suggest that Daft Punk's vision of the technological is a much darker one than Apple might like to embrace.<sup>2</sup>

Nowhere else in the duo's *oeuvre* is their take on technology and the human more developed in its details and more ambivalent in its message than in their debut feature-length film, *Electroma* (2007). The film's plot can be summed up in a few sentences: a pair of robots dressed in the same leather jackets and helmets that Daft Punk themselves wear, dubbed ‘Hero Robot #1’ and ‘Hero Robot #2’ in the film's credits, embark upon a journey to become human. They drive to a small town in Inyo county, California, populated by other robots, and enter

a facility where a group of mysterious assistants clad in white use flesh-coloured latex and wigs to construct mimetic human faces on the duo. The duo then walk back through the town, where their faces melt in the sun, and they are chased by the other robots. The hero robots flee to an abandoned restroom, where they discard the remnants of their latex faces. Discouraged, the duo embark on a lengthy walk through the desert, which culminates with a montage of aerial shots of the desert and the only image of a human body part in the film: a disembodied woman's pubis and vulva. After this montage, Hero Robot #1 stops in his tracks, and Hero Robot #2 assists him in self-destructing by pressing a switch on his back. After a short countdown, Hero Robot #1 explodes. Hero Robot #2 gathers his remains into a pile, then continues on. After a short while, Hero Robot #2 stops walking and attempts to self-destruct, but cannot reach the switch on his back. He takes off his faceplate, smashes it on the ground, then uses a shard of it as a burning glass to set himself on fire. The final shot of the film is a long tracking shot of a blazing Hero Robot #2 walking slowly through the desert night. What are we to make of this film?

This paper will read *Electroma* as an existentialist<sup>3</sup> critique of one of the transhumanism movement's central theses: that death is a harm. In order to do so, I will examine the ways in which *Electroma* can be read as a micro-drama of coming into Sartrean authentic being, and I will argue that the film presents the moment at which the first of its robot protagonists gives up on his quest to become human as the very site of the robots' becoming-human. I will then examine the role of gender in Daft Punk's vision of the posthuman, and argue that *Electroma*'s critique of transhumanism relies on sexist structures of thought outlined in *Being and Nothingness*. Finally, I will conclude by examining Donna Haraway's paper "A Cyborg Manifesto" and its potential ability to complicate *Electroma*'s notion of the cyborg.

## TRANSHUMANISM, EXISTENTIALISM, AND DEATH

The term 'transhumanism' entered the English language in 1957, in Julian Huxley's book *Religion Without Revelation*. Huxley writes:

The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way—but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature.<sup>4</sup>

The application of the term has changed little since Huxley coined it. Indeed, Nick Bostrom—the founder and current chair of the both the World Transhumanist Association (recently given the more anodyne appellation Humanity+) and Oxford University's Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies, as well as a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Evolution and Technology* (previously the *Journal of Transhumanism*)—gives Huxley a central place in his history of transhumanist philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Bostrom, whose prominent standing within the transhumanist movement allows his statements to be read as a rough synecdoche of the broader movement's perspective, provides a succinct description of transhumanism in his rebuttal to Francis Fukuyama's recent claim that transhumanism is "the world's most dangerous idea:"

Transhumanists believe that, while there are hazards that need to be identified and avoided, human enhancement technologies will offer enormous potential for deeply valuable and humanly beneficial uses. Ultimately, it is possible that such enhancements may make us, or our descendants, 'posthuman', beings who may have indefinite health-spans, much greater intellectual faculties than any current human being—and perhaps entirely new sensibilities or modalities—as well as the ability to control their own emotions. The wisest approach *vis-à-vis* these prospects, argue transhumanists, is to embrace technological progress, while strongly defending human rights and individual choice, and taking action specifically against concrete threats, such as military or terrorist abuse of bioweapons, and against unwanted environmental or social side-effects.<sup>6</sup>

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Regardless of the merits or feasibility of potential transhumanist technologies, it is clear that several prominent voices within the transhumanist movement regard death as a harm.<sup>7</sup> Bostrom's account goes so far as to claim that the human desire to either defeat death or, at least, to prolong life as much as possible, is the impulse behind *all* human technological innovation:

Ceremonial burial and preserved fragments of religious writings show that prehistoric man and woman were deeply disturbed by the death of loved ones. Although the belief in an afterlife was common, this did not preclude efforts to extend the present life. ... The boundary between mythos and science, between magic and technology, was blurry, and almost all conceivable means to the preservation of life were attempted by somebody or other. Yet while explorers made many interesting discoveries and alchemists invented some useful things, such as new dyes and improvements in metallurgy, the goal of life-extension proved elusive.<sup>8</sup>

The universality of the life-extension instinct can, Bostrom claims, be proven by its ubiquity in myth (including, for instance, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*).<sup>9</sup> Having accorded the life-extension instinct its proper place as the ground upon which all technological advances must be made, Bostrom goes on to detail its significance in current transhumanist thought. The journalist Brian Alexander, as a skeptical witness to a U.S. anti-ageing medicine conference, puts the case more bluntly: he describes its 200 attendants as united "in one belief: death was just damn unfair."<sup>10</sup>

We might begin to map the continuities and discontinuities between transhumanism and existentialism by examining their relationship to humanism. In both cases, I will rely on two texts, each delivered by an acknowledged leader of either the transhumanist or existentialist movement: Bostrom and Jean-Paul Sartre, respectively. Both of these texts were composed in defence of their respective movement against strong criticism by their contemporaries: Bostrom's history in the light of Francis Fukuyama's aforementioned criticism,<sup>11</sup> and Sartre's lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* in response to what he perceived as the term's continual misuse by its Catholic and communist detractors and in the press.<sup>12</sup> Both authors, in order to defend the movements of which they are the figureheads, claim that their movements are forms of humanism. Bostrom's history traces transhumanism's lineage through the rational humanism of Condorcet, Kant, and Newton.<sup>13</sup> In Bostrom's strongly teleological view of technology and its history, transhumanism becomes the logical extension of humanism, an affirmation of Kant's "*sapere aude!*"<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Sartre counters the claims of his attackers not by defending existentialism's supposed nihilism and anti-humanism, but rather by defining existentialism as a radical and thoroughgoing version of humanism, and counter-intuitively claiming that what his detractors find most upsetting about existentialism is, in fact, its relentless humanistic optimism: for Sartre, existentialism cannot "be called a pessimistic description of man, for no doctrine is more optimistic, since it declares that man's destiny lies within himself."<sup>15</sup>

Aside from these pointed polemics (and their concomitant tendency to decontextualise the history of philosophy and distort complex intellectual positions to suit the exigencies of the authors' theses), these texts share a similar view of human capacities. Despite the fact that Bostrom claims that transhumanism's opponents, pejoratively dubbed "bioconservatives," find some solace in "various Continental philosopher's [*sic*] critiques of technology, technocracy, and the rationalistic mindset that accompanies modern technoscience,"<sup>16</sup> it is not at all clear that a transhumanist perspective is necessarily incompatible with the version of existentialism promoted by Sartre in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Consider Sartre's definition of the human in *Existentialism is a Humanism*:

Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself.<sup>17</sup>

Sartre's position here is not at all dissimilar to Julian Huxley's previously-cited claim that "[t]he human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself,"<sup>18</sup> although there are some important differences. Huxley deploys the verb "to

transcend” in its common English-language form, namely, “to pass beyond, to exceed.”<sup>19</sup> Sartre’s deployment of the same verb in both *Existentialism is a Humanism* and *Being and Nothingness* is underpinned by Sartre’s ontology of Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself, and is informed by the term’s prior deployment in both Kant and Husserl (certainly, too, Sartre would disdain Huxley’s use of the term “human nature,” a sin for which he chastises Diderot, Voltaire, and Kant).<sup>20</sup> Regardless, as Mary Warnock explains, the term ‘transcendence’ in Sartre “often refers simply to the process whereby the For-itself goes beyond the given in a further project of itself.”<sup>21</sup> The distinction here is one of scope: Sartre is concerned with the individual, Huxley with the species. We need not perform too much conceptual violence in order to fit transhumanism’s central concern of transcending the limitations of human embodiment towards a more stable and robust life-form into Sartre’s definition of the human For-itself as that which “surpasses its facticity (*i.e.*, to be either *given* or past or body) towards the in-itself which it would be if it were able to be its own foundation.”<sup>22</sup>

There is, of course, a great deal of disagreement amongst transhumanists about which of Bostrom’s “human enhancement technologies” would best serve humanity in its self-transcendence.<sup>23</sup> Key amongst them, however—and the one that Daft Punk deal with directly in *Electroma*—is the notion of ‘uploading,’ which would entail, in Bostrom’s account:

creat[ing] a sufficiently detailed scan of a particular human brain ... from this scan, reconstruct[ing] the neuronal network that the brain implemented ... [and] emulat[ing] the whole computational structure on a powerful supercomputer. If successful, the procedure would result in the original mind, with memory and personality intact, being transferred to the computer where it could there exist as software; and it could either inhabit a robot body or live in a virtual reality.<sup>24</sup>

In technical rather than common usage, the term ‘robot’ denotes a programmable machine that is designed to perform tasks in the place of a living agent,<sup>25</sup> and indeed robots are an integral part of contemporary industrial production. Unlike humans, though, for robots essence precedes existence: like Sartre’s example of the paper knife, they are built for a purpose, and their instrumentality is their essence.<sup>26</sup> As automata, robots do not possess the nihilating ontological structure of the For-itself: they cannot nihilate their programming and in so doing freely choose to perform another task; they therefore cannot transcend their facticity in order to become Beings-for-themselves.<sup>27</sup> The etymology of the word *robot* reveals the immanent nature of the robot’s existence: the term is derived from the Czech *robota*, “forced labour.”<sup>28</sup> The cyborg, however, is a different proposition: a portmanteau of ‘cybernetic’ and ‘organism,’ the term ‘cyborg’ refers to “an integrated man-machine system.”<sup>29</sup> The transhumanist fantasy of ‘uploading,’ if the software mind were uploaded into a robotic body, would create cyborgs rather than robots.

