

Extroduction

The Irresistibility of the Posthuman: Questioning “New Cultural Theory”

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The foregoing essays suggest that after the revisiting of roads not taken by theory or retaken with a difference, there remains to consider the (ir)resistibility of post-theory. That which succeeds theory must, by definition, be irresistible. Yet the aura of inevitability collecting around that irresistibility might not be sufficient to prevent what succeeds upon theory from being, in fact, resistible. It is at least thinkable that the appeal of post-theory, if this ever were to materialize in the most straightforward of ways—in a form superseding theory—might after all not be very beguiling, both to theorists themselves but also to anti-theorists who, on the face of it, would not be expected to mourn the passing of theory. To explore this paradox further we have chosen to speak of one form of post-theory whose momentum appears to be irresistible, and yet one whose rationale has been viewed with some consternation by both theorists and anti-theorists. We have chosen to speak of the posthuman, and shall be presenting its (ir)resistibility as exemplary not only of the (ir)resistibility of post-theory, but also as a warning that theory’s readiness to find reasons for not thinking its own passing is to be guarded against. The reasons why theory should

bring to consciousness what it represses, together with the implications for its disciplinary status and practice once it does, are what will concern us.

Thesis

It is always tempting to think post-theory in terms of *anti*-theory, which Frank Kermode once famously characterized as “a genre in its own right.”¹ It was within that genre that George Steiner once digressed from an attack on deconstruction to lament that “at the heart of futurity lies the byte and the number.”² The remark captures the tone of commentaries fearful that the encroachment of digitalism, together with the appeal of the natural and applied sciences, will abet the contraction of the humanities’ constituency. Steiner writes that “[m]odern biology, genetics, physics, chemistry, modern engineering and cosmological conjectures can no longer be put forward or debated in non-mathematical language.” He bemoans the fact that they are “accessible not to the literate, but only to the numerate.”³ This is at the root of widespread apprehension that the *lettered* disciplines are about to face a crisis. To quote Steiner again, there is at work a “numerization” which is leading to “the new clerisy, a clerisy of the young and the very young who are, flexibly, pre- or counter-literate.”⁴

Steiner’s words are expressive of what has been termed the posthuman, or at least one form of it: the simplifying view that an age is at an end, that another is about to start, that catalyzing change is digital technology, and that technoscience will proceed to alter the present and the very nature of the human more radically and more completely than anything previously experienced in history, culture, or epistemology. Underpinning such scenarios is the apparent indisputability of the

assumption critiqued by Martin Heidegger: “[T]echnology is the fate of our age, where “fate” means the inevitableness of an unalterable course.”⁵ In the context of general acceptance of that fate, the Lyotardian effort to combat the glibness with which “[t]he [prefix] “post-” indicates something like a conversion: a new direction from the previous one,” has its work cut out. Lyotard’s mistrust of the notion that “it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new ways of living and thinking”⁶ is ignored by the kind of approach to the posthuman which takes as a truism the statement in Robert Pepperell’s *The Post-Human Manifesto* (1995) that “[a]ll technological progress of Human society is geared towards the redundancy of the Human species as we currently know it.”⁷ This is plainly not the kind of attitude to the “post-” that theory would endorse. To a theorist, Pepperell’s statement is unbelievably jejune: almost as unbelievable as his statement that “Post-Humans never get bogged down in arguments about language. The scholars and humanists will always try to restrict debate to the battleground of language because they know no one can win.”⁸

Pepperell’s brand of posthumanism embodies an unattunedness to theory that is likely to find all of the following positions very resistible: the concern with the tropological dimension of language, seen by Paul de Man as precipitating “the indeterminate residue” that finds its most mysterious instantiation within literariness; the Derridean idea that literary language is unable “to be abiding” [*être à demeure*]; the Heideggerian conviction that “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home.”⁹ Pepperell’s posthumanism would scoff at such positions, which are founded in what our introduction viewed as theory’s capacity for “letter-al mindedness.”

Indeed most posthumanist positions, while recognising that “[p]hilosophy is hounded by the fear that it loses prestige and validity if it is not a science,” would not set about exorcising that fear with the “effort to return thinking to its element”: an element that for Heidegger is approachable only in the conviction that “Language still denies us its essence: that it is the house of the truth of Being.”¹⁰ Consequently it will not want to follow through the Heideggerian exploration of the question “*Comment redonner un sens au mot ‘Humanisme?’*”: an exploration that ends up with the conclusion that “[w]hat is needed in the present world is less philosophy, but more attentiveness in thinking; less literature, but more cultivation of the letter.”¹¹ Posthumanism, because it is a numerized thought, is not minded to the letter-al. Posthumanism is in fact this also, and perhaps above all: the utter unattunedness to a thinking of the difference between literature and the letter. It is an unattunedness that comes about once language “falls into the service of expediting communication along routes where objectification—the uniform accessibility of everything to everyone—branches out and disregards all limits,”¹² a fall which as will be seen below privileges what can be “operationalized.”

To an intellectual temper given to operationalization, language must be allowed to be transparent—which is not far from saying that it should be resistible as an object of investigation in its own right. As intimated by Plotnitsky in his essay in this volume, a *science* of language—a linguistics—is comprehensible to that temper; anything other is however inapprehensible. This is why the thought that finds within language an unaccountable alterity palls upon that which operationalizes—suggesting that if de Man is right to say that the resistance to theory is the resistance to language about language, then theory (particularly a *literary* theory) might well be

posthumanism's antithesis. Whereupon it is timely to recall what Lyotard says in "A Gloss on Resistance," namely that the "desire for [language] to be able to say something other than what it already knows how to say" is what allays a Newspeak, because "literary writing, artistic writing . . . cannot cooperate with a project of domination or total transparency, even involuntarily."¹³

Of course, posthumanism does not lead ineluctably to Orwellian nightmares, and the time of the lettered may not be utterly "over," as some accounts would have us believe. Yet it is as well to recall Jean Baudrillard's view that "today language is confronted by the hegemonic fantasy of a global and perpetual communication—the New Order, the new cyberspace of language—where the ultrasimplification of digital languages prevails over the figural complexity of natural languages."¹⁴ Theory, committed to "figural complexity," then finds itself ranged against an "ultrasimplification" that is anathema to it. Meanwhile, as the unsuitedness of theoretical discourse to a "project" of "transparency" and "ultrasimplification" deepens, positions like Pepperell's acquire the topicality of a not implausible futurology because there is abroad, to borrow a phrase from Kermode again, "a sense of an ending." It is a sense that Pepperell-like "manifestoese" plausibly positions in terms of a receptivity to a posthumanism that might come to exceed not only humanism but the human itself – as anybody familiar with the pronouncements of the Extropian Society on "transhumanism" will know.¹⁵ It could indeed be argued that the posthuman, in its most fundamental form, is nothing if not this experience of the palpability of terminality.

Theory has typically responded to that palpability by questioning the nature of the apocalyptic and problematizing it. It does so in line with the Heideggerian

insistence on not thinking the finite (or the technological, as that which could precipitate the finiteness of the human) straightforwardly. All of de Man's, Lyotard's, and Derrida's resistance to the idea of post-theory being conceived of according to a logic of successiveness builds on this suspicion of supersedence.

