Postmodernism, Postsecularism, Posthumanism, or, (Flash) Gordon, Saviour of the Universe

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Imagine the following scene, a scene of writing if you wish. I, or now we, are sitting, in the margins, at some distance, in the "off", but strangely enough also quite close, at least close enough to be fully "present" while also absent from the scene: we're at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, on November 12th 2007. Gordon Brown, then prime minister, is in the middle of the annual Prime Minister's speech, his first. As is customary, he speaks about Britain's place in the world, its past, present and future and the challenges and risks of globalisation, the network society and Britain's "mission". He says:

> From the early years of this young century we can already discern what Britain, the first multinational state, has always known: that success requires that people of different races, religions and backgrounds learn to live in harmony with each other.[1]

Instantly, I'm transported, teleported dreamlike into another time, another scene, in a galaxy far, far away, where I hear another voice, that of Graham Ward, the religious studies scholar, and his opening sentences in *True Religion*, from the "Introduction: A Manifesto":

> Religion is, once more, haunting the imagination of the West. The various attempts to exorcise its presence – from Feuerbach's anthropology to Freudian psychology, from the atheism of the logical atomists to the quarantining policies of liberalism – have

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[1] Gordon Brown, "The Lord Mayor's Banquet Speech", 12 November 2007; available online: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130109092234/http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page13736, accessed 30 October 2015.

failed, for the secularism upon which they were each founded is imploding. A new remythologizing of the real – media-driven, market-led – is emerging. [2]

And I'm starting to realise that I'm hearing these voices in the context of a call – a call for papers[3] – a call that tells me something about Britain and asks whether it's postsecular, maybe the first or the only or the most postsecular nation, an island steering a lonely course, for better or for worse, between the abyss opened up by the ends of secularism and the rising tide of a religious return prompted by globalisation and migration. And I cannot help but think of…

The End of the Post – A Sense of "Urgent Déjà Vu"

"Post-Secular Britain", question mark – the announced "event" seemed to come out of nowhere, worse, from an entirely other time and place, a galaxy far, far away. If this is the future, I thought, then I've seen it, and it's already happened. Even worse, it's not quite sure what was more disturbing in the title, the "post-secular" or the "Britain". Or, put differently, was it the elision and the forgetting of several decades' of 'theory' that I saw hiding behind the construed narrative that, I quote, "since 9/11… a new, post-secular phase in European societies" may have begun and that therefore, and I quote again from the blurb, "geopolitical

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[2] Graham Ward, *True Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. vii.

[3] This intervention was made at the "Post-Secular Britain? Religion, Secularity and Cultural Agency", 19th Annual Conference of the German Association for the Study of British Cultures, 20.-22. November 2008, Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg; http://www.britcult.de/konferenzen.htm.

constellations appear to offer renewed incentives for casting social and political conflicts and affiliations in religious terms". I was immediately reminded of, or thrown back to all those texts I had been reading from the early 1990s (and which I have never stopped reading or, in fact, "living" ever since), starting with Roland Barthes's death of the god-like "Author", Foucault's and Derrida's respective takes on the "ends of man", and which lead, inevitably, to the larger cultural, ethical and political questions of alterity, hospitality, faith and religion, sovereignty, migration, messianisms with and without messiah, etc.

Or was it the geographical perspective that was bothering a certain "me", helped by this "demon of theory" (my eternal "Compagnon"), that couldn't or wouldn't identify with the intricate (geo)political interplay of inside-outside persepctives and their "liberal" transcendence or "slippage" built into its structural gaze to support this narrative: what does this mean to "me"? Who is speaking here? Arguably, the most invaluable question that theory has taught any "me" caring to listen. Having turned my back, a bit more than a year ago, on this strange island that had been my "home" – "home" in very scary "scare quotes" of course – for the past fifteen years and which had taught me "theory" – a peculiar mixture of so-called "British poststructuralism", "cultural studies", "French" and not so French Theory, which I then fed back to people going off to work in the so-called "media and cultural industries" (if they were lucky enough to get it – the theory and the work, that is), I realised that now, back in the place where I supposedly "belong", Britain had come back to haunt "me". What Britain are "they" talking about –Tony Blair's? Gordon Brown's? Not "mine", in any case. What perspective allows "them" to slide liberally between, first, Britain, then European societies (what, for example, of the incredibly complex question of the relationship between Britain and that thing or desire called "Europe"?) and "geopolitics" represented by this fateful "American" number: 9/11 (as if Britain hadn't had "its" own 9/11, its very own "awakening", its own number, 7/7, in 2005). What, I thought, if not a certain well-meaning cosmopolitanism, guarantees this national internationalism and the return to or rather "on" the