As Sartre makes clear in *Being and Nothingness*, “the for-itself attempts to escape its factual existence (*i.e.*, its being there, as an in-itself for which it is in no way the foundation), and ... this flight takes place towards an impossible future always pursued where the for-itself would be an in-itself-for-itself—*i.e.*, an in-itself that would be to itself its own foundation.”<sup>30</sup> Sartre identifies the In-itself-For-itself as the “uncaused cause” of Aquinas’ cosmological argument; thus “To be man means to reach toward being God.”<sup>31</sup> Sartre takes care to state “that while the *meaning* of the desire is ultimately the project of being God, the desire is never *constituted* by this meaning; on the contrary, it always represents a particular discovery of its ends.”<sup>32</sup> Despite this caveat—in the light of which nearly *any* human project can be read as a sublimated desire to become God— it is more transparently the case in the transhumanist ideal of uploading than most other human projects. The human being uploaded into a robotic body would not only have cheated death, but, importantly, it would be an In-itself (a robotic body) that is to itself its own foundation—that is, a For-itself that willed itself to be an In-itself of its own choosing. In Sartrean terms, the cyborg not only offers the possibility of immortality, but also of the resolution of the interminable dialectic of the In-itself and the For-itself.

## DAFT PUNK'S VISION OF THE POSTHUMAN

*Electroma* offers us a compelling vision of a posthuman, cyborg world. Various textual clues indicate that the world of *Electroma* was once inhabited by human beings: the robots live in houses like contemporary Western houses, drive late twentieth-century cars, and the toilets in the restroom in which our heroes discard their latex faces (here reconfigured as faeces) still function. It is clear, in the robots' comportment and motility, that they were once human: each moves and occupies space in much the same way as a contemporary (and therefore gendered) Westerner.

While the film offers us a vision of the cyborg posthuman future, it also implicitly denies that the cyborg would, in fact, be the resolution of the interminable dialectic, or the In-itself-For-itself. Quite the opposite: it portrays the cyborg as "for-itself-in-itself," a term coined by Iris Marion Young to describe the contradictory nature of women as transcendent beings "overlaid with immanence."<sup>33</sup> We can see this clearly in the scene in which our hero robots drive through the robot town, observing the lives of their fellow robots, who mimetically perform household chores and other projectless tasks that recall Beauvoir's discussion of the immanent and Sisyphean task of housework.<sup>34</sup> That there are male robots and female robots here seems not to matter: although the tasks are clearly gendered—a female robot minds the robot children in the park; the police robots are male—each robot's existence is equally oriented towards Life rather than Spirit.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the very fact that the film insists on calling these beings "robots" rather than the etymologically correct "cyborg" indicates that these beings' lives are immanent rather than transcendental.<sup>36</sup> In short, having succeeded in the project of transcending death, these beings have no further projects and nothing else left to transcend—thus they lead lives of bad faith, mistakenly understanding themselves as little more than automata.

Therefore, our hero robots' journey to humanity is not a mere physical journey. It is instead a journey from bad faith to authenticity, and one that takes the form of a re-enactment of Sartre's ontological ekstases by which Being-for-itself distinguishes itself from and nihilates Being-in-itself: the ekstases of temporality, reflection, and Being-for-others.<sup>37</sup> To put it another way, the robot's interior journey from immanence to freedom is presented in narrative terms as a more primordial journey in which Being-in-itself nihilates itself and in so doing becomes Being-for-itself. Even before the outset of the film, we know that the robots have a project of becoming-human, and this implies two of the three ekstases: the ekstases of temporality (a *project* implies a past that is to be transcended, a present that is geared towards that transcendence, and a future in which the project is completed) and reflection (the robots must take themselves to be both objects and subjects in order to transform themselves). Furthermore, we first encounter our heroes at the beginning of their voyage: in the opening scene of the film, they enter their car and begin driving. In Sartrean terms, they are *in flight*. For Sartre, "The for-itself is a pursued-pursuing. ... let us note that the for-itself is not *first* in order to attempt *later* to attain being ... This pursuing flight is not given which is added on to the being of the for-itself. The for-itself *is* this very flight."<sup>38</sup> Yet *Electroma* starts from a standstill: a series of still shots of rock formations precedes the hero robots entering the car. Thus the car journey to Inyo County symbolically changes our robots from stationary Beings-in-themselves to a line of flight which becomes, or rather *is*, the Being-for-themselves of these two robots. They have, in the very taking up of their project of becoming-human, recaptured one of their modes of being: that is, Being-for-itself.

But, in narrative terms, they are not yet human. In order for this to occur, they must pass through the third ekstasis: that of Being-for-others.<sup>39</sup> This they accomplish, in the film's narrative logic, after their transformation into false humans. Although this transformation does not *make* them human, it does break the visual codes through which the members of the robotic community identify each other as part of the Same. Their arrival into town in their human suits therefore carries with it the shock of alterity: their different appearance signifies them as Other. Here the film lingers on the disquieting effect on the robot population of our hero robots' transformation: the town robots stop their work or play to stare at them, and it is precisely through the look that our hero robots come to realise that they have a being for others. The fact that the robots are chased into the abandoned restroom renders in narrative form the ontological tussle of mutual objectification and conflict that

Sartre describes as the primary relationship to the Other.<sup>40</sup>

Having discarded their disguises, and having seemingly failed at their project of becoming human, our robots now embark on their long trek through the desert. In coming to terms with their failure, the robots have grasped that their attempt at becoming human was made in bad faith: not the more common bad faith of the person who denies their ontological freedom and thinks of themselves as a determinate being (the bad faith of the café waiter), but the bad faith of the being that denies its own situation in order to emphasise its transcendence: the bad faith of Sartre's homosexual, who cannot accept what he supposedly is.<sup>41</sup> Although the town's robots are guilty of bad faith in leading lives of immanence, our hero robots are also guilty of bad faith: quite clearly, the robots cannot become human merely by applying latex to their faces. Having grasped their failure, and the bad faith implicit within their attempts to realise their project of becoming human, the robots now feel the full force of responsibility for their actions. The desert thus symbolises their abandonment: the robots "are left alone and without excuse ... condemned to be free."<sup>42</sup> Yet at the very moment the robots grasp their failure, and their responsibility for the consequences of it, the film presents us with a significant visual clue: the image of the vulva and pubis. The visual codes of the film present this piece of human anatomy in absolute contradistinction to the bodies of the hero robots: the naked and exposed vulva represents "real" humanity. In a gendered social context where the vulva is understood teleologically as the organ *par excellence* of sexual reproduction and birth, the symbolism of this moment is obvious: in the depths of their failure, the robots are born as human. The seemingly inhospitable desert of abandonment and anguish, feminised through the eroticising gaze of the montage, becomes the source of human life.<sup>43</sup>

## GENDER AND THE POSTHUMAN

It is at this point in the film that its earlier myopia about gender comes into focus. The earlier scenes in Inyo County present gender in the posthuman world as little more than a vestigial trace of past humanity: one could argue that Daft Punk are doing little more than dramatising Donna Haraway's claim that "the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world."<sup>44</sup> However, the reduction of gender from (human) bodily sexual difference to what appears to be a mere choice in clothing and (cyborg) bodily comportment demonstrates that gender here is absent only insofar as the cyborg, in Daft Punk's vision of the posthuman, becomes the universal male. Jacques Derrida describes the process by which the utopian elimination of gender becomes a re-inscription of the male/same:

The determination of sexual difference in opposition is destined, designed, in truth, for truth; it is so in order to erase sexual difference. The dialectical opposition neutralises or supersedes ... the difference. However, according to a surreptitious operation that must be flushed out, one insures phallogocentric mastery under the cover of neutralization every time. These are now well known paradoxes.<sup>45</sup>

In the posthuman world of Inyo County gender is at best a vestigial trace of a past humanity. Indeed, the more salient difference for these robots seems not to be gender but division of the robots into two models differentiated by helmet designs. Thus we see two robots of the same model, one 'male,' one 'female,' being wed—a parodic vision of the future that shows the elimination of sexual difference through the processes of technological (re)production. In this context we might therefore read Daft Punk's display of the vulva as a reminder of the necessity of sexual difference in the project of being-human. Certainly, by revisiting and restaging the moment of birth as the signifier of the robots' becoming-human, Daft Punk appear not to disavow what Luce Irigaray has termed the "forgotten vagina,"<sup>46</sup> that which allows for passage between states of being: in this case, from robot to human. This act of remembrance would insist, therefore, on the privileged role of "the maternal-feminine."<sup>47</sup> Yet the context of this vaginal image complicates such a reading. Firstly, the vagina functions as a synecdoche for the complete woman: in this brief image, we see only the ridges of the woman's hips, her pubis, and her vulva. There is no face, nor any other body parts that could inscribe this female body as a unique or individuated female body. It is indeed as though the most salient feature of women in *Electroma* is their sexual anatomy: *tota mulier in vagina*.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, this female body is, through its positioning in the

montage of desert shots, rendered contiguous with nature, and thus stands in a metonymic relationship with nature. Nature is here feminised, and the feminine naturalised.<sup>49</sup> Finally, the context implicitly reduces the feminine to the reproductive through the interplay of images of barrenness and fecundity: women's bodies are both the barren desert and the oasis teeming with life. In either case, they are to be understood in relation to their capacity to reproduce.