One consequence of all the palaver (theoretical and not) about post-history, post-industrialism, (post-)post-modernity, post-art, post-capitalism, post-philosophy, (post-) post-structuralism, post-gender, post-race—indeed post-everything, including notions of supersedence itself—is that theoretical inquiry needs to assay a trenchant diagnosis for our times. Rather than referring to theory's well-known but perhaps tired attempts at this, we would like to work from the intuition of Robert Musil, author of *The Man Without Qualities* (1930-42), that “since 1914, humanity has revealed itself as a mass that is astonishingly more malleable than we had been accustomed to assume.”¹⁶ Less than a century later, radically deconstituting change in the astonishingly malleable human has become eminently thinkable, as shown by the fact that researchers in Artificial Intelligence, Artificial Life and the sciences of cognition are becoming almost blasé about scenarios like those conceived by Hans Moravec in *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988), when he declared that “it will soon be possible to download human consciousness into a computer.”¹⁷ As N. Katherine Hayles reports it in her book *How We Became Posthuman*, Moravec

invents a fantasy scenario in which a robot surgeon purees the human brain in a kind of cranial liposuction, . . . transferring the information into a computer. At the end of the operation, the cranial cavity is empty, and the patient, now

inhabiting the metallic body of the computer, wakens to find his consciousness exactly the same as it was before.¹⁸

Hayles admits to consternation at this idea. She records, however, that she was “shocked into awareness” that Moravec was “far from alone” in his suppositions,¹⁹ and proceeds to install Moravec within a genealogy of the posthuman. She traces “the unfolding story of how a historically specific construction called *the human* is giving way to a different construction called *the posthuman*” (Hayles’s emphasis).²⁰

Talk of supersedence has already been identified above as intrinsic to posthumanism, whose acquisition of a genealogy (through Hayles’s and others’ pioneering work) is the inevitable first step to the acquisition of disciplinarity. That such talk is not shunned in *How We Became Posthuman* (the very title makes this obvious) confirms that even as theoretically aware a posthumanist as Hayles finds it difficult to accommodate the problematization of straightforward successiveness that is a fixture of poststructuralist and postmodernist thought. This may or may not be indicative of an impending and wider repositioning of the orthodoxies of theory as it comes to terms with a rivalling coming to disciplinarity. Leverage—to return to the Archimedean scene of our introduction and all that is inaugurated in Derrida’s essay “Mochlos”²¹—would thereby be exerted upon theory, which may need to shift in a displacement that, though it is unlikely to precede outright replacement, cannot help accommodating what supervenes.

The accommodating will in that case proceed from theory, since what supervenes always has one disposition above all: that of inducing the accommodating disposition of what it supervenes upon. In this respect, it is symptomatic that Hayles

(who is scarcely unfamiliar with theory's positions) does not raise the issue of the differences between the posthumanist apprehension of time and the time of theory. Posthumanists tend not to modulate the idea of one paradigm displacing another with Lyotardian conceptualization of the event, Derridean reflections on the *arrivant*, or Heideggerian questionings of time and technology, and they are unlikely to go along with Nicholas Royle's pronouncement that "[I]f post-theory has a time, it would be the time of this phrase [*déjà vu*]." ²² The understanding of temporality according to the "paradox of the future anterior" and the operations of *Nachträglichkeit* is an understanding incongruous with posthumanist perceptions. Instead, in an age when physicists like Stephen Hawking have shown us how time is multidimensional, the posthuman keeps its timescapes very strategically linear and irreversible. Within that form of resistance to theory, if post-theory has a time at all it is the time that linearly renders Theory *passé* and very resistible to the irresistibility of the posthuman.

The teleology implied by that linearity will not disturb the clerisy Steiner spoke of, which will be unfazed by the thought that not only futurity, but the human itself, might become "byte and number." Meanwhile, the evidence on whether theory is at all disturbed is ambivalent. Occasionally, as will be seen below, theory appears to engage with the posthuman by taking on prostheses to what it was doing already, accepting adjuncts to its repertoire rather than substantively engaging with scenarios like those imagined by Moravec and with the implications they carry for the (re)conceptualization of "theoremes" like subjectivity, cognition, the unconscious, language, and death. Whether this amounts to maturation or capitulation is a moot point. The one thing that is certain, as the title of Hayles's book—*How We Became Posthuman*—suggests, is that the posthuman is not mere potentiality. It is, rather, the

“structure of feeling” of a supposedly futuristic time that is already experienced in the present.

It has become a platitude to say that this “already present” futurity acquires tangibility through the encounter with technology. There is now a generalized experience of technology’s ongoing prosthesization of the human. It therefore seems intuitive that technology carries the human to a beyond of the human, as Hayles makes clear in her foundational formulation of the posthuman:

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 . . . 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.²³

This is a more restrained expression of the idea behind the Moravec thought-experiment, but the implications are just as momentous. Hayles’s portrayal raises at

every point questions that could hardly be more intrinsically amenable to theoretical investigation. After all, within its various denominations theory has assiduously thought through questions relating to being and alterity, prosthesization and supplementarity, bodies and consciousnesses. Yet the posthuman as it plays itself out at present in its manifestoes rarely modulates itself with awareness of that amenability. In illustration, consider the answer which posthumanists might give to the question “Who Comes After the Subject?”²⁴ Short and simple, it has the rare distinction of travestyng both Pontius Pilate and Friedrich Nietzsche: “Ecce Robot.”

Not surprisingly, this “soundbite” approach to posthuman issues has the advantage of making good copy. Indeed, the posthuman thrives on and speaks to the popular imagination. That “popular” touch contrasts with theory’s resistance to contemplating its own demise straightforwardly, with theory’s ability to lend cogency to the counter-intuitive and to thinking “otherwise,” with the insistence that the “*post-*” be approached according to the paradox of the future anterior, and with critiques of the “depthless” cultural logic of late capitalism (a logic that cradles the posthuman). Theory might be able to “think very hard”: to common experience and good copy, though, it does not do so apprehensibly. Its irresistibility is a construction of its own making, born from its rhetoric about itself. What is popular will find such rhetoric resistible by finding it easy to pass over.

Theory might respond that its counter-intuitive temporalities are never as necessary as when they appear to be out of phase; consequently, this being “out of phase” of theory, which can be dangerously close to a “phasing out,” could defeat anachronism if theory were to bring to bear a sense of its own timeliness upon drifts that would render it *passé*. That comforting notion is however unsettled by the

feeling that there exists a fundamental incommensurability between the posthuman and theory. To resolve this by seeking to explain the irreconcilability in terms of a differend, of rival discourses which cannot be referred to an authority that might be *super partes*,²⁵ would be to retreat into the refuges provided by theory's "otherwise." Indeed, there arises the intuition that the posthuman might disarm philosophical and theoretical discourse, even dispense with it. This is because the posthuman renders philosophical and theoretical readings of its characteristics formally *indecorous*, in the sense that this word was used within neoclassical literary theory. In other words, the posthuman suspends the theoretical or the philosophical. They are superfluous to it.

That is a large claim to be making. But it is hardly new, and indeed merely restates Steiner's view. Any time spent resisting the claim is better devoted to studying the implications of a choice like that of Manuel Castells, whose comments on the impact on the self in "the networked society" very noticeably downplay any kind of reference to the very diverse explorations of subjectivity within theory or philosophy.²⁶ In this respect the following remark by Castells is typical: "I certainly consider Lyotard a most insightful philosopher, and a brilliant intellectual. But I do not know what to do with his theory, and I am not sure that I fully understand it." Baudrillard, on the other hand, "is different," because "[h]e is not truly a sociologist, he is indeed a philosopher, but he is a useful, and usable philosopher, for social scientists."²⁷ This, it is important to note, is *not* extraordinary. It captures, precisely, the temper of the posthuman. It is not extraordinary at all for the age of the matrix to put a premium on "usability." The posthuman investment in what is instrumental can have little time for the almost pathological self-awareness of much theoretical and

philosophical discourse. This can be linked to the fact that the “possibility of a Perfect Crime against language, an aphanisis of the symbolic function,” can be imputed to the “ultrasimplification of digital languages” that goes on within the posthuman.²⁸ Rather than retaining any significant reverence for “ancestral” discourses, such an age is likely to see greater sense in the scenario conceived by Jean-Luc Nancy, namely that “[n]owadays, [*philosophy*] would rather mean: different ways of thinking about philosophy itself . . .and even ways of understanding that the thing it names is gone, or finished.”²⁹ It could hardly be different when, “[b]y shifting to a virtual world, we go beyond alienation, into a state of radical deprivation of the Other,” where “everything that exists only as idea, dream, fantasy, utopia will be eradicated, because it will immediately be realized, *operationalized*” (emphasis added).³⁰

