

What Is a Posthumanist Reading?

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Do we like this word, “annihilating”?¹

Introduction : Some Propositions

The claim we are making is very simple. It is possible to read “texts,” in the widest sense attributed to this word by poststructuralism, through the way they set up a catalogue of assumptions and values about “what it means to be human.”

Some disclaimers and definitions may immediately be necessary. Hence, it would be good protocol to suggest that not all texts are equally amenable to such a reading; to problematise the nature of textuality; to concede that it is difficult to engage with posthumanism without clarifying one’s outlook on the “human,” “humanism,” and the “humanities” through prior theorisation and critique. Some of that will emerge in the paragraphs below. But that kind of protocol is altogether too practised. In any case it is possible to be sufficiently confident about the theoretical humanities’ long and eclectic exploration of those issues to thereby claim licence not to revisit the relevant debates.²

We prefer instead to address a different set of issues. They arise from the question of what a posthumanist reading would do or be. And perhaps no question is more intractable here than how one can go about critically reading assumptions and values about the human. In other words, how is it possible to read as if one were not human, or at least from a position of analytical detachment in relation to the humanity – whether “essential” or “constructed” – that informs and determines the very position from which it is read? What would be the nature of such an “unnatural” reading?

A critical reading of the assumptions and values underpinning such a reading and surrounding “what it means to be human” will undoubtedly find that they are rarely explicit. Perhaps it is for this very reason that the reading will proceed “against the grain.” In French this might be translated as *à rebours* or *à rebrousse poil*, and in German as *gegen den Strich*: as if in demonstration that the animal metaphor is never “innocent” but also never far away when inquiry turns to the posthuman. To read in a posthuman way is to read against one’s self, against one’s own deep-seated self-understanding as a member or even representative of a certain “species.” It is already to project an otherness to the human, to sympathise and empathise with a position that troubles and undoes identity while struggling to reassert what is familiar and defining. It is to locate oneself simultaneously within identity and otherness, and within the strategies of a radical deconstruction which does not presume, and thereby presumes on, the organic foundations of any reading.

Of course, it is hard to repress the idea that there is something quite daft about this. That old bugbear of theory, “common sense,”³ will feel justified in protesting that reading as if one were outside one’s own humanity, or as if it were possible to suspend for the space of the reading the naturalness springing from the one identity that we were never uptight about before, just doesn’t add up. Attitudinising about gender, race, or class might

be understandable, but surely our humanity need not enter theory's agendas, whether corrective or investigatory. Good old humanism goes as far as it is possible to go on the assumption that the proper study of mankind is man, as Pope had it. Reading to tease out further assumptions and values about what it means to be human is redundant and tautological, not least because we are surely never going to be anything other than human. A posthumanist reading, then, is disconcerting on three counts. It is an impossibility; if, nevertheless, it insists on being, it is an imposition; if it proceeds regardless, it shows up its own ignorance of humanism's most achieved inroads in the direction that it thinks it could go.

How can this impossible and ignorant intellectual imposture be carried forward? As it happens, intruding on the possible, the sensible, the evident, and the canonical is almost precisely the point. A posthumanist reading is enabled by the deconstruction of the integrity of the human and the other, of the natural and the alienable. This kind of deconstruction cannot fail to be empathetic to the degree that it is, self-evidently, human, and thereby invested in what it disinvests; yet it cannot abdicate an ethic of extreme dispassionateness which must make itself constructible, particularly in this context, as almost "inhuman." This is very different to deconstructing the binary opposition of speech and writing, for instance, in which reassurances and consolatory reflections on one's nature and one's very being are not at stake. Instead it is the anxieties and desires involved in the process of drawing boundaries around the human and what may, or may not be, natural to it that become the object of critique. This occurs not through the practised procedures of humanism and metaphysics, which through various ruses tend to reaffirm "nature" and its categories and debate the place of "Man" therein, but on the basis of a question which in undercutting such routines (and in the end nothing is more routine to a reader than being in their humanity) is inevitably unnerving. For to be

“human” necessarily implies its opposite, and helps set up or underscore hierarchies which in turn determine certain (accepted) ways of reading “as a human,” so that it becomes pertinent rather than ridiculous to ask how one can read *not* as a human. How can one read in a manner that does not take “as read” the humanity from which one reads? It is precisely this “as read” that critical posthumanism reads and deconstructs.

In a longer essay the coextensiveness between this practice of deconstruction and a certain kind of posthumanist reading, one that is necessarily paradoxical and *exemplarily* unnatural, would need to be scrutinised. Here we ought rather to explore the consequences of a posthumanist reading of texts that focuses on the ambiguities around the human and what proceeds there. Are there texts and contexts that allow us to ask what would happen if we were to unlearn – we might say even to “unread” – the “human”? What would change if we gave in to this desire, this specific anxiety, this aspiration, this trauma?