The implicit sexism of this construction of women is reflected in Sartre's own work. In principle, Sartre's existentialism cannot support sexist notions of 'woman's essence,' since existentialism will admit no talk of human nature or essences.<sup>50</sup> As Margery L. Collins and Christine Pierce make clear, to deny 'essences' or 'natures' of all kinds is a *de facto* feminist stance: "one would not expect to find sexism in Sartrean psychology because Sartre denies the concept of human nature and therefore its legitimacy as a source of human values. Such a view disallows the argument that roles are natural as a basis for assigning particular roles to women. Indeed, anyone who uses such arguments would be guilty of bad faith."<sup>51</sup> Yet, as Collins and Pierce aptly demonstrate, both Sartre's philosophy and his fictional works demonstrate a continued reduction of female figures and characters to essences. For Collins and Pierce this contradiction is at most a regrettable matter, perhaps the function of lingering traces of sexism in the author: "It is gravely disappointing that a major contemporary effort to refute the existence of human nature and its legitimacy as a source of human values fails to encompass women, one of the groups of human beings to suffer most from essentialist views," they write in conclusion.<sup>52</sup> In this sentence we can see two claims at work: 1) that Sartre's sexism is profoundly out of tune with his philosophical system, perhaps because of highly personal and idiosyncratic reasons; and 2) that the system is nonetheless salvageable if others can adhere more strictly to its tenets and remain vigilant about the possibility of sexism entering the theoretical through imagery and metaphor.

Michèle le Dœuff's investigation of similar passages of *Being and Nothingness* in *Hipparchia's Choice* highlights the same sexism, but arrives at a different conclusion. For le Dœuff, the sexism of *Being and Nothingness* is not incidental to the text and therefore possible to excise in a more thorough and self-consistent application of existentialist theory. To reach this point we must engage with le Dœuff's earlier work in *The Philosophical Imaginary*, which begins with the observation that although there is infamously very little agreement about what, exactly, philosophy constitutes, there is no disagreement about what is *not* philosophical: philosophy, according to its post-Socratic practitioners, "is not a story, not a pictorial description, not a work of pure literature. Philosophical discourse is inscribed and declares its status as philosophy through a break with myth, fable, the poetic, the domain of the image."<sup>53</sup> That having been said, if "one goes looking for this philosophy in the texts which are meant to embody it, the least that can be said is that it is not to be found there in a pure state. We shall *also* find statues that breathe the scent of roses, comedies, tragedies, architects, foundations, dwellings ... in short, a whole pictorial world sufficient to decorate even the driest 'History of Philosophy'."<sup>54</sup> What are we to make of this distinction? If the image is merely a supplement to the theoretical text, either as the trace of a universal pre-rational psyche or as a pedagogic aid, then we can say it is properly extra-philosophical.<sup>55</sup> Yet the presence of these images opens the philosophical system up to the extra-theoretical world of pictorial representation, literature, poetry, and socially-produced meaning. Imagery says more than the text can say, therefore, at the very least, "the interpretation of imagery within philosophical texts goes together with the search for points of tension in a work. In other words such imagery is inseparable from the difficulties, the sensitive points of an intellectual venture."<sup>56</sup> More strongly stated, this hypothesis indicates that "the meaning conveyed by images works both for and against the system that deploys them. *For*, because they sustain something which the system itself cannot justify, but which is nevertheless needed for its proper working. *Against*, for the same reason—or almost: their meaning is incompatible with the system's possibilities."<sup>57</sup>

We can see in these introductory comments the kernel of both le Dœuff's critique of Sartre and her philosophical admiration for Beauvoir.<sup>58</sup> The imagery in *Being and Nothingness* in this analysis says what the theoretical system itself cannot: it thus mobilises highly-sexed and highly sexist images to support arguments that its philosophical system could not in itself pose. So, for instance, Sartre's problematic passages on the slimy are not to be understood merely as authorial aberrations but as integral to existentialism as such. Sartre writes that the slimy

invites me; for a body of slime at rest is not noticeably distinct from a body of very dense liquid. But it is a trap. ... [the slimy] leaves its traces on me. ... Slime is the revenge of the In-itself. A sickly-sweet, feminine revenge which will be symbolised on another level by the quality 'sugary'. ... A sugary sliminess is the ideal of the slimy; it symbolises the sugary death of the For-itself (like that of the wasp which sinks into the jam and drowns in it).<sup>59</sup>

The sexism of this passage ought to be self-evident, particularly given the synecdochic and metonymic relationships between jam, sugar, the domestic, and the feminine. The slimy death of the For-itself becomes even more keenly gendered when Sartre begins talking about the tendency to fill holes as “one of the most fundamental tendencies of human reality.”<sup>60</sup> The hole *par excellence* turns out to be, unsurprisingly, the vagina. “The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which ‘gapes open’. It is an *appeal to being* as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness by penetration and dissolution.”<sup>61</sup> This appeal to being is not reciprocal: if woman calls for a strange flesh to make her lack into a plenitude, then man fears her lack because it may hungrily devour his penis and castrate him. As a hole, and a slimy, feminine one at that, the vagina represents for Sartre nothing less than the call of the In-itself to the For-itself which must die (as the wasp dies) in sugary slime as it attempts to plug the obscene hole.

This imagery, and its conflation of the feminine with slime, passivity, death, and the In-itself (while the masculine stands for plugging holes, activity, life, and the For-itself), is not peripheral to Sartre’s work. Indeed, it is a structural necessity. We may recall that, for Sartre, all human projects can be understood as the expression of an atavistic desire to reconcile the In-itself and the For-itself into the In-itself-For-itself, or God. Slime and holes represent in this system the end of the For-itself and the impossibility of that project. Thus, as le Dœuff puts it, woman is that “counter-figure [who] should undo the work of integration and persistently compromise the For-itself in order to ensure that this ‘God’ fails and thus that the For-itself’s projects of conquest can continue indefinitely.”<sup>62</sup> Sartre therefore presents in *Being and Nothingness* the “story of a failed God, contrasted with woman, who fails because of woman, or thanks to her, since his defeat allows him to start his conquests all over again.”<sup>63</sup> This aspect of le Dœuff’s critique is rendered startlingly visible in *Electroma*. As we have noted above, the moment of the robots’ becoming-human is metaphorised as birth by the interspersing of a human vulva in the desert montage. Nevertheless, directly after this shot, Hero Robot #1 begins his suicide attempts. The narrative proximity is revealing: the vulva is the source of both death and life. While the robots have succeeded in their project of becoming-human, they have only done so through recourse to a symbolic feminine whose function mirrors that of the symbolic feminine in *Being and Nothingness*—to provide both the limit of human projects and the source of their constant renewal. Although *Electroma*’s parodic display of the vestigial traces of gender in the posthuman world of Inyo County indicates a compelling critique of the potential for transhumanist technologies to obliterate sexual difference, when Daft Punk return to sexual difference as the *sine qua non* of the human their vision of sexual difference is clouded by the sexism implicit in Sartrean existentialism.

## CONCLUSION: BEYOND EXISTENTIALIST CRITIQUE

Although existentialism proves to be a rich framework within which Daft Punk articulate a critique of the naïve technological triumphalism of transhumanism, it cannot, in the end, account for the gendered nature of the posthuman. For this, we must turn to non-existentialist sources, one of the most prominent being Donna Haraway’s 1985 paper “A Cyborg Manifesto.” In this final section I will briefly discuss Haraway’s paper in relation to the thematics of *Electroma* and indicate how Haraway’s understanding of the cyborg can productively complicate the use of cyborg figures in a critique of transhumanism.