The idea that philosophy or theory, in either their ideality or their institutional form, can be “finished” because of an all-encroaching movement of operationalization may appear risible to anyone faintly familiar with the trials each has weathered. In any case, their own discourse provides the security of aloof retreat from the prospect of their apocalypse. The post-theoretical, theory’s (ir)resistible arguments might run, can never happen. The posthuman is characterizable as a form of messianism, too unaware of philosophy’s and theory’s more complex thinking of the questions it raises to deserve more than the disdain for that which does not think very hard. The posthuman is badly conceived, philosophically raw, and theoretically unelaborated. Yet while theory mounts that defence, ear will be lent outside its seminar rooms to contrasting perceptions—like the view that the humanities are merely “ancestor disciplines,” and that their insistence on pronouncing themselves

interdisciplinarily risks “cluttering the research agenda” of something like cognitive science.³¹

Robert Musil, whose literary inspiration was often embedded in the scientific, foresaw long ago that something like this might be on the cards. He wrote that “solutions to perennial metaphysical problems are now being hinted at from the firm ground of the exact sciences.”³² If Ulrich, in the second chapter of *The Man Without Qualities*, is to be found emblematically measuring traffic with a stopwatch in hand,³³ it is almost in advance illustration of the fact that Heidegger’s intuition in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” would be fundamentally sound. “The development of the sciences,” Heidegger says in that essay, “is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of their independence. This process belongs to the completion of philosophy,” a completion which has philosophy turning into “the empirical science of man,” so that “[n]o prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences . . . will soon be determined and regulated by the new fundamental science that is called cybernetics”—the very cybernetics that finds a potent symbol in the traffic measured by “the man without qualities,” Ulrich.³⁴ As, for Heidegger, “[p]hilosophy is metaphysics,”³⁵ and as “every humanism remains metaphysical,”³⁶ any posthumanism must be deeply involved with the overcoming of the metaphysical, and the passing of the philosophical. Indeed, for Heidegger “the development of the sciences” is not “the mere dissolution of philosophy,” but “in truth precisely its completion,” a move towards “the end of philosophy” as “that place in which the whole of philosophy’s history is gathered in its utmost possibility.”³⁷ In the present context, the most important questions that Heidegger asks are then those which structure “The End of Philosophy and the Task

of Thinking.” “To what extent has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” “What task is reserved for thinking at the end of philosophy?”³⁸

The posthuman will find Heidegger’s response to the questions he himself poses eminently resistible, for a paradigm that perceives technology as it does will neither give much consideration to the view that “the question concerning technology is the question concerning the constellation in which revealing and concealing, in which the essential unfolding of truth appropriates,”³⁹ nor find any affinity with the insistence on the somewhat arcane faith in *Lichtung* and *aletheia* that marks the conclusion of “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.”⁴⁰ Instead, the “task of thinking” will for the posthumanist paradigm inhere in calculative thinking and “the intoxicating quality of cybernetics.”⁴¹ It is a thinking that will necessarily marginalize the theoretical, the discourse whose language is “the language of self-resistance.” Perhaps this is why theory repositions itself to disciplinarily take in the posthuman (as demonstrated below). Even so, it is unlikely thus to delegate to itself the kind of task of thinking envisaged by Heidegger: a task attuned to “the primally granted revealing that could bring the saving power into its first shining-forth in the midst of the danger that in the technological age rather conceals than shows itself.”⁴²

Plainly, that task is not proceeding within the institution. For the posthuman it is utterly un compelling, and theory has embraced it fitfully if at all. The thinking of the technological and its relation with *poesis*, “that revealing which holds complete sway in all the fine arts, in poetry,”⁴³ is only marginally a concern for theory’s disciplinarity. At most it becomes, as in R. L. Rutsky’s *High Technē* (1999) and indeed in this very essay, an obligatory point of reference for discussions of the posthuman, something to argue (away) from.⁴⁴ So since the task envisaged by

Heidegger is not undertaken *as such* within the institution and if at all only very skimmingly within theory, what *is* happening at the disciplinary interface between theory and the posthuman? How is the former taking on the latter, prosthetically, in order to prolong for itself (“a better quality of”) life within the university? How, then, is theory coming to terms with the fact that it no longer “just is,” and that its appointment to critical practice—whether this devolves upon literature, politics, or itself—becomes underwritten, like much else, by pedagogically sound and “practical” (and therefore very unHeideggerian) answers to the question concerning technology?

Prosthesis

Answer to these questions are more possible if it is recognized that Hayles’s *How We Became Posthuman* is just one of several studies abetting the coming to disciplinarity of the posthuman. It is a coming announced by the pedagogic timeliness of a collection like Neil Badmington’s *Posthumanism* (2000). Though it may be premature to talk of a new paradigm or episteme, the legitimation within the university of the study of “the posthuman condition” suggests that this coming is irreversible. Posthumanism or “new cultural theory” as it has also been called, can no longer be ignored.

New cultural theory is a label that acquired prominence after it was employed in the subtitle of a special issue of the journal *Angelaki*. The issue, edited by John Armitage, was called *Machinic Modulations: New Cultural Theory and Technopolitics*. For theory, the last term in the label seems to suggest a reassuring

continuity, but everything else brings to the fore the question of repositioning. The question arises in the wake of the realization that, in the collection, theory does far more self-modulating than modulating. This is because theory is there seen reconciling itself to ‘seismisms’ and accepting the importance of possibly having to be “new,” rather than “post.”⁴⁵ It quietly acknowledges the factualness of rupture, rather than the option of a Lyotardian perlaboration of the logic behind that rupture’s recognition; it is disposed to be *cultural*, rather than literary (after de Man), or critique-al (after Zavarzadeh and Morton);⁴⁶ it devolves some of the singularity of its appointedness to practice upon a *technopolitics*. Therefore the question concerning theory’s (re)positioning is rhetorical, because it knows in advance that any answer will probably acknowledge that which imposes itself in the place of a repositioned theory: “Are cultural and postmodern cultural theories yielding to new “hypermodern” and “recombinant” cultural theories of technology?”⁴⁷ If the answer is indeed “yes,” then something has shifted, making way for a post-theory that, grown pragmatic, takes on aspects that neither a post-theory possibly “after” de Man nor one possibly “after” Zavarzadeh and Morton would have countenanced.⁴⁸

To put it another way: it might seem that a “new cultural theory”—predicated on work like that by George Landow on hypertextuality and digital texts, by Sadie Plant on the genderedness of the digital, by Paul Virilio on dromology, by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker on digital delirium, by Donna Haraway or Chris Hables Gray on cyborgs, by Scott Bukatman on virtual subjectivity—amounts to an abdication of theory as it might have literarily or radically been.⁴⁹ Indeed, “new cultural theory” seems to extend theory’s disciplinarity and extend it to the posthuman. Theory thereby behaves like one of those discourses identified by Zavarzadeh and Morton

that co-opt what might have been adversarial (as seen in the introduction, above).