We acknowledge that we cannot claim radical originality here. This form of reading has in fact become *explicitly* possible under certain cultural historical conditions that could be described as the ongoing crisis of humanism, including the notion of humanity and even the Humanities after the impact of the supposed “antihumanism” of “theory,” but perhaps especially because of the fast technological change that threatens the integrity of the human as a (biological and moral) species. Whether it is because of accelerating cultural changes induced by new technologies (bio-, info-, nano-, cogno-...) and new media (digitalisation, virtualisation, interactivity...), or because of material changes to the economic base (globalisation, the rise of the information society, environmentalism...), or both, humanism, which across various and sometimes mutually contradictory instantiations has very arguably remained the dominant Western ideology of the past 500 years, is in crisis. Its universalist, liberal, essentialist, individualist moral

values have not suffered the attritional effect of twentieth-century political, cultural and intellectual history all that well. The spectre of posthumanism steals upon it and haunts it. This spectre might seem to beckon toward, or point to, an “after” of humanism, one that threatens current understanding of what it means to be human. This posthuman “other,” understood as threat or promise, is a product of human anxiety and desire. As we shall see, and though this is hardly the whole story – much less the “full” episteme or entirely *the* (or even *a*) “new” paradigm – that other takes shape in figures and representations which tap into the long history of humanity’s excluded (the inhuman, the non-human, the less than human, the superhuman, the animal, the alien, the monster, the stranger, God ...) and reflect current “posthumanising” practices, technologies and fantasies.

On that basis, it is somewhat easier to speculate on what it is that a posthumanist reading might attempt. A posthumanist reading can strategically exploit the ambiguity of the term *posthumanism*. It critically evaluates *posthuman-ism* – the discourse on and representations of the posthuman – at work. N. Katherine Hayles’s *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) and *My Mother Was a Computer* (2005) are exemplary in this respect, as they reflexively analyse the posthuman’s “becoming” while theorising its “emergence.” At the same time, a posthumanist reading can evaluate examples of posthuman representation in terms of their potential for a critical *post-humanism*: a discourse that strategically and critically “inhabits” traditional humanism and which may even contrive to find itself prefigured there. The scholarship of Elaine Graham illustrates the potential for this, as it undertakes genealogical work in tracing the history of this particular idea. So, in a different way, does the work of Cary Wolfe or Bruce Clarke, who show how cybernetics and systems theory provide more than an analogical framework for posthumanism. In addition, a posthumanist reading may be critical both of representations of the posthuman and of humanism, and instead envisages the human as

something or someone that remains to arrive, as a potential that remains to be defined or realised. Through a materialist and deconstructive reading of the cultural politics that underlie the actual representations of the posthuman and the processes of ongoing posthumanisation, it helps to envisage alternative conceptualisations of both the human and the posthuman, and of their mutually informing relationship. The work of Neil Badmington, as we indicate below, is particularly relevant here. And as we have argued elsewhere, a posthumanist reading, mindful of the transformative power of technology, science, and the current state of technoculture, can nevertheless resist technological determinism and posthuman teleology, and contemplate a “posthumanism without technology” (Callus & Herbrechter, 2007: *passim*).

Beyond all that, a posthumanist reading may identify oppositions between the human and the non-human at work in a text or practice and demonstrate how the vital difference between the two has to be strategically breached in order to trouble protection of the “essential purity” of the categories. It critically evaluates the contrivances that the text is willing to accept or even promote in order to protect the integrity of the distinction and reduce contamination to a minimum. A posthumanist reading spells out the anxieties and repressedes that inform the text’s desire. It aims to show that another and less defensive way of thinking about the human in its posthuman forms and disguises, and in its implication within the posthumanising process, may be not only possible but pre-inscribed within texts.

In any case, there are texts in which such contrivances or strategies are hardly implicit. In the case of science fiction, this crisis of the integrity of the human, of the human form itself, has become a major formative aspect, even the foregrounded rationale. Indeed Hollywood science fiction cinema has in recent years been diligent, even tiresome, in the readiness with which it has taken the challenge to and the confirmation of human

“essentials” as a principal preoccupation. It is therefore no surprise that science fiction film is one of the genres that have become privileged sites for posthumanist readings. Science fiction cinema is an important area where the scientific, technological, and cultural imaginary become thoroughly interdependent. How this imaginary envisages the posthuman, posthumanisation, and the eventual supersedence of humanity tells the critical posthumanist something about the current state of humanist values. And perhaps it is not surprising to discover that science fiction often remains a crypto-humanist genre, producing closures that reaffirm a radical difference between human and non-human other. The interest of a posthumanist reading of science fiction therefore lies specifically in analysing the subversive potential of the foreclosed non-human other, and examining whether it could lead to alternative non-humanist notions of humanity and non-humanity. As Fredric Jameson has shown in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), science fiction is perhaps the only genre in which asking questions about human(ist) values and assumptions is not incongruous: not when it is possible to seriously discuss the ability to imagine new colours or the physiologies of alien bodies (119-41). And we need no convincing that “[a] mass sub-cultural genre like SF has different (and stricter) laws than high culture, and can sometimes express realities and dimensions that escape high literature” (345).