question of the secular. So, I was thrown "back" to "my" theory and I thought, with Derrida, this cannot be it, "Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!"[4]

In sum, I guess I was puzzled by what I'd call "the end of the post" and its resulting "sense of 'urgent' déjà vu". So I thought I'd have to ask "them" to indulge "me" – the "me" that was and the one that is trying to come to terms with a certain loss and a certain haunting. Like everything this turns out to be an auto-bio-(but also, in this case, an onto-theo)-hetero-graphy.[5] Life, in theory – life "as" theory, theory's life, the other life, because there's always more than one – how to be faithful to it/them?[6] What to do with ambiguity, basically – for example with the kind of ambiguity of the prefix "post"? The accumulation of posts is undoubtedly a symptom of its own, an anxiety and a desire. But like every other, every post is entirely other. Behind each of the monstrous postisms – Postmodernism, Postsecularism, Posthumanism in my title – stand different but related "monstrous monstrosities" ready to haunt:

It is a normal monstrosity to think that to get back finally to reality, history, society, politics, it suffices to leave behind these plays on words… I shall distinguish between normal monstrosities and monstrous monstrosities which never present themselves *as such*… A monstrosity can only be 'mis-known' [*méconnue*], that is, unrecognized and

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[4] Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort*, Paris: Galilée, 1997.

[5] Cf. Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale – de Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Paris: Flammarion, 357; and "Circonfession", in Jacques Derrida & Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, Paris: Seuil, 1991, 198.

[6] Cf. Derrida, "Fidélité à plus d'un – Mériter d'hériter où la généalogie fait défaut*", Cahiers Intersignes* 13 (1998): 221-265.

misunderstood. It can only be recognized afterwards, when it has become normal or the norm.[7]

So let's start with the taming of the first of the posts: postmodernism has been dead almost from the start. As Jean-François Lyotard explained to the children of modernity, the post is what deconstructs the modern logic and its meta-narratives of freedom, emancipation, liberalism, universalism, one should include secularism, progress and apocalyptism. It is its non-modern repressed that sets the task for "Rewriting Modernity" and for "perlaboration" in the name of plurality:

> …the postmodern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. And not only to exceed itself in that way, but to resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability, such for example as is aimed at by the utopian project, but also by the straightforward political project implied in the grand narratives of emancipation. Modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity.[8]

What Lyotard says here about the postmodern is true of any "post", including the postsecular of course. Instead Lyotard proposes the idea of "re-writing", not to be misunderstood as a return but as a Freudian "*Durcharbeitung*" (not to say, a Derridean deconstructuion) – "a

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[7] Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms", in *The States of 'Theory': History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, 79.

[8] Jean-François Lyotard, "Rewriting Modernity", in *The Inhuman – Reflections on Time*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, 25.

working attached to a thought of what is constitutively hidden from us in the event and the meaning of the event, hidden not merely by prejudice, but also by those dimensions of the future marked by the pro-ject, the pro-grammed, pro-spectives… (26). And this perlaboration or rewriting process, as far as modernity and its idea of secularisation is concerned, is far from complete, if, indeed, it's completable at all. On the contrary, it looks like modernity itself has by now become a much "riskier" business – and is in need of risk management, basically. Facing environmental, financial and humanitarian crises on a daily basis, it really doesn't have time for quirky things like theory anymore, with its endless "language games".

Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War the death ceritifcates for so-called "postmodern" theory have been proliferating. So, placed in context, 9/11 is maybe "just" another, another "final" instance of these endless "ends of postmodernism" – another repression, rather than the beginning of something new. It seems quite obvious, however, that the serious issues raised by so-called postmodern thinkers like Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, Levinas, and many others have, if anything, become more urgent: questions of philosophical dissensus and plurality, cultural difference and technologies of otherness, and now again technology *tout court*, are haunting the multipolar world, so that now seems to be a good time to re-member and "re-articulate" the postmodern rather than forgetting or repressing it.

And, effortlessly, I'm transported back to the banquet, because Gordon, most uncannily, seems to have been reading my mind. He says:

So this is our message – to ourselves, our allies, potential adversaries and people who, no matter how distant, are now our neighbours: Our hard-headed internationalism

means we will never retreat from our responsibilities. At all times justice in jeopardy, security at risk, suffering that cries out will command our concern.[9]

And I think to my self, where have I heard this before? Oh yes, in the other galaxy, far, far away, where we're about to witness…

The Return of the Jedi

It seems to me to be an error to take 9/11 as the latest and most visible symptom of a "return to religion" and/or the sign for a new phase of political and moral postsecularism. Against this version of a return of the repressed it is important to remember that religion, postmodernism and theory are by no means separate entities. So-called "French" theory that constitutes the backbone of philosophical postmodernism is for example far more critical of a certain French republican secularism and far more open-minded towards the theological than it is usually given credit for. This can also be seen in the eagerness with which Derrida's work has been received by a number of theologians, from Graham Ward and John D. Caputo to Mark C. Taylor. Arguably the key figure in this context, however, is Levinas and the postmodern "ethics of alterity" that challenges precisely the distincion between secular and non-secular, or put differently, post-secular is neither secular nor non-secular, it is concerned with the deconstruction of the opposition between the two; the post highlights the untenable character of an underlying opposition and visualises the contradiction at the heart of any desire for "overcoming" that which is being "posted". For modernity, just like the modern itself, a certain idea of the secular is unsurpassable and precisely for that reason does it create the

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[9] Gordon Brown, "Lord Mayor's Banquet Speech" (s.a.).

desire for its surpassing, its posting if you want. Can the non-secular other of modernity – religion, faith, God etc. – resist both, the modern secular *and* the non-secular logic? That seems to have been at the centre of discussion ever since the 1990s in "postmodern" theological circles especially where they engage with both Levinas and Derrida. As John D. Caputo explains:

> In just the past year [1997] we have seen two books edited by English theologians – one entitled *The Postmodern God*, the other *Post-Secular Philosophy*[10] – that have pressed the claim that "postmodern" must be understood to mean or at least to include "postsecular", that the delimitation of the claims of Enlightenment rationalism must also involve the delimitation of the claims of Enlightenment secularism. A critical stance toward modernism goes hand in hand with a critical stance toward secularism. In France, Jacques Derrida's most recent work has taken a turn toward what he calls "religion without religion", that is, to a thinking that involves a certain repetition of basic religious structures, most notably the "messianic". Derrida now analyzes in detail notions like the gift, hospitality, testimony – and most recently, forgiveness – that have always belonged to classical religious discourse.[11]

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[10] Caputo refers to Graham Ward, ed., *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997; and Phillip Blond, ed., Post-*Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, London: Routledge, 1997; Philippa Berry & Andrew Wernick, eds., *Of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, London: Routledge, 1992 also comes to mind, as well as the entire works of Caputo himself, Mark C. Taylor, Kevin Hart and many others.

[11] John D. Caputo and Edith Wyschogrod, "Postmodernism and the Desire for God: An E-Mail Exchange", *Cross Currents* (1998): 293 ff.

More to the point, Derrida has been emphasising the proximity between deconstruction and Levinasian ethics at least since "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Writing and Difference* [1967],[12] where he emphasises that "the ethical relationship – a non-violent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other – as the only one capable of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics" (83).