We must note from the outset that Haraway’s cyborg and Daft Punk’s robots are remarkably different things. A key distinction between Haraway’s understanding of the cyborg and the cyborgs presented in *Electroma* is that of temporality. The robots of *Electroma* inhabit a posited future where humans as such do not exist; their posthuman world is temporally disconnected from the world of the film’s consumers. Haraway’s cyborgs, in contrast, are present to her readers, indeed *are* her readers: “By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are

all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics.”<sup>64</sup> Thus the cyborg is a “creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction,”<sup>65</sup> and science fiction provides us with an area to contest definitions of the cyborgs that we are in the process of becoming—or perhaps already are. For although the cyborg is, in terms of its historical genesis in and through systems theory and informatics, “the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the ‘West’s’ escalating dominations of abstract individuation” and “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism,” Haraway nonetheless articulates the subversive capacities immanent within the figure of the cyborg: “But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.”<sup>66</sup> The cyborg is thus, for Haraway, a figure to remain *contested* in concrete political action:

It is entirely possible, even likely, that people who want to make cyborg social realities and images to be more contested places—where people have different kinds of say about the shape of their lives—will lose, and are losing all over the world. One would be a fool, I think, to ignore that. However, that doesn’t mean we have to give away the game, cash in our chips and go home. I think that those are the places where we need to keep contesting.<sup>67</sup>

While Haraway makes explicit the fact that her cyborg is utopian, her cyborg functions as a politically-motivated fiction that speaks to the exigencies of 1980s socialist feminism. Her cyborg is a hybrid creature that moves between the registers of theory and fiction; it “is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity.”<sup>68</sup> As such, it ought not be recuperable to the project of teleological transhumanism, although Bostrom’s “History of Transhumanism” cites the essay’s famous concluding sentence—“I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess”—as though it were an endorsement of his cause.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the largest distinction between Haraway’s cyborgs and Daft Punk’s robots is that Haraway’s cyborg is part of a sustained theoretical project to think beyond humanism and human subjectivity, whereas Daft Punk’s robots are clearly little more than upgraded humans, or Humanity+. Each robot is an individual unit rather than a partial creature; although the robots are an amalgamation of human and machine, the machine component is understood to have no volition, to be subordinated to the human. As such, they are profoundly *humanist* creatures, as can be demonstrated by their relationship to the symbolic maternal as represented by the vulva. Haraway writes that “An origin story in the ‘Western’, humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism . . . The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust.”<sup>70</sup> To psychoanalysis and Marxism we may add existentialism, which casts the essence of humanity as the nihilating power of consciousness to carve up the original unity of the In-itself, and sees in holes and slime the inevitable, cyclical return to an original state of non-being. Daft Punk’s robots may long to return to a state of being-human, but in dreaming of a prelapsarian state they have proven themselves only too human. If we are to believe both Bostrom and Sartre when they claim that their doctrines are extensions of humanism, then we must recognise that an existentialist critique of transhumanism will only return us to the humanism that underpins them both; had they succeeded in becoming human, Daft Punk’s robots may have found themselves dreaming of becoming robots once more ■

## NOTES

1. Chris Gill, "Robopop" *Remix Magazine*, May 1 2001, available online at [http://remixmag.com./mag/remix\\_robopop](http://remixmag.com./mag/remix_robopop). The song consists of the lyrics "Buy it, use it, break it, fix it, trash it, change it, melt, upgrade it ..." repeated in a robotic monotone over a compulsive dance beat. The Apple iPod commercial (perhaps unsuccessfully) attempts to co-opt these lyrics into a celebration of the elasticity of information flows by matching the music with dancing human silhouettes, while the official video offers a darker vision: in it, a small, skinless and childlike robot repeats the mantra from atop a pyramid that looks out into a desert wasteland. It is worth noting here that the Daft Punk themselves created and directed all of the videos for the singles from *Human After All*, and that *Electroma* was conceived and filmed as part of this process. These clips can be easily found online, through sites such as YouTube.
2. The term 'existentialism' can be applied either broadly, to the figures that Jean-Paul Sartre names 'existentialist' in his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* (including Karl Jaspers, Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, and Martin Heidegger), or more narrowly, to the thought of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. In this paper, I will restrict the use of the term to the latter, narrower sense of the term.
3. Cited in Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought" *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14:1 (2005), 6.
4. See *Ibid.*
5. Nick Bostrom, "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity" *Bioethics* 19:3 (2005), 203.
6. This is not to say that all transhumanists believe that death is a harm, or that it is indeed possible to achieve immortality. For example, insofar as the French artist Orlan can be considered a transhumanist, her work certainly does not subscribe to the same technological triumphalism and disinterest in the embodied nature of subjectivity that Bostrom's account of transhumanism valorises. However, such voices are comparatively rare in the transhumanist movement.
7. Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", 1.
8. *Ibid.* We may note here that not all philosophical treatments of *Gilgamesh* come to the same conclusion: indeed, Jan Patočka reads in *Gilgamesh* an affirmation of "the dark power of finite life, ever exhausting itself, ever requiring care and protection." Cf. Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Trans. Erasmir Kohák. Chicago and La Salle: Open Court Press, 1996, 19–21.
9. Brian Alexander, *Rapture: A Raucous Tour of Cloning, Transhumanism, and the New Era of Immortality*. New York: Basic Books, 2003, 52.
10. Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", 24.
11. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Trans. Carol Macomber, Ed. John Kulka. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, 17–20.
12. Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", 2.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.
14. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 40.
15. Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", 23. Although Bostrom doesn't name the Continental philosophers about which he might be speaking, this barb is quite clearly aimed (at least in part) at Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" and its criticism of advanced forms of technology enframing the world as "standing in reserve". Cf. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper and Row, 1977, 3–35.
16. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 22.

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17. Cited in Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", 6.
18. Cf. *OED Online*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Transcend."
19. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 21–22.
20. Hazel E. Barnes, "Key to Special Terminology" in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: an Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York and London: Routledge, 2005, 655.
21. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 384. The terms "In-itself" and "For-itself" are inconsistently capitalised in this edition; I have capitalised them in my own text and made no modifications to their inconsistent use in direct quotations.
22. The details of several proposed technologies, as well as some discussion about their comparative merits, can be found in Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought".
23. *Ibid.*, 9.
24. *OED Online*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Robot."
25. Cf. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 21.
26. The fear that, through developments in artificial intelligence, computers and robots may one day nihilate their programming and discover a kind of ontological freedom that was previously the sole domain of the human propels a great deal of contemporary science fiction, including James Cameron's popular *Terminator* franchise. Fortunately, aside from the system crashes that plague the Microsoft Windows operating system, computers and robots seem no closer to this ontological revelation than they were in 1984, when Cameron released the first *Terminator* film.
27. *OED Online*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Robot."
28. *OED Online*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Cyborg"
29. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 384.
30. *Ibid.*, 587.
31. *Ibid.*, 587–588.
32. Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl" *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays on Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 148. The term "for-itself-in-itself" was coined later, in the piece "Throwing Like a Girl: Twenty Years Later" *Body and Flesh: a Philosophical Reader*. Ed. Donn Welton. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, 287. This appears to be a conscious reversal of Sartre's "in-itself-for-itself" formulation, although the term "for-itself-in-itself" has been used interchangeably with Sartre's terminology in several instances within the literature on Beauvoir—see, for instance, Sonia Kruk's "Beauvoir: the Weight of Situation" *Simone de Beauvoir: a Critical Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Fallaize. London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 48.
33. Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Trans. and Ed. H.M. Parshley. London: Vintage, 1997, 449, 470. Indeed, Beauvoir's description of housework was considered so repetitive by Parshley that he excised pages of this material in his translation from the French; cf. Margaret Simons, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing From *The Second Sex*" *Womens Studies International Forum* 6:5 (1983), 562.
34. Beauvoir introduces these terms, derived from her reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, in *Ibid.*, 95–96.
35. As there is no dialogue in the film, the robots are only nominated as such in its credits and other paratexts such as the back cover blurb of the Australian release.
36. For a concise précis of the three ekstases through which the For-itself distinguishes itself from the In-itself, cf. Barnes,

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- “Key to Special Terminology”, 651.
37. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 384.
38. Barnes, “Key to Special Terminology”, 651.
39. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 276–326. Sartre’s text uses the terms ‘paederast’ and ‘homosexual’ interchangeably.
40. *Ibid.*, 82, 86–87.
41. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 29.
42. It is a given in post-Lacanian screen studies that the gaze of the camera is a specifically male gaze. Cf. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. Ed. Mandy Merck. London and New York: Routledge, 1992, 22–34.
43. Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991, 150.
44. Jacques Derrida, “‘Choreographies’ An interview with Christie V. McDonald.” *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 2. Ed. Jonathan Culler. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 292.
45. Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985, 247.
46. Cf. Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993.
47. Cf. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 13.
48. Sartre’s own work compares nature to feminine flesh, and the gaze of the scientist to a violation of that flesh in rape. Cf. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 599. Michèle le Dœuff offers a commendable critique of these passages in *Hipparchia’s Choice*. Trans. Trista Selous. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 79–82.
49. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 21–22.
50. Margery L. Collins and Christine Pearce, “Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre’s Psychoanalysis” *Women and Philosophy: Towards a Theory of Liberation*. Ed. Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky. New York: Putnam, 1976, 113.
51. *Ibid.*, 125.
52. Michèle le Dœuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Trans. Colin Gordon. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1989, 1.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Cf. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
55. *Ibid.*, 3.
56. *Ibid.*
57. For more on le Dœuff’s admiration of Beauvoir, cf. le Dœuff, *Hipparchia’s Choice*, 55–133; for a more concise, albeit less critical account, cf. Michèle le Dœuff, “Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism.” Trans. Colin Gordon. *Feminist Studies* 6:2 (1980), 277–289.
58. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 630.
59. *Ibid.*, 634.