This scarcely suggests radical practice, and may indeed be ranged against it. That is because “technopolitics” may be nothing more than a politics of theory that is, strategically, immersed in a digitalism very different to that envisaged by Zavarzadeh and Morton:

“Digitalism,” in our analysis . . . is not used as the “cause” of changes (it is not a new “mode of information” that displaces “the mode of production”) in contemporary capitalism and the labor force. It is deployed here, rather, as a mediating concept that points to the shift in the superstructural discourses and practices that, in response to material changes, are involved in constructing (post)modern subjectivities and the “consciousness skills” needed for the rising labor force of late capitalism.”⁵⁰

Zavarzadeh and Morton’s is cultural theory which is not “new,” even if it takes the term *digitalism* and redefines it in order not to allow it to be too uncritically given over to its more generally accepted (and ironically “older”) meaning. Theory has always played this game of relexicalization, for instance with the words *writing*, *post(-)*, *resistance*, and *theory* itself. It is a game which exemplifies how important it is for theory to work through counter-intuitiveness and against the popular understanding of a term, even if it cannot realistically hope to displace what is otherwise understood generally by that term. But now that a new *digital writing* has come to be—a writing (into being) of the digital—there occurs a redimensionalization of the *resistance* of theory to thinking its own *post* as otherwise

as it always has. In the midst of the posthuman, theory therefore has to face up to the possibility of its own passability, and to be ready to think the “*post-*” in terms of the most literal meaning of this fateful word. It will find that difficult, as it is a procedure that moves against all of its instincts concerning the past and the “*post-*,” the present and the unrepresentable, the intuitive and the counter-intuitive: instincts that risk making theory mannered. What is needed, then, is a less “instinctual” engagement with the posthuman on the part of theory.

It is in this context that we should like to pay *Machinic Modulations* the compliment of saying not only that it is “required reading” for anybody interested in the posthuman, but that it avoids any “mannered” theorese. *Machinic Modulations* suggests that the posthuman can distance itself from the kind of approach exemplified by Pepperell’s writing. To emphasize this, we should like to draw attention to Armitage’s introduction to the special number of *Angelaki*: an introduction that is a solid and reliable guide to “the rising interest in the theoretical humanities and the social sciences in new cultural and theoretical debates over technology and politics.”⁵¹ The introduction builds on the remark that “modern and postmodern cultural thinkers all gravitate toward aesthetic, experiential, moral, practical, and political questions concerning the essence, interpretation, actuality, rhythm, and riddle of technology.”⁵² This sets the tone for the whole collection, in which many of the essays deploy “theoremes” in an inquiry into “new” culture. It is to their credit that this exercise in recontextualization of “the theoretical humanities” arouses no sense of incongruity when it articulates, for instance, a reading of Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980) with David Cronenberg’s *Crash* (1996).⁵³ Indeed, such articulations serve as an instructive exercise in the

renegotiation of critical and cultural theory, even if this renegotiation may marginalize a great deal that is important. What is certain is that such articulations exemplify Armitage's view that "in the age of the recombinant world-picture, foraging among the fragments of cultural doctrines and debates is an extremely important activity."⁵⁴ *Foraging* is a key term here. It expresses the need for a salvaging that is also a scavenging: a going over of the (dead) body of theory in order to recover the scraps that might help to constitute what Arthur and Marilouise Kroker call the "data body" more studiously.⁵⁵ And indeed, the scavenging metaphor appears irresistibly temptable:

[T]he Krokers' efforts to characterise technology as a constituent part of the contemporary emergence of recombinant cultural theory—surely a phenomenon that catches the technological mood of our times—comes close to capturing what I shall call *new cultural theory*. New cultural theorists, therefore, demand a recombinant approach to technology—a perspective that is based on their contemporary cultural experience of everyday life. To be sure, it is for this reason that new cultural theorists are currently acknowledging the importance of Marxism, post-situationism, post-structuralism, cyberfeminism, and postmodernism. In short, a growing number of new cultural theorists are taking to *scavenging among the remnants of modernism and postmodernism to construct hypermodern and recombinant cultural theories of technology* (our emphasis).⁵⁶

Theory, then, cannot remain integrally itself in the face of "the technological mood of our times." To this mood, the best theory is a scavenged theory, its

remnants taken over to construct—no doubt very useably—a rethinking of the theoretical that, in being “new” and “cultural,” can by definition not be “literary” and may well not be “critical” in the sense of “radical.” Whereupon it becomes diplomatic to insist that theory’s body, and a certain spirit that breathe through it, will remain intact: “Fashioning such an image of technology does not necessarily involve the complete abandonment of modernism, postmodernism, modernity, history, and radical conceptions of culture derived from Marx.”⁵⁷ “Not necessarily,” perhaps, but quite foreseeably, especially because although “it is important [and doubtless politic] to state that hypermodern conceptions of technology are neither a defence nor an attack on the theory of artistic, philosophical, and scientific modernism”—that is, on the “modern cultural tradition” that “has been developed in the twentieth century through a general commitment to phenomenology, psychoanalysis, existentialism, critical theory, poststructuralism, feminism, and postmodernism”⁵⁸—it is difficult to see how “new cultural theory” will not end up making the body of theory unrecognizable as it mutilates it. At best, then, theory itself becomes prosthetic. It provides certain conceptual supports to the thinking of the technological and the networked, lest this proceed too limpingly in the wake of that which it sets out to keep up with.

This redefined role of theory is not allowed much scope for the letter-al “option” reviewed in our introduction. Indeed, few if any of the essays in *Machinic Modulations* raise the question of the literary. When they do so it is exemplifyingly, as in Armitage’s reference to “The Book of Machines” in Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon* (1872),⁵⁹ and definitely not with any intent to ask what literariness might mutate into in the age of technology. However, new cultural theory may at least seem to have

some claim to the “radical” option envisaged by Zavarzadeh and Morton. That is because of its interest in “technopolitics.” In paragraphs which construct a curriculum vitae of technopolitics, Armitage lists issues that engage “technopolitical commentators,” among them the Internet, autonomist Marxism, and the Zapatista rebellion in southern Mexico; “high-tech” capitalism and the changing class struggle; conceptions of technology that take in “ontological anarchy”; virtual communities and the post-geographical; the impact of “the city of bits,” the “motorization of art” and the coming of non-humans”; the changing role of the state and questions of democratic access; and the praxis of collectives like the Critical Art Ensemble and other exponents of the post-avant-garde.⁶⁰ Underwriting all this is the notion that “[t]echnopolitics eschews the idea that technology can, in any meaningful sense, be separated from politics.”⁶¹

Whether this eschewing suffices to answer to Zavarzadeh and Morton’s understanding of digitalism is another matter. In this respect, the most significant analysis of technopolitics in the collection is that supplied by Armitage himself, in his reading of Hakim Bey whose radical writings on the role of (post-)anarchy might seem to institute a new space for the critique-al. Armitage shows, however, that Bey’s “poetic [and cyber] terrorists” instead, either “dance alone in the micro-spaces of globalitarian finance capital but commit acts of art sabotage in the name of nothing but an inner dialogue with themselves,” or else participate in an “anarcho-syndicalism”—in both cases refusing “to recognise that the overwhelming force of presence or solidarity really does arise from the reality of class.” Technopolitics, it seems, is not as radical as it would like to think.⁶²

New cultural theory, then, is going to be tenuously if at all after de Man, and very probably not after Zavarzadeh and Morton. The fact remains, however, that it yields a credible coming of the posthuman not only to disciplinarity, but also to theory itself. What *Machinic Modulations* does admirably is to show that theory, apart from being about the literary, the critical, the cultural and the radical, can now also be about the digital. That is a significant development, opening up new concepts, vocabularies, and agendas for theory's curricula and for the process of its disciplinarity. It is—and this is not to hint at cynicism and mercenariness—a good move towards diversification: an identification of a new niche and a move onto it. This may seem opportunistic, but it is an effect of disciplinarity, and theory can now no more resist this attribute about itself than it can resist wondering whether its commitment to the tropological dimension of language represents a flourishing or a fall. Is it surprising that theorists, who as the editors of *Post-Theory* remind us “also have mortgages,”⁶³ are anxious to peg its continued flourishing to the new curricular presence on the academic block?