In other words, the ethically, as well as the politically just "decision" has to pass through the experience of the aporia, or the totally other, or through undecidability, if you wish; thus far I guess there is agreement between Derrida and Levinas. Where Derrida is not willing to follow, however, is where Levinas's theologically motivated "postsecularism", as one might call it, inscribes religion into the centre of the ethics of alterity based on the absolute precedence and "disowning" of any self by the timeless infinity of the totally other:

> Face to face with the other within a glance *and* a speech which both maintain distance and interrupt all totalities, this being together as separation precedes or exceeds society, collectivity, community. Levinas calls it *religion*. It opens ethics. The ethical relation is a religious relation. (95-96)

This is certainly not the time or place to reopen the very complex question of the relationship between deconstruction, ethics and the other[13] – as infinitely other or as relation, i.e. already

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[12] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics – An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas", in *Writing and Difference*, London: Routledge, 1978 [original French in 1967].

[13] Cf. Simon Critchley's authoritative *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, in this respect.

"inhabiting" the "same" or the self,[14] alterity as experience of hos(ti)pitality,[15] the task of being truthful to the "more-than-one",[16] or the idea that "tout autre est tout autre".[17]

It seems that what is needed is not an erasure of the difference between secular and non-secular, it is not a dialectical sublation of two opposites "transcended" in a new world order where the distinction has been repressed in a new alliance between politics and religion, where religion is politics or politics religion – we've had tastes of that.[18] Instead, the challenge would be precisely to hear the postsecular call for the new "messiah", and the "messianics" at work in the postsecular event, without giving in to any "messianism".[19] The

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[14] Cf. e.g. Derrida's in *Altérités*, eds. Derrida & Pierre-Jean Labarrière, Paris: Osiris, 1986.

[15] Cf. Derrida, *Adieu – à Emmanuel Lévinas*, Paris: Galilée, 1997, and Derrida's subsequent work on hospitality and cosmopolitanism, justice and the law.

[16] Cf. Derrida, "Fidélité à plus d'un", see above.

[17] Cf. Derrida, *Donner la mort*, Paris: Galilée, 1999, 114ff.

[18] Cf. for example John Brenkman's recent *The Cultural Contradictions of Democracy: Political Thought since September 11*, which, in a section entitled: "Global Neoliberal Religious Conservatism?" states that "Bush-inspired Republicanism yokes together the global assertion of American power, deregulated capitalism and religious conservatism" (171); it remains to be seen whether George Bush's successor, after the credit crunching of deregulated global capitalism, will be able to contain the normal monstrosity of a global religious revival inevitably understood as "conservatism" – a development which seems to be well under way in the attempt to seek, by military power and persuasion, a compatibility between "Revivalist America and conservative Islam" (173). See Postscript below.

[19] Cf. Derrida's "The Deconstruction of Actuality", Radical Philosophy 68 (1994), *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, London: Routledge, 1994, and "Faith and Knowledge – The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of

"Return of the Jedi" must not be the conceptualisation of global security in the form of the sovereignty of global empire. Neither can it be a postsecular international-nationalism, for while politics still thinks of sovereignty and power being the preserve of the nation-state and of inter-national mediation, the three major monotheistic religions and especially Christianity, have always understood themselves as global in vocation at least.[20] Hence Derrida's notion of "globalatinization" [*mondialatinisation*] ("this strange alliance of Christianity, as the experience of the death of God, and tele-technoscientific capitalism").[21]

And, together with the congregation at the banquet, the political last supper celebrating the death and rise of a new Britain in a new world order, we hear Gordon say:

> Upon this rests our shared future: a truly global society empowering people everywhere; not yet here, but in this century within our grasp.[22]

And I just think – science fiction – and a familiar Vulcan whispers in my ear that it's probably…

Reason Alone", in *Jacques Derrida – Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, London: Routledge, 2002, 40ff.

[20] Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Déclosion – Déconstruction du christianisme 1*, Paris: Galilée, 2005 and *La création du monde ou la mondialisation*, Paris: Galilée, 2002.

[21] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge", 52 (French original: 21).

[22] Gordon Brown, "Lord Mayor's Banquet Speech".