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60. *Ibid.*

61. le Dœuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, 87.

62. *Ibid.*, 88.

63. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 150.

64. *Ibid.*, 149.

65. *Ibid.*, 150–151.

66. Haraway in Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, "Cyborgs at Large: Interview With Donna Haraway" *Social Text* 25/26 (1990), 13.

67. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.

68. Cf. Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", 24. Haraway, for her own part, refuses to be assimilated as a naïve celebrant of technology's potential, as is evident in the introduction to her *Reader*: "Too many people, forgetting the discipline of love and rage, have read the 'Manifesto' as the ramblings of a blissed-out, technobunny, fembot." Cf. Donna Haraway, "Introduction: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations" *The Haraway Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004, 3. She also delivers a stinging rebuke to organisations such as Bostrom's Humanity+: "I can't believe the blissed-out techno-idioty of people who talk about downloading human consciousness onto a chip." Cf. Donna Haraway in Nicholas Gane, "When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?" Interview with Donna Haraway." *Theory, Culture and Society* 23:7–8 (2006), 146.

69. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.

## THE RETURN OF RAGE

Mario Wenning

Emotions are popular again.<sup>1</sup> However, while there have been discussions of emotions ranging from humiliation, guilt, and anxiety to love or sympathy, rage has received only marginal attention. This is rather surprising, given that rage is one of the most apparent psychopolitical driving forces in conflicts on the personal, national and international stages. It might be argued that the vengeful part of the affective life of political actors has been neglected because it is, by definition, anti-deliberative and anti-egalitarian. If X is furious about Y, she does not care for equal treatment or reasoning directed toward mutual understanding. Rage thus undermines the normative pillars of contemporary political theory.

For the present purpose I would like to pursue the question, if it is possible to construct a viable theoretical paradigm that draws on the psychopolitical category of rage and related concepts such as indignation, wrath, and anger.<sup>2</sup> Plato already argued that only a political system that could successfully balance the accumulating, receptive, erotic, on the one hand, and the giving, explosive and what he calls “*thymotic*” dimensions of communal life, on the other hand, would provide for a just society. Recently, the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who became known to a wider audience through his *Critique of Cynical Reason*<sup>3</sup> and his 1999 quarrel with Habermas concerning the ethics of human engineering, attempted to rehabilitate rage as a central political category. In his treatise *Zorn und Zeit* (‘Rage and Time’, an allusion to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*), Sloterdijk proposes to reread the history of civilization as well as contemporary political developments as attempts to balance the vengeful and the caring dimensions of social interaction. This paper discusses Sloterdijk’s proposal to introduce rage as a central psychopolitical category and at the same time pursues the systematic question whether this proposal can be extended into a political theory that is empirically plausible and normatively convincing. The guiding hypothesis is that a politics of caring for the worst-off without vengeful contours is empty, while rage without a vision of a better society is blind.

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A rehabilitation of rage as a political concept is all but an easy and, even less so, self-evident endeavor. It is almost a truism that rage destroys rather than creates environments in which human beings and communities could flourish. Philosophical calls to a politics of rage, one would think, is the last thing we need at times in which we are only slowly recovering from a rampant war rhetoric that too easily distinguished friend from foe, those who are with from those who are against us. Nonetheless, there remains the question how we should relate to that force which the ancient Greeks referred to as “*thymos*.”

If the 20<sup>th</sup> century has taught us one thing than it is that using strong negative emotions to manipulate masses is one of the most dangerous arts of governing. Accordingly, we might think that it is the role of the responsible philosopher to warn against these dangers. Jürgen Habermas, for example, has made a career out of defending reason in the form of the forceless force of the better argument against the “dark” *thymotic* forces that threaten the project of modernity.<sup>4</sup> Amongst other things, Peter Sloterdijk’s *Rage and Time* helps to critically reconsider the adequacy of such deliberative models of political interaction.<sup>5</sup>

To take rage politics seriously requires us to break with three pillars of contemporary social and political theorizing:<sup>6</sup> First, it is necessary to refrain from constructing an idealized theory of the good, the just, the virtues, or virtuous affects. Rather than clearly separating the normative wheat from the pathological chaff, the possibility of making such clear-cut distinctions needs to be called into question in order to come to terms with the complexity and normative ambivalence of emotions and their expressions in political life. Second, in line with the critique of ideal theory, the focus on the neglected concept of rage helps to reinterpret and better understand recent historical developments from a global perspective. Global terrorism as well as the reaction of a war on terror mark not just the return of history but also the return of rage as a political emotion. They call for a different form of political theory than the proponents of cosmopolitanism and rights—or justice-centered accounts are able to offer. Third, in order to develop a viable alternative to current idealizing political theories, it is necessary to think about ways of reorienting the theoretical underpinnings of the left. The political subtext of *Rage and Time* is an attempt at coming to terms with and eventually proposing possible ways of overcoming the exhaustion of the left. It sees political theory as a critical tool to take part in political reality rather than simply reflecting about it. The political theory centered on the concept of *thymos* interprets recent political history from the perspective of violated honor and recognition claims to then address the translation of these violations into rage dynamics. Rather than simply presenting a realist interpretation of recent historical events, *thymotics* engages in a normative theory in the more specific sense of using the insight into *thymotic* dynamics to promote a political economy of what Sloterdijk calls “balancing acts.” Contrary to the current manifestations of the rage of losers, the goal is a rage free of resentment, a rage that successfully balances *eros* and *thymos*. The parallels to Nietzsche, which I will not address in this paper, cannot be overlooked.

I will argue that the account presented by Sloterdijk is successful with regard to the first two dimensions, i.e. the dismissal of idealizing normative theories and the interpretation of recent historical events. However, as I will point out in the final section, at least in its current form, it fails to present a convincing alternative to the partially self-incurred insignificance of the left due to its lack of channeling *thymotic* energies to make convincing threat aimed at the systematic causes for pathologies and conditions of injustice. As it stands, the politics of rage lack a convincing vision of a world in which there would be fewer motivations for rage.

Sloterdijk rereads Plato and Hegel through the lens of neoconservative thinkers Leo Strauss and Francis Fukuyama. Plato had argued in the fourth book of the *Republic* that the human soul consists of three parts: reason (*nous*), appetite (*epithymia*), and what he refers to as “*thymos*.” *Thymos*, which is usually translated as “spiritedness,” is that part of the soul which houses pride, a need for recognition, and courage. When claims to pride and recognition are not satisfied, the *thymotic* part of the soul reacts with spirited emotions ranging from shame to rage. Hurt *thymos* triggers struggles for recognition.<sup>7</sup> Although this part of the soul is different from reason, it is not reducible to the corruptive appetite of physical desire. “In the soul,” Plato writes in the fourth book of the *Republic*, “the spirited is a third part, by nature the helper of reason, if it has not been corrupted by bad upbringing.”<sup>8</sup> The *thymotic* part of our soul responds to suffering from injustice, be it our own or that

of others. However, it is not itself part of reason, because one can be angry without being guided by reason in acting on that anger. The German term “*Jähzorn*” (fury, irascibility), a particular kind of “*Zorn*” (rage), captures this difference. *Zorn* might be supported by reason. *Jähzorn*, on the other hand, is an instinctive and immediately released form of fury that leads to reckless action. In some situations, though, *thymos* is neither a potential auxiliary of reason nor a form of recklessness, but it settles conflicts between reason and desire. *Thymos* is a second-order desire that potentially helps reason to suppress foolish desires when reason by itself fails.

It was thus recognized by the ancients that *thymos* is normatively ambivalent, which is the major reason why it has in turn been treated like a stepchild by mainstream normative theory with its emphasis on “positive” or “ideal” norms and erotic emotions. In the *thymotic* urge, selfishness and selflessness are intertwined. When a person does not feel taken seriously, when she feels his or her honor to have been violated, that person responds ferociously. She does not simply call attention to the equality of human beings and the need to respect every citizen of the kingdom of ends. Rather she feels misrecognized in her *particular* claims. When people are being offended and made feel like they are worth less than they think they are worth, they become angry.