That presence is worth characterizing, if only to reject the thought that posthumanism might yet be ill-defined within academic departments and academic publishing. We should therefore like to identify six “types” of the posthuman. These types do not set out to present “a poetics of the posthuman.” They are far too schematic for that. They may, however, help in the recognition of the comprehensiveness of the posthuman's repertoire, and its potential. The first “type” is, fittingly, a self-announcing posthumanism. It is a posthumanism which works hard to establish a complex and multifaceted identity for itself, and in fact ranges from defiant calls to attention (as in Pepperell's manifesto) to tracts which attempt a

founding history of the posthuman (as with Hayles's book). It also comprises outlooks which do not doubt the topicality of the posthuman but are judiciously dissenting and critiquing (as exemplified by Neil Badmington's unease at Hayles's title and at the posthuman's countenancing of the "straightforward, present, instantly graspable").⁶⁴

The second type of the posthuman is more unalloyedly critical. It acknowledges the unignorability of the effect on the theoretical humanities of the new technologies, but laments it, as occurs in Robert Markley's *Virtual Realities and their Discontents* (1996). The third posthumanism is to be found in work like that of Elaine L. Graham,⁶⁵ and inscribes the posthuman within a genealogy of its prefigurations. Thus, for instance, the third book of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), in which the hero encounters the strange academicians of the imaginary city of Lagado and their efforts at mechanization and formalization of the arts and sciences, provides fictive and debunked prototypes for Charles Babbage's Difference and Analytical Engines, today's microprocessors, and indeed the apparently overreaching designs of the posthumanist vision. One might also mention the Pygmalion myth or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as Ur-texts for contemporary posthumanism, together with the identification of the automaton Hadaly in Villiers de L'Isle Adam's *L'Eve future* (1880-81) as a fictional precursor of the creatures abounding in such founding narratives for the posthuman as *Bladerunner* (1982), *Lawnmower Man* (1992), or Richard Powers's novel *Galatea 2.2* (1995).

From these founding narratives arises a fourth, more "cultish" posthumanism. The cultish is central to the posthuman, and indeed a number of posthumanists tend to like their manga, their androids and their tales from the techno-crypt as much as

the next techno-head. They see no reason why those narratives should not receive the respect reserved for more conventional masterpieces. This is the posthuman most amenable to scenarios like those conceived by Moravec and to the transhumanist declarations of a body like the Extropian Society. George Steiner's fears about the pre- or counter-literateness of the young might thereby appear justified, especially in view of the indications emanating from a film like *The Matrix* (1999) being approached as reverentially as *Macbeth*, or the installing of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) as posthumanism's answer to the niche afforded in a humanist culture to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. A very "new" form of cultural studies might emerge from this, hence the scope for a label like "new cultural theory" that designates a discipline and a practice that may already be with us. Whatever one's thoughts on this, the profile of Gibson's novel confirms that science fiction is the genre of choice in posthumanist criticism of narrative. That is the corollary to the perception that science and technology might be the last "metanarrative" in the "meatworld," and self-evidently the only viable one in the digital "mentalverse." The rise of "Science Studies" as a subdiscipline within theory attempts to challenge this,⁶⁶ as does the work undertaken by Arkady Plotnitsky in his contribution to this volume and in his work on complementarity between poststructuralism and theoretical physics more generally. These developments attest to a subtle reordering of the priorities for theoretical debate.

The fifth type of posthumanism is more philosophical and theoretical in orientation, and indeed seeks to bring to the posthuman the protocols of readings conducted in the theoretical humanities. It is represented by texts like the essays in *Machinic Modulations* or by Rutsky's excellent *High Technē*, which remains the

most complete and rigorous book-length study of posthumanism's affinities with philosophy and theory. What such texts attempt is a move away from "the wearisome sameness" of "debates over technology and techno-culture"⁶⁷ to the discovery within the posthuman of an amenability to appropriation by "philosophemes" and "theoremes." On this basis, Rutsky reads Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" and Freud's "The Uncanny," assesses the parallels between "the machine aesthetic" and theories of the avant-garde, and inscribes the posthuman as "always already" within the work of figures like Walter Benjamin and Fredric Jameson, "always already" within modernism and postmodernism. This type of philosophically-cum-theoretically elaborated posthumanism, present also in significant essays on cybernetics by figures like Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Andrew Pickering,⁶⁸ provides the kind of academic respectability essential to posthumanism's accrual of a disciplinarity that is not merely bandwagon-servicing or opportunistic, but a genuinely rigorous engagement with what is very arguably an emergent paradigm.

There is a lot that could potentially exist on the interface between philosophy, theory, and that paradigm. Indeed there can be no doubt of the relevance, for instance, to post-phenomenological philosophical inquiry of posthumanist explorations of subjectivity, or of the notion of "distributed cognition" to post-Lacanian interrogations of divided selves and subjects. Similarly, talk by commentators like Milan Kundera about the "death of the novel" could do worse than look at the creations of researchers in Artificial Life and Artificial Intelligence. As Hayles suggests in her analysis of the Santa Fe Tierra programme in Artificial Intelligence, the self-replicating narratives produced there offer scope for a

redimensionalization of the concept of fictional and possible worlds.⁶⁹ Because of such possibilities, it is regrettable that theory's nemesis so often continues to be conceived in terms of anti-theory rather than post-theory. Indeed, it is ironic that Steiner's words on the insuperability of byte and number and the threat to the lettered should have embedded themselves digressively and almost unnoticeably in an anti-theoretical polemic. *Real Presences* is remembered as anti-deconstructionist, while it should have been clear, even in 1989, that the greater urgency lay in engaging more deeply with the implications of the numerate and the digital for the lettered: in critiquing the belief that the days of the theoretical and even the anti-theoretical are, in more ways than one, numbered. It sometimes seems that while certain areas within theory have been engrossed in vexatious polemics with each other—disagreeing about the resistance to theory and theory as resistance, most notably in terms of poststructuralism's beyond⁷⁰—posthumanism, as one manifestation of that beyond, has come up irresistibly on all their blindsides, illustrating in the process the resistibility of theory.

It is for this reason that it is so crucial to draw attention to the sixth type of posthumanism. It is the posthumanism that is already contained within theory. Is it not surprising, for instance, that posthumanism largely overlooks Lyotard's essay "Can Thought go on without a Body?" This title can be glossed in terms of "thought divested of the body, that is, the body which binds and bounds the consciousness from which thought springs" but also as "thought outside a body," which marks one state of the posthuman. It is perhaps a measure of current thinking within the posthuman that these possibilities are stifled by the brouhaha over Moravecian scenarios. The downloading of a mind is now part of the *episteme* of the posthuman,

in concept if not in fact. Since such scenarios appear to downplay reference to the Cartesian “body in a vat” or the Lyotardian “thought without a body,” a philosophical and theoretical substratum to posthumanism’s thinking of the dispensability of the “biological substrate” of thought is optional and in practice dispensable, not constitutive. This is all of a piece with the glaring fact that a work like Pepperell’s *The Post-Human Condition* opts to make no reference to Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958).