Life, but not as we know it

In the time of global utopian or dystopian constructions of the future, in the time of, as Derrida called it, global tele-techno-scientific capitalism with its digital, informational and virtual technologies and cultures, what exactly "provokes" the postsecular? To what is the desire for a postsecular national-international, global politics, as encapsulated in Gordon Brown's speech, the supposed solution? What is the postsecular afraid of? Like everyone else it's afraid of the worst, of death, that is, the future – death of life as we know it.

Hence my claim, my third "post", that the postsecular in fact barely hides the anxiety towards another, even worse, maybe the worst "post" – that of the posthuman or the technologically determined end-vision of posthumanity, a time after humanity-as-we-know-it (cf. the proliferation of either techno-enthusiasm or techno-apocalyptism in so-called transhumanists, extropians, technognostics and the like). But humanist tradition, it is worth noting in this context, has itself always entertained a double relation with religion: in its theological and ethical form it has more or less simply bracketed God as the unknowable, wholly or holy Other whose interpellation nevertheless makes us human and responsible and respectful of the "sanctity" of the other human's life (as seen in Levinas's case, understood through the "figure" of the "face" of the other human being, i.e. God); and in its radically atheist or agnostic form, humanism's denial of God from a materialist-scientific point of view, has reinscribed the principle of "sanctity" into what may be called a secular, even biologist or vitalist fundamentalism (cf. Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*). Now, in the context of the advent of the so-called "life sciences" – following the sequencing of the human and, not to forget, the non-human genome, as well, with its new possibilities of the commodification of life, and the prospect of a post-evolutionary condition, and the return of eugenics – one has to acknowledge that humanism is now heavily "pregnant" with the posthuman and various posthumanisms.

What is troublesome about the idea of the postsecular as "a new phase in European societies", as the conference blurb suggests, is that cultural conflict is, again, interpreted as religious conflict (cf. the familiar idea of a clash of civilizations) and that, as a reaction, consensus is sought to overcome this conflict by appealing to common human, read humanistic, values in the face of a perceived new enemy who, thanks to new technologies, is threatening to "desanctify" the human (cf. the interventions by Fukuyama or Habermas in the eugenics debate) and to transform life as we know it, forgetting that, as Derrida already points out, in "Faith and Knowledge":

> Religion today allies itself with tele-technoscience, to which it reacts with all its forces. It *is*, *on the one hand*, globalization; it produces, weds, exploits the capital and knowledge of tele-mediatization… But, *on the other hand*, it reacts immediately, *simultaneously*, declaring war against that which gives it this new power only at the cost of dislodging it from all its proper places, *in truth from place itself*, from the *taking-place* of its truth. It conducts a terrible war against that which protects it only by threatening it, according to this double and contradictory structure: immunitary and auto-immunitary. (82 [62])

Hence the "two sources of religion" (cf. the subtitle, alluding to Kant's cosmopolitanism), its originary aporia, prior to its constitutive immunitarian but self-destructive reflex, is giving rise to its deconstruction in the name of a "religion without religion":[23]

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[23] "Without" – as explained by Derrida in "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", *Oxford Literary Review* 6.2 (1984): 35, in a different but related context of the "apocalypse without apocalypse": "The word *sans*, *without*, I pronounce here in the so necessary syntax of Blanchot, who often says *X without X*. The *without* marks an internal and

The relation between these two motions or two sources is ineluctable, and therefore automatic and mechanical, between one which has the form of the machine (mechanization, automatization, machination or *mechane*), and the other, that of living spontaneity, of the unscathed property of life, that is to say, of another (claimed) self-determination. ("Faith and Knowledge", 82)

What follows from religion's twofold self-contradictory foundation and its resulting "hauntology" – an ontology being haunted (its self-defences being called upon, if you wish) by its indispensable "allergens" to provoke its self-harming, auto-immunitarian reflexes – it has no choice but to incorporate the "worst" from the start. Dehumanisation has already taken place, the machine has already taken over… As Donna Haraway, the lapsed "Catholic", confesses: "At the center of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the cyborg".[24]

I narrowly escape the attractively threatening terminatrix and am back again with Gordon building up to his grand finale…

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external catastrophe of the apocalypse, an overturning of sense [*sens*] that does not merge with the catastrophe announced or described in the apocalyptic writings without however being foreign to them. Here the catastrophe would perhaps be *of* the apocalypse itself, its fold and its end, a closure without end, an end without end."