Yet, this becoming angry is not rooted in particular claims aiming at the satisfaction of egoistic desires. As an innate, affective sense of justice, *thymos* allows its bearer to lift himself up beyond his petty concerns for life and pleasure. It does so in a way which often leads to violence and tragic downfall. For this reason, Plato ultimately eradicated the normative ambivalence of *thymos*. He argued that, only if reason, appetite, and thymotic spiritedness would form a harmony in which *thymos* and animal appetite were *under the control of* reason, would it be possible to live a life characterized by justice, temperance, and happiness.<sup>9</sup> This inclusion of our desire and spiritedness under reason only worked as long as hierarchies could still be seen as harmonic. Of course it is not possible to literally translate Plato’s psychology to our day. The tripartite division of the soul in which reason is presented as the highest faculty is modeled on the problematic assumption of an organically structured but ultimately static city in which reason corresponds to the philosopher king, appetite to the workers, and spiritedness to the class of warriors. Furthermore, modern pedagogy no longer assumes that “when a man gives music an opportunity to charm his soul with the flute, and to pour through his ears as through a funnel those sweet, soft and plaintive tunes we have mentioned, when he spends his whole life humming them and delighting in them, then, at first, if he has any spirit, it is softened as iron is tempered and, from being hard and useless, is made useful.”<sup>10</sup> However, in spite of the obvious distance to Plato’s socio-political ideals and pedagogical convictions, a reconsideration of the function and the dynamics of the spirited part of our soul suggests itself, if we want to make sense of the global dynamics unraveling in recent history.

In drawing on the ancient Platonic theory of a thymotic force influencing our action, a force that is neither reducible to reason nor to desire, Sloterdijk emphasizes the complexity that constitutes our ethical, economic, and political life. In particular, there is the intertwined nature of claims for honor and recognition, on the one hand, and acts of rage and revenge following the violation of these claims, on the other hand. This complexity accounts for an ethical as well as historical dynamic that cannot be analyzed appropriately without taking seriously the normative complexity of *thymos*. Currently we lack the conceptual resources to rightly address this complexity.

Some examples can help to illustrate that liberal institutions and modes of thinking are insufficient when trying to come to terms with the eruption of *thymotic* energies. Let us look at two prominent cases: that of honor killings and that of international terrorism. An honor or customary killing is the killing of a family or clan member by another family member, where the killing is committed because it is believed that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family—usually by adopting liberal sexual practices or ways of dressing. The number of honor killings has rapidly increased during recent years, especially in Western societies with a significant immigration from the Islamic world. Ordinary citizens do not quite know how to react to these events. They sense that honor killings are not ordinary crimes, because the motif is not based on merely egoistic inclinations. However, there is also a consensus that these killings *are* crimes after all, even if it is possible to understand that the motif for them is something one can still understand as adhering to a cross-cultural value such as family piety. Honor killings pose

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serious challenges not only to the moral sensibilities of enlightened liberal adults, but also to the legal systems of liberal democracies. We are not dealing with conventional murders in which emotions blind the sane mind and lead to actions which could be regretted later. In most cases there is a rather deliberate decision of the perpetrator to kill the victim, which would suggest that we are dealing with a case of murder. Frequently the perpetrators of these killings do not only acknowledge that they might end up in prison: the act of punishment is seen as part of the process of “reestablishing honor.” Vendettas require sustained commitment and are often accompanied by high degrees of reflexivity during the process of planning and carrying them out. They can thus not be reduced to spring from mere impulsive (re)actions. In various cases, judges have opted to accept a cultural defense (for example by drawing on the *Sharia*, the Islamic law) and imposed only reduced sentences to the perpetrators. In the absence of a more refined moral and legal categorization, these killings have then been interpreted as instances of manslaughter instead of premeditated murder although it was apparent that the killing was not impulsive and followed an internally coherent process of rationalization. The justifications often draw on cultural values that can claim some level of universality. The reestablishing of family honor, the usual motive, is a value that is accepted across cultures, even if the interpretation of what it requires and how it relates to individual rights is different.

The normative disorientation that the liberal psyche experiences in light of the explosion of *thymotic* energies becomes even more obvious when we consider the rise of and responses to international terrorism. The rage of those whose honor and recognition claims remain unanswered is a key motive in the acts that have led the West into its “war on terror.” The terrorists are successful in constantly recruiting mostly young male second, third, and fourth sons without future prospects for suicide missions. The success is due not only because the leaders of terror cells are masters of propaganda and understand how to channel the *thymotic* energies of those who feel humiliated or left out by the erotic promises of speculative capitalism. Terrorist movements are as successful as they are because they provide exhilarating utopian visions not free of eroticism: on the individual level in the form of the promise of joining the company of 72 virgins after the suicide mission; on a social level many terrorists hope to gain recognition within and outside of their family for fighting the “infidels”; and on a socio-historical level they hope to contribute to the reconstitution of the global emirate and bring about a new Islamic millennium.

Seen from an erotic as well as *thymotic* perspective, the war on terror is more problematic on the side of the so called “free world”. This is because it cannot be won while it is instrumentalized to erode the achievements of liberal democracies, most importantly the welfare state and the rule of law (by reducing social infrastructures and restricting civil liberties to the point of legalizing torture for political purposes). Although radical Islamic fanaticism is more successful than the “free world” in the management of the affective impulses of the losers of globalization, it also represents an anti-modern movement that seems highly anachronistic. While borrowing innovative Western technologies, Islamic fundamentalists romanticize living in cages and try to install an anti-egalitarian social order. These neolithic ideologies then make use of the technical achievements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since terrorist leaders have not been able to formulate innovative visions for the world of tomorrow, the movement gets stuck in a form of blind rage that is guided by resentment and nostalgic images. As much as angry losers can be devastating and spread fear, they cannot be victorious. As dialectical opposites terror and the fight against it converge in their conflation of productive rage with retribution and resentment. This leads us to the question: if the rage that explodes in terrorism is anachronistic and resentful, what features would progressive rage reveal?

One way to answer this question is to contrast the current economy of moral affects to that of the ancients. The contemporary political homelessness of rage energies can be juxtaposed to the world of the ancients as it is presented in the foundational document of Western culture, the *Iliad*, a poem which starts with the words “Sing, Goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus.”<sup>11</sup> The world of the Homeric epic seems very distant to us. The moral valorization of war and heroic struggle as exemplifying the meaning of life only survives in the illusion-creating entertainment industry. That true satisfaction could only be reached on the battlefield of higher causes is a concept that is incommensurable with the moral cosmos of enlightened adults who have

learned the lesson that rage should not explode directly.

Following Aristotle, St. Augustine had defined rage as inherently aiming at revenge (*ira appetit vindictam*). According to Christian dogmatism, rage or wrath was thus included as a prominent member in the list of the seven deadly sins (next to lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, envy, and pride).<sup>12</sup> Rather than following the call of immediate pay-back for suffered injury in uniting the role of judge and executor, post-heroic citizens place trust in the ultimate authority of the rule of law, the courts, the police, and the penitentiary system. The achievements of relegating the authority of violent payback to the state has allowed to create a pacified civil society in which thymotic impulses are tolerated only in the form of peaceful competition within a highly eroticized market that is to a large extent dependent on the continuity of illusions. The excess of rage is supposed to be sublimated by cultural means, as Freud suggested in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Instead of waging war, modern enlightened *connoisseurs* are trained to peacefully compensate our *thymotic* urge through the consumption of the arts as well as sports. Dancing to a concert or watching the soccer championships, going to the museum or playing video games such as *Counter-Strike* are thus nothing but a symbolic enactment of a culturally prohibited act of taming one's *thymos*.

The ancients, in contrast, were capable to ascribe to the spirited state of mind a significance that is higher than human. By participating in the affect of rage, they thought, human beings get as close as it gets to the world of the gods. According to the moral cosmos of the ancients, moral elevation consists in an act of fully identifying and following the flow of extreme affects. The emotional metaphysics of the ancients allows for a participation in a reality in which the self is transformed by partaking in higher values than those available in everyday life. True sacrifice thus consists in making oneself into an instrument or medium of the divine command that articulates itself in extreme emotions. Before the modern subject sat itself up as the master of its emotions, "it is not the human beings who have their passions, but rather it is the passions that have their human beings."<sup>13</sup>

What is it that led to the modern distrust in *thymotic* actions? Appealing to the denigration of emotions in general under conditions of increased normative abstraction and institutionalization of legal systems can at best be part of an explanation. Emotions do not just celebrate a revival in contemporary debates in moral philosophy, in a way they have never been absent. Whether Confucius, Aristotle, Epicurus, Schiller, Schopenhauer, or contemporary care ethicists—they all emphasize that emotions, although not reasons for action, are central building blocks of any convincing normative theory. Without the right emotion, they argue against formalist and overly intellectualized accounts of morality, there is no action at all.