The omission in such texts of any reference to Lyotard is arguably, however, a more serious oversight. Lyotard’s opening essay in *The Inhuman* evades the unproblematic scientism of a certain kind of posthumanism, all sold on cyborgia and post-apocalyptic survival narratives, to place at the centre of the posthuman the issue of consciousness. Notoriously, the essay remarks that “after the sun’s death there won’t be a thought to know that its death took place.”⁷¹ Lyotard’s essay speaks of this as “the sole serious question to face humanity today.”⁷² When the essay disingenuously refers to the importance of providing “software with a hardware that is independent of the conditions of life on earth,”⁷³ the congruence with the posthuman appears confirmed. That is where the similarities end, however. Lyotard writes: “It isn’t enough for these machines to simulate the results of vision or of writing fairly well. It’s a matter (to use the attractively appropriate locution) of ‘giving body’ to the artificial thought of which they are capable. And it’s that body, both ‘natural’ and artificial, that will have to be carried far from earth before its destruction if we want the thought that survives the solar explosion to be something more than a poor binarized ghost of what it was beforehand.”⁷⁴ Most importantly, he later warns that “the pilot at the helm of the spaceship *Exodus* will still be entropy”

unless it is realized that “[t]hought is inseparable from the phenomenological body.”⁷⁵ So, no post-phenomenology then, which would, as Lyotard’s collection in itself suggests, be more *inhuman* than *posthuman*.

Such approaches might make it possible for the posthuman to read and be read by the theoretical. There is much within theory that has already broached this, and it may be time to acknowledge those texts of theory that can with hindsight be shown to have been always already concerned with the posthuman: David Wills’s remarkable *Prosthesis* (1995); Avital Ronell’s *The Telephone Book* (1989); all the deliberations by Blanchot and others about the end of the Book and its coextensiveness with the finiteness of the human; Derrida’s remarks on the finiteness of memory and on the consequent *technē* of archivization; all the work on subjectivity and post-subjectivity, for which the landmark *Who Comes After the Subject* (1991) provides an unignorable sample; inescapably, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Thousand Plateaus* (1980).⁷⁶

There are, however, dangers in this attempt to prospect within the body of theory’s texts for an attunedness to the posthuman *avant le nombre*, as it were. We should like to point to two of these. The first is to think that dissenting explorations are sufficient in theory’s encounter with the posthuman. The idea that there exists already a theoretical critique of the posthuman could conceivably lead to complacency, to the view that the critique need not be extended or deepened, and consequently to both theory and the posthuman remaining integral to their respective clerisies. It leaves theory and the posthuman concerned only tokenistically with the other. Theory, it has to be said, has already had a number of non-encounters,⁷⁷ and it is doubtful whether it can afford another one where posthumanism is concerned.

The second danger lies in the temptation to reduce the posthuman to those aspects of it already contained within theory's repertoire, so that its specificity as an object of investigation is obscured. An analogy from philosophy can make this clear. Attempts in the philosophy of, say, Hilary Putnam to cultivate an adaptability to the posthuman can create the impression that philosophy is trying to reappropriate what it might consider to be properly its own. Thus, for instance, when Putnam appears to give time to the view that "a human being is just a computer that happens to be made of flesh and blood" and to speak of "Probabilistic Automata,"⁷⁸ it is as if he is undertaking a more sober reworking of the Artificial Life scientist Edward Fredkin's view that "reality is a program run on a cosmic computer."⁷⁹ Putnam can thereby proceed towards the conclusion that such ideas "mistake a piece of science fiction for an outline of a scientific theory."⁸⁰ His position may be philosophically sounder, but it underestimates an important aspect of the posthuman: its capacity to dispense with the kind of self-searching that can become pathological within philosophy or theory. Unlike feminism, which has been characterized as being "beside itself," and literature, which Peggy Kamuf sees as divided from itself,⁸¹ posthumanist discourse is unassailed by the tortured exploration of its own essentialities or protocols. Consequently, the kind of anguished self-scrutiny of philosophical and theoretical language which marks the work of, for instance, Emmanuel Levinas or Maurice Blanchot is incomprehensible and embarrassing to the posthuman. For the opposite to have occurred, the posthuman would have required a work of theorization that immediately accompanied its expression when it was being articulated as such. But that accompaniment, where it has occurred already, has occurred under the alias of theory. Although there is a theory which among other things is also posthumanist,

there is comparatively little posthumanism that among other things is also theoretical. The sixth type of the posthuman, in other words, is much more replete than the fifth.

This suggests that in the posthuman time of mutability, it is theory which is the more likely to take on the appurtenances of the posthuman rather than the other way round. Theory affects the posthuman as prosthesis. The posthuman becomes another aspect of theory's disciplinarity and curricula. The posthuman, concerned with supplementarity to the human, itself becomes a supplement to another discourse, feeding off the latter's disciplinarity even while it acquires some itself. Theory, as a result, becomes posthuman, growing into it even as it allows posthumanism to grow upon it. It is a mutation which arguably de-constitutes theory in forcing it to a renegotiation, or rearticulation—definitely a (post-)theoretical (self-)repositioning—that would be more far-reaching than any reconsideration of a radical melding between the critical and the cultural. Undoubtedly, an *interdisciplinary* posthumanism, ready to be theoretical *as well*, gives theory a renewed end at the time of its supposed end. The reactions to this can be philosophical: “It cannot be helped, it is pragmatic, it is what had to happen once theory acquired disciplinarity, it actually is quite all right (theory is healthier and leaner and meaner and more ‘with it’ as a result).” No melodrama or overdramatization then: to borrow the words of Belsey at the close of her essay in this volume, “we only have to carry on,” with the posthumanist and the theoretical together. But there is always, instead, the possibility of regret, of nostalgia, and perhaps even of mourning for a “being theoretical” whose status becomes increasingly precarious. If prosthesization and rearticulation are so urgent, what positions might (post-)theory strike?

Epilogue

Is there really a need to reposition theory? Could it really be possible that there might occur a synchronization between post-theory and a moment of rupture called “the posthuman,” to the mortification of all of theory’s orthodoxies on the *post-*? Is this, after all of theory’s angst about alterity and the difference between messianism and messianicity, what the *post-* of theory comes down to: the posthuman as *arrivant*? And if it really were to be believed that this might come to pass, that the posthuman is the glibbest but also the most believable herald of theory’s “displacement by replacement,” where does that leave theory? What levers will need to be pulled in theory’s repositioning, “before” the posthuman?

Undeniably, the posthuman remains the clearest expression of a form of post-theory which, with no use for the temporalities of uncanny returns and future anterior re-cognitions, might straightforwardly leave theory “behind.” In opposition to that, theory cannot merely seek comfort in the possibility that “post-theory” may represent nothing more cataclysmic than a gentle riding of the “next” wave. Something *is* happening, palpably. It may not be something very sublime, but then again it may be something that redefines the sublime itself, as Rutsky intimates in his suggestion that technology (with which posthumanism is concerned above all) becomes “a figure of the sublime.”⁸² If the latter is the case then theory is right to “be about” the posthuman, in all the senses of that phrase. Theory, then, cannot but rethink its ends, as it always has done when it has most flourishingly resisted itself. “Before” the posthuman, and against its nature, it has to recognize that those ends are

conceivable both as objectives *and* obsolescence. Indeed, the reconsidered ends (as objectives) of theory may never have been more vital than when it finds itself “before” that which forces contemplation of its end (as obsolescence). In the midst of the posthuman, those ends are modulated to inquire how theory, in the university and through its disciplinarity, is supposed to react to what has become incumbent upon it: namely to think the imponderables of immanent impermanence, which technology has instituted within the fabric of dailiness and in the very definition of the human. And with that immanent impermanence resulting, potentially, in the posthuman transformation (not to say transference) of consciousness, how is the loss of the theoretical mind to be prevented? How should theory, then, keep the posthuman in mind in order to ensure that the posthuman can itself be minded to the theoretical? And how can it do so irresistibly, to the posthuman as well as to itself?