[24] Cf. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s", *The Donna Haraway Reader*, London: Routledge, 2004.

Building a global society means agreeing that the great interests we share in common are more powerful than the issues that sometimes divide us. It means articulating and acting upon the enduring values that define our common humanity and transcending ideologies of hatred that seek to drive us apart. And critically… we must bring to life these shared interests and shared values by practical proposals to create the architecture of a new global society.[25]

But the evil genius, the demon of theory, still holds me and I ask myself:

Do posthumans dream of humanity, or maybe worse, do they pray to electric gods?

It turns out that Gordon Brown's admirable "hard-headed internationalism", having embraced some of theory's (or postmodernism's) lessons in arguing almost explicitly for what Stuart Hall would call "minimal selves" (1987)[26] and for an almost Derridean future as "task" in the face of its radical alterity of the "to-come" [*à-venir*], nevertheless feels compelled to preserve one transcendental signifier's sanctity – "our common humanity". Relief or disappointment –

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[25] Brown, "Lord Mayor's Banquet Speech".

[26] One should not forget, however, that Hall finishes his own, i.e. the "migrant's" version of auto-hetero-bio-thanato-graphy by saying: "The slow contradictory movement from 'nationalsim' to 'ethnicity' as a source of identities is part of a new politics. It is also part of the 'decline of the west' – that immense process of historical relativization which is just beginning to make the British, at least, feel just marginally 'marginal'." Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves", in *The Real Me – Postmodernism and the Question of Identity*, London: ICA Documents, 1987. The importance of this qualification hasn't stopped growing ever since…

New New Labour, or Post-Post-Thatcherism, in picking up the pieces of neoliberal globalisation and its related postsecular read "moral-cultural-political" imperialism, swears by good old-fashioned humanist universalism. The circle is thus complete.

The "desire for religion" as an answer to the eternal "evil of abstraction" [*mal d'abstraction*] (Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge", 43), the original fall from grace, which today projects its "postsecular" anxieties on the processes of deracination, disembodiment, objectification and commodification, tele-technologisation, global alienation, cannot work without the humanist notion of humanity even while it is implicated in its own (auto-immunitarian) process of dehumanisation. This is why the real or attributed antihumanism of poststructuralist theory was never going to be enough. Even Foucault's hope that "man" might soon disappear, washed away, like every mark of historical cultural or social formation drawn in the sand, by the sea of history, might have been too "cheerful", after all. The same counts for the radically opposite spectrum. Heidegger's "Only a God Can Save Us" in the face of the technological enframing of the human, the *Ge-Stell*, seems still far too "pious" and optimistic.[27] They find their successors in those (almost farcical) contemporary techno-

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[27] Cf. Heidegger in "'Only a God Can Save Us' *Der Spiegel*'s Interview with Martin Heidegger, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin, Minnesota: MIT Press, 1993, 107: "The frame [*das Ge-stell*] holding sway means: the essence of man is framed, claimed, and challenged by a power which manifests itself in the essence of technology, a power which man himself does not control. To help with this realization is all that one can expect of thought. Philosophy is at an end." And, just before on the same page: "Only a God can save us. The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, through thinking and poetizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of foundering [*Untergang*]; for in the face of the god who is absent, we founder."

gnostics who have swapped the death of God for the birth of the machine, hoping for immortality, for life, but not as we know it, downloaded into a computer, transfixed, or shall we say crucified, by and arisen from digitalisation, living-on, virtually, as we have always done.[28]

Now, to avoid the danger of a classic and reactionary opposition between secular humanists (transhumanists "playing God" included), and postsecular religious (neo-) humanists, I would argue we need theory, more than ever. But it is a theory which has come to terms with its own Gods. It is postsecular theory in an entirely different sense. Behind the return of religion and the question of God "after God" lies the question of the future-human. Thus there also lies the best and the worst, the "*fins de l'homme*", the death of man and the survival of humans. The last God to be deconstructed is humanity itself so that humans may survive. What is needed therefore, as we have argued on a number of occasions,[29] is a "critical

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[28] Cf. Oliver Krüger, *Virtualität und Unsterblichkeit – Die Visionen des Posthumanismus*, Freiburg: Rombach, 2004.