If not a neglect of emotions in general, what is it then that led to the suspicion of *thymotic* affects in particular? A primary reason is that many normative accounts tend to exclusively focus on what are perceived to be good, pacific, and healthy emotions such as compassion, empathy, or love. They either ignore other emotions or treat them as being either derivative of or privations of the allegedly good emotions. *Thymotic* impulses have been ethically vanquished and stigmatized as belonging to a precultivated, archaic state of—predominantly male—development into which we can always sink back if we are not careful.<sup>14</sup>

The valorization of erotic emotions and virtues over *thymotic* ones is as old as philosophy itself. Aristotle already insists that the virtuous person cultivates mildness of temper "the even tempered person confesses to be calm and not carried away by his feelings, but to be cross only in the way, at the things, and for the length of time that reason dictates."<sup>15</sup> Compassion is introduced as an antidote to revenge. The virtuous character does not lose the control that is necessary to provide for a self-sufficient emotional economy, which is the precondition for achieving a life that is marked by wisdom, even-temperedness, and justice. Seneca's influential work on rage, *De ira*, which was immensely influential for Christian and humanist ethics, calls for a Stoic control of the dangerous affect. The general suspicion against the destructive consequences of this aggressive emotion is not limited to the European tradition. Confucius already warns his students "to let a sudden fit of anger make you forget the safety of your own person or even that of your parents, is that not misguided judgment?"<sup>16</sup> Daoism and Zen-Buddhism promote meditative practices and compassion to overcome our fixation on the need of being angry

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with ourselves and the world surrounding us. More recently, Martha Nussbaum argued that we should aim to understand “how to channel emotional development in the direction of a more mature and inclusive and less ambivalent type of love.”<sup>17</sup> According to Nussbaum, anger should at best operate as a tool of compassion. Acts of punishment are then seen as merciful rather than vindictive because they aim at the good of the victim.

These representative examples illustrate that the eroticization of the psyche replaced what is regarded as archaic forms of militancy that, it is contended, mistakenly suggest that honor, pride and craving for recognition (and the rage that results from the violation of these) has been considered to be more important than a concern for justice, equality and compassion.

We might think that the dislike of negative emotions in general and potentially aggressive ones in particular results from an insight into the misfortunes these emotions bring about. Revenge, then, is undesirable because it tends to be too costly in producing long term damages. Hegel, for example, reminds us in the *Philosophy of Right* of the infinite chain of violence, the economy of pay-back that results from blind vengeance and self-administered acts of justice.<sup>18</sup> The excesses of rage can easily lead to tragic repetitions of an original act of violence that might be impossible to get out of. Honor killings often lead to new honor killings rather than the reestablishment of justice and the fight against terror breed more terrorists.

However, despite the danger of vengeful affects to lead to unwanted chain reactions, we should be careful to follow the prevailing tendency of privileging erotic over *thymotic* affects. Often rage is an *appropriate* response to injustice and serious wrongdoing. It can be a force not just of cathartic purification from holding a grudge and reestablish sovereignty, but also a major tool for creating justice and gaining power of the oppressed. Neither the French Revolution nor more recent emancipatory movements such as feminism or environmentalism would have been possible without their distinct forms of rage. When supported through justified indignation, rage can be an emancipatory force that does not simply expose violations but at the same time brings about an engagement to correct them. It is productive whenever it is not simply a reactive response sparked by envy or resentment. Ideally, it appears as great courage, which is why “*thymos*” has sometimes also been translated as “stout-heartedness.” In extreme cases this courage commits its bearer to risk his or her life for causes “higher” than his own affairs and interests. Even among the negative emotions, rage enjoys a privileged moral standing. In contrast to hatred, for example, rage can be balanced and does not simply aim at destruction for its own sake. Whereas hatred does not stop after a certain sanction was imposed, rage can recede after justice has received its dues. In contrast to the negative emotions of greed or envy, rage does not rest in the unfulfilled desire to maximize one’s benefits over those of others, but expresses a sense of universal justice.<sup>19</sup> The logic of rage rests on implicit egalitarian assumptions. When we become angry at someone, we see that someone as an equal who has violated a morally sanctioned law and thus turned into an antagonist. With inferiors, in contrast, one is disdainful, annoyed, or irritated, but not angry, while one is afraid of superiors until one becomes angry at them and confronts them.

In drawing on the heroic song of the *Iliad*, Sloterdijk reminds us that in antiquity—or at least in a certain tradition of antiquity expressed in the great epic works and tragedies—rage belonged to a heroic character. It was not simply deducible from external provocations: “Achilles is wrathful just as the North Pole is icy, the Olympus is surrounded by clouds, and Mont Ventoux is surrounded by roaring winds.”<sup>20</sup> To be a hero simply means to listen to and act on the voice of one’s *thymos*. It is not the careful and considered practice of retribution and certainly not the giving and taking of reasons in an ideal uncoerced discourse.

In our post-heroic universe, the virtues of hesitation and rational deliberation have replaced virtues of forceful action. However, if the world (and human culture) is a memory house in which the medium human being accumulates traumatic memories of suffering from moral injuries, insults, and humiliations, the question arises how to deal with this stored memory. There are at least two historically prominent strategies of dealing with stored rage that come to mind. There is the Christian strategy of “forgiving, but not forgetting.” The good loving God of the *New Testament* replaced the God of wrath of the *Old Testament*. Settling scores is not up to us,

but, if at all necessary, it will be God's business when the Day of Judgment comes. The Christian command to turn the other cheek implies a prohibition of revenge and commits us to an apocalyptic vision of history in which justice remains to come and, with it, rage is transferred to the last moment of time.

Or, alternatively, there is the strategy of taking over God's position and instill humanity as the judge—be it as party, dictator, or movement. The pure form of Christian political theology is replaced by a theological politics when radical political movements on the left or on the right proclaim a monopoly on managing rage and practicing revenge.<sup>21</sup>

*Thymotics* is the technology of channeling stored *thymos* for political purposes. History is the history of the administration of these mnemonic resources. Social institutions as well as the self-therapeutic ideas of Buddhism, Stoicism, and Christianity had the role of cultivating and redirecting stored energies through meditation, retreat, and forgiveness so that they would not break out violently. Since the forces of secularization weakened the great world religions, and socialism has vanished as an existing political alternative, we are left in a situation where *thymotic* energies are up for grabs. If they are not to be instrumentalized within the war on terror or swallowed up by the erotic lures of consumerism and the recent "return of religions," it is necessary to channel them in more meaningful political ways.

In order to begin thinking about such a progressive politics of rage, we need to reconsider the guiding assumption of liberalism that individuals are the primary political agents and bearers of rights. Sloterdijk's reinterpretation of the history of civilization from the perspective of rage breaks with the grounding assumption of liberal political theories in that his model of rage politics does not start from the perspective of individuals, but from that of groups. Plato and Marx after him already pointed out that people do not just want their own honor and dignity recognized, but also desire the recognition of their various group affiliations. If a group is feeling that its worth is recognized less than what it thinks it deserves, it will find ways and means to make itself heard. Sloterdijk refuses to address groups as if they would be individuals with certain desires, wishes, and programs of action. Rather groups and their organization within parties function like financial institutions in which emotions are being acquired, stored, traded, and, from time to time, released.<sup>22</sup> Sloterdijk uses the allegories of the "world bank of rage," "*thymos* monopolies," and "*thymotic* dividends" to characterize the accumulation and dispersal of rage quanta. Under conditions of capitalism, greed-dynamic transactions characterize the erotically loaded forms of life in which overcompensation for everyone is promised without being realizable. The promise of overcompensation replaces the traditional promise of being adequately rewarded for one's efforts. Those excluded from the benefits of the overcompensation promise and those without luck in the permanent lottery of speculative capitalism form an increasingly dangerous army of the angry and frustrated.

In a countries like Japan, a country in which workers used to enjoy a tacit right to have life-long employment in the same company, is it not unlikely that rage-movements will form if companies like Sony, Toyota or Honda will continue laying off workers and the historical victory of the democratic party does not bring about the desired *thymotic* abreaction and the promised erotic fulfillment. Workers do not simply lose jobs. In a world guided by the ideal of the *homo oeconomicus*, if you get fired you first lose your recognition as worker; if you lose your recognition as a worker, you lose your dignity; and if you lose your dignity, you lose your sense self. Under conditions of capitalism economic failure *is* moral failure.

Honor and dignity violations constitute a politically explosive arsenal. However, this arsenal could also be a progressive means of transformation. At present progressive parties are not presenting themselves as agencies that responsibly invest rage to harvest emancipatory returns. Mainstream parties only administer hopelessly dept-ridden budgets and threaten the citizens with the specter of being outsourced due to competition in a globalized market in which labor power and capital is freely traded. As it stands, parties on neither side of the political spectrum are capable to transform the stored up *thymotic* energies into the courage to become politically active. When moments of violent eruptions do occur, there is no political mechanism, there are no rage agencies to channel them in lucrative political projects.

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This current inability to steer rage-movements productively became particularly apparent in the late October of 2005 when a group of mostly male adolescents from immigrant families engaged in riots in the Paris *banlieus*. A few people quickly turned into a rage mop. Sparked by allegations of a chase by a couple of police men and resulting death of two teenagers with an Arab background—an allegation that turned out to be false—the riots which lasted for weeks expressed a deeper anger about racism and poverty in a country that prides itself for its welfare state and faith in equal human rights and opportunities. An estimated 10,000 vehicles were burned, 5,000 people were arrested, and 170 million Euros worth of damage was created in the respective suburbs. No party attempted to transform these “untidy” energies into a meaningful political protest movement that would have been capable to make convincing threats. The only consequences were republican calls to wider access to education following the remark of Sarkozy, at the time minister of the interior, that the “rabble” (*racaille*) should be taken off the streets and that everyone who would be unhappy in France—in particular people with a foreign background—had the right to leave the country if they didn’t want to be there.<sup>23</sup> This example illustrates that currently there is a lack of political organizations that would have the power or even the intention to make productive use of rage. The existing agencies propagate a politics of fear rather than one of courage.