There are no ready answers to these most theoretical of questions. Nor is there consolation to be had in Lyotard’s view that unanswerability is the calling of the philosophical.⁸³ For theory, which attempted once the “Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?” any answer to the posthuman seems to compel a forgetting of the answer to the preceding question: “*Postmodern* would be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo).”⁸⁴ The posthuman, this later answer might run, is to be understood according to the intuitiveness of the investment in the flight of time’s arrow of the simple rather than the complex tenses. To follow, then, the counter-intuitive with the intuitive, to follow the “thinking very hard” with the “ultrasimplistic” and what theory might consider too banal for words: this is itself the resistance confronting theory “before” the posthuman, a resistance that it must learn to put up against what comes most

naturally to it. It is a resistance sustained by the thought that unless theory problematizes what comes most instinctively to it, it will not be resisting itself, or its orthodoxies. And if it does not do so it will be only possible to say, in the simplest and most valedictory way imaginable, “From theory, post-theory.”

That is because theory’s instinct to problematize its demise in terms of supplementarity, of the future anterior, of its capacity for self-resistance, risks becoming mannered, and hence expected, insipid, evident. It brings to mind the Gadamer-Derrida encounter in Paris in 1981, in which Derrida referred with some affectation of weariness to that which is “extremely evident.”⁸⁵ It would be tragic were theory itself to start becoming evident to itself, to start becoming what at its best it guards against: correct, an attribute which de Man taught us to be wary of. De Man’s instincts on the proper of any discipline were surely right. What theory finds boring it must not confront with what is “correct” to itself: a course which always risks being “boring [in turn], monotonous, predictable and unpleasant,” and which might also lull it into a false sense of its own irrefutability. For theory, it has become correct—and therefore seemingly and delusively irrefutable—that theory’s “post” is not to be thought in the facile terms of the simple past; that it needs to be thought “otherwise.” Yet, following de Man’s equivalences, this “technically correct” gambit becomes “teachable, generalizable and highly responsive to systematization,”⁸⁶ at least to theory’s own audience. In other words, within theory it has become orthodox. Such correctness and orthodoxy become (too) practised; take them further, persistingly, and a dangerous tediousness looms.

That eventuality needs to be evaded. The evasion may require theory to “think otherwise” otherwise. One way of doing this is for theory to do the unexpected by

going along with the expected. Paradoxically, it might be able to allay correctness by giving some thought to the banal. To be specific: it might actually have become less insipid for theory now to (re)think through the simple past, rather than to re-elaborate the relevance to its conceptualities, and to its own demise, of the future anterior.

Otherwise, theory's alibi of not thinking its own apocalypse because it was elsewhere, importantly thinking otherwise the nature and relevance of the *post-*, of ends and of the apocalyptic, may start to wear a bit thin.

It therefore all comes down, in the end, to the importance of avoiding correctness, or the resistible. Theory must address what is ordinarily insipid to it: the "ultrasimplistic" notion that the digital may prefigure—without figuration—its passing. This challenge is all the harder because if the posthuman is truly a time and a paradigm confirmed in depthlessness, in its unattunedness to the lettered, in the operations of successiveness, it divests itself of any real amenability to the theoretical. One suspects that all the strategies of the fifth and sixth types of the posthuman, which attempt articulation and renegotiation at both epistemological and disciplinary levels, might then become a fudge. They mark an uneasy alliance that theory enters into while barely concealing its distaste. Theory continues to hanker, secretly or perhaps transparently, after "qualities" that did not need to be redefined as a result of the encounter with the culture of the posthuman. Those qualities have much to do with the kind of critical practice that sustains theory's position as the true radical among the theoretical humanities (after Zavarzadeh and Morton, as seen in the introduction to this volume), or, alternatively, with a "pure" focus on literature as the discourse most steeped in an unaccountable, non-ulterior alterity (after de Man). Posthumanism, however, resists those qualities. Its consequent insipidity to theory

makes it pertinent to adapt the title of Robert Musil's novel, *The Man Without Qualities*, and start to contemplate a *posthuman without qualities*. Indeed, it becomes vital to inquire whether Ulrich, the man without qualities who struggles against all-pervasive boredom, might herald the posthuman. His deliberate divestiture of that within him which is distinguishing seems almost like an honourable abdication of the humanist from the post-humanist order stealing upon Kakania. Whatever one thinks of the analogy which positions Ulrich as a crypto-(post)humanist, a *(post-)homme* very deliberately *moyen sensuel*, it becomes important to come to terms with the fact that the posthuman that desists from living on theory's and philosophy's borderlines is now firmly part of the culture that theory defines as its object. If it really wants to be about culture, it must be about that as well.

What hope, then, for a very resolutely lettered theory, and for a "radical" critical practice? How is theory to negotiate the posthuman, given that its would-be "otherwise" holds out for the mass only the prospect of boredom, in turn, with the letteredly fogeyish, and with a "radicality" that might only prompt (and this, ironically, from those most immersed in the "virtual" and the "hyperreal") the retort "Get real!" To answer that, we should like to return to Catherine Belsey's essay at the start of this volume, and its intuition that theory must now be about a Cultural Criticism that, ambitiously, takes the whole of culture for its purview, and not just literature or "English." Theory cannot be above all and most purely about literature, as de Man might have wished. Neither can it be radical, forever resisting its disciplinary definition, as Zavarzadeh and Morton might wish. To continue to hope that it might be so is to a very large extent noble, but it is also childish. It is childish because it resists entering into the processes of negotiation and renegotiation that are

so much part of the adult world. It would be more grown up for theory to accept the process of its own disciplinarity: to accept that disciplinarity *is* its practice. Of course, this disciplinarity prevents theory from being what it might have been if there had been no need for a (re)negotiation of its practice: if it could have continued to childishly and unrestrainedly be itself, whether that self is seen as essentially literary or essentially and un-disciplined-ly radical. And the point about theory as a discipline, now, is that it has no option but to give up the rhetoric of what Zavarzadeh and Morton call “disparticipation” and participate in its own disciplining.⁸⁷ In other words, and discomfiting as it might appear, what theory must live up to most of all now is nothing if not the commitment it undertook, once it entered the university, to discipline its instinct to be unrestrainedly itself—to teach instead. Very arguably, what it should teach most of all is the Cultural Criticism that, as Belsey argues, should take the whole of culture as its purview.

True: that can be neither very literary nor very radical. True, also, that as posthumanism is now so inextricably part of the contemporary experience of culture, theory will have to teach the posthuman as well. The editors of *Post-Theory* made no bones about this. Teaching, as the most obvious manifestation of disciplinarity, is now the point of theory, and “the point is not just that [teaching] is Theory’s day job, but also that it is its destination.”⁸⁸ If teaching is what theory must consider as its day job, as that which keeps most of its mortgaged practitioners in clover while its more privileged “disparticipants” conduct literacy’s and radicalism’s more exhilarating work of resistance, then so be it. Famously, even T. S. Eliot (whose attempt to exclusively delimit culture is studied in Belsey’s essay in this volume) had a day job,

and even Musil's Ulrich found it hard to resist one when it was offered by the very worldly Arnheim.

Theory, then, has to dare to teach the culture of the posthuman, to "account for" it in the sense used by Simon Morgan Wortham in his essay within these pages, to contribute more to all the types of posthumanism. Teaching, that most solid and stolid of pursuits, is what it becomes incumbent upon theory not to resist: a course of action, this, that moves against all of theory's instincts to resist the "teachable," the "generalizable," and what is "highly responsive to systematization." Yet for theory to teach would be for it to speak "the language of self-resistance," for theory will no doubt have to resist itself almost unnaturally if it is to speak in the classroom about what it might find resistible conceptually but irresistible pragmatically. In doing so its flourishing becomes very much like a fall, its fall the condition of its flourishing. De Man would no doubt have hated it, but it is worth remembering that even he ended up hailed as a teacher, his "lesson" a supreme instrument in theory's disciplinarity.⁸⁹ And this, at least, can be confidently predicted: there will be no more valuable and intriguing contribution to the study of the posthuman than theory's. If it can accept this disciplinary call, theory's seminar rooms might yet modulate (rather than simply be modulated by) and induce a repositioning of (rather than unilaterally suffer a repositioning by) the posthuman "ultrasimplification" and insipidity elsewhere, of which (as Eliot and Musil foresaw, and as theory senses all too well) there is already quite enough. And that, whether it happens under the name of theory or post-theory, cultural criticism or new cultural theory, humanism or posthumanism, would be truly irresistible.