[29] Cf. Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanismus – Eine kritische Einführung*, Darmstadt: WBG (forthcoming 2009); Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, eds, *Cy-Borges: Posthumanism, Memory and Subjectivity in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press (forthcoming 2009); Callus & Herbrechter, *Critical Posthumanism*, *Critical Posthumanisms* 1, Amsterdam and Kenilworth: Rodopi (forthcoming 2009); "What is a Posthumanist Reading?" *Angelaki* 13.3: 95-111; "Critical Posthumanism or, the inventio of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3:2/4:1; "The Latecoming of the Posthuman, Or, Why 'We' Do the Apocalypse Differently, 'Now'", *Reconstruction* 4:3 (2004), http://reconstruction.eserver.org/043/callus.htm); and "Extroduction: The Irresistibility of the Posthuman: Questioning 'New Cultural Theory'", in Herbrechter &

posthumanism", or theory, if you will, that embraces the challenges and benefits of technological change and human transformation while seeing the crisis of the secular and postsecular humanist tradition, in all its ambiguous relation with religion, as a chance for a radical posthumanist ethics, in which relations between humans and their non-human others are no longer governed by ultimately fundamentalist prejudice – secular, non-secular or post-secular – whether it be based on gender, race, age, nationality, faith or species.

At this point I emerge, as if from a bad dream, and the scene of writing recedes… and I think, the end, especially the ends of conference papers, are always "pathetic". Even though theory has made every "me" wary of closure and of the desire for self-presence, for "hearing one's self speak", so to speak, the end is always inevitable, Mr Anderson, the sound of destiny, the writing of auto-hetero-thanato-onto-theo-bio-info-nano-cogno… etc. And so, the "I" gets carried away again…

Post-Script (2015):

So many things have happened since… even though the reality of my 'dream' still rings true to me. I've been encouraged and disheartened at once to upload this paper after such a long time by two things: Manav Ratti, in his *The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2013), begins his discussion of the "post/secular" with a similar move as my paper. He reports that on his return from India and its struggle with secularism to the UK, he "witness[es] David Cameron proclaim in February

Callus, eds., *Discipline and Practice – The (Ir)resistibility of Theory*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004, pp. 226-258.

2011[30] that state multiculturalism has failed in the UK, due to extremist ideologies that lead young people to violence, instead of their being drawn towards a cohesive concept of 'Britishness'. Angela Merkel, a few months before Cameron, had made a similar pronouncement on the failure of 'multikulti' in Germany" (p. xvii). However, while Germany's Merkel, in 2015, surprised her European neighbours (and many of her own conservative party colleagues) by opening Germany's borders to an unprecedented influx of migrants fleeing the civil war in Syria (and elsewhere), the conservative David Cameron has been enforcing UK borders ever since he inherited power from Gordon Brown's New Labour. It remains to be seen to what extent German humanitarian, if not neohumanist, empathy will cope with the almost relentless arrival of refugees and the rising fear of Islam. What is clear, however, is that Europe's identity – one of the main reasons it attracts so many migrants in the first place – will increasingly be challenged in its secular humanism. While Germany (not quite so selflessly and humanely) banks on the economic potential of the migrants it absorbs and looks to them as the solution to its declining demography and lack of skilled labour, it will have to work hard to redesign its idea of "multiculturalism". The first step would be to abandon humanism as a political "reflex", or as "totem and taboo". That the dignity of the human should be inviolable,[31] has never stopped humans from setting fire to a refugee camp filled with fellow humans. Faced with resurging trends towards "dehumanisation", maybe one should start thinking about an adequate *posthumanist* politics and ethics…

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[30] Cf. "PM's speech at Munich Security Conference (2011)", available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/, accessed 29 October 2015.

[31] "Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar. Sie zu achten und zu schützen ist Verpflichtung aller staatlichen Gewalt". This is the first article of the German constitution.