Finally, it is necessary to end by pointing to a blind spot in the project of a political theory of rage that has been discussed. The actualization of *thymos* reveals it as a dynamic factor in history. It has been shown that *thymos* is an expression of a moral craving for recognition as well as the struggle against injustices. Sloterdijk’s expressed aim is to argue for a balancing act of *eros* and *thymos*, the passive, inward-directed and the active outward-directed desires of our soul. So far the main achievement of reconsidering *thymos* is to have pointed to its normative ambivalence and the dangers of unproductive *thymotic* explosions springing from resentment. However, it is not in Sloterdijk’s (or anyone else’s) interest to stage himself as the Cassandra who warns us of a future of *thymotic* catastrophes. Rather, the task for New Leftist movements is to open up ways of engaging in politically promising rage agendas, and harnessing them to desirable ends.

How is it possible to make productive use of rage? How can one distinguish between bad and good *thymos*? With Robert Musil, Sloterdijk regards the becoming one with the pure driving force of *thymos* as the “utopia of a life based on motivation,” a life that would be at once *thymotic*, erotic, and rational. Far from romanticizing violence or blind acts of self-administered justice, it would be necessary to create a global culture in which pride *for the right causes* would have importance again, a culture in which the violation of justified pride claims would lead to the productive use of *thymotic* energies. It is essential that rage projects are in fact aiming at the fate of the worst-off and do make use of morally permissible means, avoiding violence wherever possible and engaging in risks whenever necessary.

Sloterdijk, as far as I can see, does not provide us with such a thymotic project. The vision Sloterdijk presents is at least as old as John Locke: the basic rights to life, freedom, and property. The liberalism that the theory promised to overcome is thus smuggled in through the backdoor. This becomes particularly apparent in Sloterdijk’s recent critique of the current model of a welfare state, which finances its services by way of a progressive tax system, and thus turns into a “state cleptocracy.”<sup>24</sup> There Sloterdijk presents the vision of a revolution that would replace the current accumulating and redistributing hand of the government, which is said to be financed by overtaxing the efforts of the top performers (*Leistungsträger*), through a government that would rely on the good will and donations of a country’s elites. Apart from its implausibility and unsubstantiated claims concerning tax revenues, this vision is regressive and solidifies neoliberal tendencies while crippling social progress.

The liberal defense of an open culture of ambition and pride with sporadic acts of critical abreaction is akin to the competitive framework of speculative capitalism. Rather than calling for a new progressive movement with threatening power, Sloterdijk suggests localized practices and a trust in long-term civilizational learning processes that cannot be achieved through short-term activism. Where these processes could come from and how their *thymotic* and erotic appeal is to be balanced remains open. The, to my mind unfortunate, call for patience implicitly reiterates Seneca’s dictum that “the greatest remedy against anger is postponement.”<sup>25</sup> This reformist stance might suffocate productive rage rather than organize it for the right causes. It rests on a form

of historical optimism that is difficult to reconcile with political reality. In the face of blatant injustice there is a need to offer a different vision to that of an unconditional trust in civilizational learning processes.

Rage is not a historical subject that operates independently of its bearers and their needs and motivations. Usually rage is *someone's* rage that is directed at *someone else* for specific reasons. The “someone else” might be an individual or a group. Rage can be directed at another person, a group of people, or even at a situation that is experienced as the cause of injury. Reasons for rage are numerous. They include an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, new forms of social exclusion and subordination, widespread feelings of social and political impotence, as well as the irreparable damage that has already been done to the global ecosystem. Nonetheless, on a political level it has become increasingly difficult to subscribe to, or even imagine, large-scale rage projects after the vanishing of grand narratives including their grand scapegoats, be they capitalists, communists, Jews, or Muslims. The failures of speculative capitalism do not seem to be *someone's* failures. In the middle of a global financial crisis it might not be possible to pinpoint the exact causes and attribute responsibility to specific actors—even though some investment bankers and managers have been sentenced. Yet, many feel rightly dissatisfied with the attempt to simply manage a massive crisis they did not bring about and see it as a catalyst for new alternative forms of politics. The decisive question of the future thus seems to me to be whether it will be possible to invent forms of productive rage that can do without a traditional addressee.

The deep tension between the erotic promise of overcompensation (unconditional rights to privileges and prosperity) and the *thymotic* indignation resulting from an increasing failure to realize this promise for the majority of the population is calling for new rage agencies. It is likely that these will not be traditional parties but international grassroots movements with a shared sense of indignation and a shared vision. *Attac*, to name just one of the movements resisting neoliberal globalization, already has 90,000 members and is active in more than fifty countries.<sup>26</sup>

Last but not least, in order for rage to be free of resentment, such movements would need to be coupled with a utopian vision, a vision of a world in which there would be less systematic causes for suffering from injustice. I have argued that a political theory of rage is a promising alternative to current idealized models in that it focuses on the source motivating emancipatory action. The positive flipside of the indignation that provides for political agency has always been the hope that a better world is indeed possible. It is the message of hope in a better world that allows addressing and improving conditions that keep inhibiting such a world. There is a need for philosophers and other politicians to not shy away from the courageous *polemos* of rethinking utopia.<sup>27</sup> Janus-faced, the *thymotic* process must look backward and forward. Emancipatory prophets would have to draw on indignation as well as hope. Such prophets provide a link between an unjust and a world that, while not free of injustice, would be more just. Rage free of resentment does not strive for eternal punishment but for the establishment of new forms of social and political life. It provides glimpses of conditions in which fewer systematic violations would lead to fewer reasons for rage. Adorno, an author whose raging critique was as relentless as his utopia of a better world, puts it as follows: “consciousness could not even despair over the grey did it not harbor the notion of a different color whose traces are not absent in the negative whole”<sup>28</sup> ■

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### NOTES

1. Cf. Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion, and Will*. New York: Humanities Press, 1963; Robert Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1976; Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *Explaining Emotions*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980; Christoph Demmerling and Hilge Landweer, eds, *Philosophie der Gefuehle*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007.
2. For the purpose of this paper I do not clearly distinguish the emotions of anger, rage, and wrath. These terms share a family resemblance in being expressions of *thymos* and are not sufficiently distinguished in common language.
3. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987.
4. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987.
5. The translation is forthcoming with Columbia University Press in April 2010. All references are to Peter Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006.
6. For a systematic attempt to break with ideal theory and a political philosophy that emphasizes deliberation over power and universal rights over particular interests cf. Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
7. Francis Fukuyama writes “Plato’s thymos is therefore nothing other than the psychological seat of Hegel’s desire for recognition,” *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Avon Books, 1992, 165.
8. Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. G.M.A. Grube. London: Hackett, 1974, 441a.
9. For a detailed reconstruction of the role of *thymos* in Plato’s corpus see Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness, and the Impersonal Good*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
10. Plato, *The Republic*, 411 a-b.
11. Homer, *The Iliad*. Trans. Ian Johnston. Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2007, I, 1.  
Cf. H. Huehn’s entry on “Zorn” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 12. Basel: Schwabe, 2004, 1382-1390.
12. Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*, 12.
13. A rare exception to the predominant trend is Robert C. Solomon who describes anger as “neither a ‘good’ nor a ‘bad’ emotion” and as “an ideal test case for any emotional theory.” *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*, 227.
14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, IV 5, 1126a.
15. Confucius, *The Analects*. Trans. Dim Cheuk Lau. London: Penguin, 1979, XII: 21.
16. Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 395.
17. G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Ed. Allen W. Wood. Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, §101.
18. Demmerling and Landweer, *Philosophie der Gefuehle*, 287-310.
19. Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*, 10.
20. Cf. Slavoj Žižek’s interpretation of Sloterdijk in the context of Walter Benjamin’s conception of “divine violence,” *Violence*. London: Profile, 2008, 157-161.
21. See especially p. 221-248 and 302-314 in Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*.

22. Cf. “Nicolas Sarkozy continue de vilipender ‘racailles et voyous’,” in *Le Monde*, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005.
23. Peter Sloterdijk, “Die Revolution der gebenden Hand,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 10th, 2009. The article was harshly criticized by Axel Honneth and sparked a debate.
24. Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*. Ed. J. F. Procope. Trans. John M. Cooper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 88.
25. Cf. the networks website at <http://www.attac.org>.
26. Critical theory has had a complicated relationship to utopia and prophesy. On the one hand utopian projections are necessary to provide for normative orientation. On the other hand, they could lead to political escapism in idealizing possibility over an engagement with actuality. Maeve Cooke convincingly argues for a form of critical theory that is both immanent in focusing on historical injustice and transcendent in providing utopian visions of a good society: *Re-presenting the Good Society*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006.
27. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2008, 370.