Notes

¹ Frank Kermode, *An Appetite for Poetry: Essays in Literary Interpretation* (London: Collins, 1989), 6.

² George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 115.

³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, rev. edn (1954; London: Routledge, 1993), 330.

⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, "Note on the meaning of 'post,'" in *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (1985; London: Turnaround, 1992), 90.

⁷ Robert Pepperell, *The Post-Human Condition*, 2nd edn (Exeter: Intellect, 1997), 180.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, rev. edn (1947; London: Routledge, 1993), 217. For a consideration of the positions of de Man and Derrida that are referred to here, see the introduction in this volume.

¹⁰ Ibid., 219, 223.

¹¹ Ibid., 219, 265.

¹² Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 221.

¹³ Jean-François Lyotard, “A Gloss on Resistance,” in *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, ed. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (1985; London: Turnaround, 1992), 105, 103.

¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. Julia Witwer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 69.

¹⁵ The following pronouncement encapsulates Extropian beliefs: “Extropianism is a transhumanist philosophy. The Extropian Principles define a specific version or ‘brand’ of transhumanist thinking. Like humanists, transhumanists favor reason, progress, and values centered on our well being rather than on an external religious authority. Transhumanists take humanism further by challenging human limits by means of science and technology combined with critical and creative thinking. We challenge the inevitability of aging and death, and we seek continuing enhancements to our intellectual abilities, our physical capacities, and our emotional development. We see humanity as a transitory stage in the evolutionary development of intelligence. We advocate using science to accelerate our move from human to a transhuman or posthuman condition. As physicist Freeman Dyson has said: ‘Humanity looks to me like a magnificent beginning but not the final word.’” – Max More, “Extropian Principles 3.0: A Transhumanist Declaration”, 2002 [online]. Available at: <http://www.extropy.org/ideas/principles.html>.

¹⁶ Robert Musil, "Helpless Europe: A Digressive Journey," trans. Philip Beard, in *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*, ed. Burton Pike and David S. Luft (1922; Chicago: Chicago University Press), 120.

¹⁷ Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 109-10.

¹⁸ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹ See Jacques Derrida, "Mochlos," *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, ed. Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 1-34.

²² Nicholas Royle, "Déjà vu," in *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism*, ed. Martin McQuillan and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 5.

²³ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 2-3.

²⁴ This was of course a question asked in theory's own imagining of the (post)human subject: see Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes after the Subject?* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

²⁵ See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van der Abbeele (1983; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

²⁶ Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economics, Society and Culture*, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996-1998), 1: Prologue.

²⁷ Joanne Roberts, "Theory, Technology and Cultural Power: An Interview with Manuel Castells," *Angelaki* 4.2 (1999), 34.

²⁸ On this point, and the Perfect Crime's ultimate imperfection, see Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, 69.

²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, introduction to *Who Comes after the Subject?* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.

³⁰ Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, 66.

³¹ Don Ross, "Is Cognitive Science a Discipline?" in *The Future of the Cognitive Revolution*, ed. David Martel Johnson and Christina E. Erneling (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 103, 107.

³² Musil, "Helpless Europe," 125.

³³ See Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (London: Picador, 1997), 6.

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, rev. edn. (1966; London: Routledge, 1993), 433-34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 432.

³⁶ Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 226.

³⁷ Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," 433.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 431.

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 338.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," 441-49.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁴² Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 339.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁴⁴ See R. L. Rutsky, *High Techne: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ See Jacques Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and other small Seismisms," in *The States of Theory*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 63-94.

⁴⁶ Refer to the introduction in this volume for an exploration of de Man's and Zavarzadeh and Morton's respective positions.

⁴⁷ John Armitage, "Machinic Modulations: New Cultural Theory and Technopolitics," *Angelaki* 4.2 (1999): 1.

⁴⁸ For a review of these alternative "options" of (post-)Theory, see our introduction to this volume.

⁴⁹ See George P. Landow, *Hypertextuality 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Sadie Plant, *Zeroes and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997); Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (1977; New York: Semiotext(e), 1986); Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *Digital Delirium* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1997); Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review* 80.2 (1985): 65-108; Chris Hables Gray and others, ed., *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1995) and *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

⁵⁰ Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton, *Theory as Resistance: Politics and Culture after (Post)structuralism* (New York: Guilford, 1994), 139.

⁵¹ Armitage, "Machinic Modulations," 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵³ See Roy Boyne, "Crash Theory: The Ubiquity of the Fetish at the End of Time," *Angelaki* 4:2 (1999): 41-52.

⁵⁴ Armitage, "Machinic Modulations," 3.

⁵⁵ John Armitage, "Dissecting the Data Body: An Interview with Arthur and Marilouise Kroker," *Angelaki* 4:2 (1999): 69-74.

⁵⁶ Armitage, "Machinic Modulations," 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶² John Armitage, "Ontological Anarchy, the Temporary Autonomous Zone, and the Politics of Cyberculture: a Critique of Hakim Bey," *Angelaki* 4.2 (1999): 122, 124. See also Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991).

⁶³ Martin McQuillan, Graeme MacDonald, Robin Purves and Stephen Thomson, "The Joy of Theory," in *Post-Theory*, ed. Martin McQuillan and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), xi.

⁶⁴ See Rutsky, *High Technē*, passim; Neil Badmington, “Pod almighty!; or, Humanism, Posthumanism, and the Strange Case of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*,” *Textual Practice* 15:1 (2001): 13.

⁶⁵ See Elaine L. Graham, *The Representation of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) and Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ See Mario Biagioli, ed., *The Science Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁷ Rutsky, *High Technē*, 1.

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, “Silicon Sociology; or, Two Kings on Hegel’s Throne? Kittler, Luhmann, and the Posthuman Merger of German Media Theory,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 13 (2000): 391-420; Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ See Milan Kundera, *L’Art du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

⁷⁰ See Wendell V. Harris, ed., *Beyond Poststructuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Jean-François Lyotard, “Can Thought Go On without a Body?” in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Bruce Boone and Lee Hildreth (1988; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁶ See David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) and *Le livre à venir* (1959; Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁷⁷ On this issue, see Diane Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, introduction to *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

⁷⁸ Hilary Putnam, "Functionalism: Cognitive Science or Science Fiction?" in *The Future of the Cognitive Revolution*, ed. David Martel Johnson and Christina E. Erneling (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 32-33.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 11.

⁸⁰ Putnam, "Functionalism," 37.

⁸¹ Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman, eds, *Feminism Beside Itself* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature; or, The University in Deconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁸² Rutsky, *High Technē*, 146.

⁸³ Lyotard, "Can Thought Go On without a Body?" 8.

⁸⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, “Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?” in *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, ed. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (1982; London: Turnaround, 1992), 24.

⁸⁵ See Jacques Derrida, “Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer,” trans. Diane Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 52.

⁸⁶ Paul de Man, “The Resistance to Theory,” in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 19.

⁸⁷ On disparticipation, see Zavarzadeh and Morton, *Theory as Resistance*, 150, and our own brief references to the idea in the introduction, above.

⁸⁸ Martin McQuillan, “The Joy of Theory,” xiii.

⁸⁹ On this issue, see *The Lesson of Paul de Man*, *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985).