After this rather programmatic preamble, in what follows we would like to present some sketches for such posthumanist readings, and also some points of connection to previous and established examples. But beyond these sketches we are especially curious about those conditions and practices that make a posthumanist reading too “easy.” Are there already specific protocols and pieties behind posthumanist readings, and if so how can a posthumanist reading be made less predictable to itself? How, indeed, can a posthumanist reading resist the amiable amenability of certain texts: the very texts that,

through their hospitality to the thought of a future whose conjugation may already be all too perfect, appear to script and remember in advance, and perhaps not all that unwittingly, posthumanism's assimilation within theory's miscellany?

"Posthuman Moments" in Science Fiction Cinema

Arguably, what characterises many contemporary science fiction films is a kind of "subversion" and "containment" dialectic that cultural materialists like Jonathan Dollimore discovered in Early Modern literature a few decades ago. There are what might be called "posthuman moments" in science fiction. They more or less deliberately threaten the integrity of a given "human essence" and are fetishistically indulged in, but all too often they are in the end closed off by the reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane. Sometimes, more rarely, the posthuman moment is different, allowing the posthuman to arrive as such or indulging that illusion, as we shall see in the Conclusion to this paper. The closing off mentioned above was maybe first discerned by Tom Cohen in a little "Coda" to his book on *Anti-Mimesis* (1994). The coda's title – "Post-humanist reading" – announces its particular relevance to what we are discussing here.

The focus of Cohen's posthumanist reading is *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). Cohen focuses on one aspect of that film in particular – the T2000's "anamorphism." As opposed to the old Terminator model (which was more or less happy to retain "Arnoldoid" form), the latest cyborg killing machine sent back in time to destroy the future hero of human resistance against machines is strictly speaking no longer a machine in the "mechanical" sense of the term. "He" is a nightmare for human representation

because “he” can take on any animate or inanimate shape. He is literally anamorphic by substance, his “nature” as liquid metal allowing him to metamorphose into humans of any gender and objects of any shape. In that regard, and emphasising a different connection to that between posthumanism and meta(l)morphosis studied by critics like Rosi Braidotti, Cohen’s question goes right to the heart of humanist assumptions behind this obvious “crisis of representation” caused by “anamorphosis”:

... he [T2] is able to assume myriad anamorphic shapes as liquid metal, a virtual melt-down through all representation ... – is cast as the to-be-evaded-assassin this time. Yet assassin of what? And why is that which burns through all representations, including the commodity form of the human, *evil*? (Cohen, 1994: 260).

Why indeed? The humanity that had accommodated itself to the earlier cyborgian threat of new robotics (the android as “Arnoldoid,” as T1, is John Connor’s armoured protection machine – a kind of virtual “pet” and “replacement father” at once) now regroupes in the face of an even bigger threat that goes to the core of the human. This core appears coextensive with the survival of human shape and with recognition of it. It implies trust in human representability and in the representedness as human of even that which is scarcely human. We remain humans – even cyborgs are “humans” of sorts – because we recognize human form and humanist content, this content being that which explains Cohen’s focus on “mimesis.” Hence the T2 is “the invasion, from a fantasized ‘future’, of an *anti*-representational and post-humanist logic” (Cohen, 1994: 260). Hollywood, as a representative of defending the status quo, namely late capitalist liberal humanism and its cultural logic, could be said to be the last bulwark of

“representationalism” (and the image-commodity) against “an anamorphic logic, humanism’s low-tech mimesis against the implementation of the supplement” (261). Basically, Hollywood desperately positions itself as the legitimate source of representation in the face of “anamorphic” (i.e. unrepresentable) threats to its bread-and-butter business of filmic representation of possible, maybe even likely (fictional) scenarios. Consequently, exploring the future of what it means to be human involves encountering the very logic of the inhuman while of course creating the parameters through which the human, extended into the inhumanity of the future, may still be “captured” on film and consumed by actual contemporary human subjects. This is not too far from Jameson’s point that in science fiction “the alien, fully assimilated, its Difference transmuted into identity, will simply become a capitalist like the rest of us” (2005: 141). On his part, Cohen reads this defensive “pseudo-humanism,” which is only really interested in protecting some human essence as long as it can be sold (down the river), as a “reply” by popular culture to the impacts of anti-representational “theory,” in the following way:

The film, subtitled “Judgment Day,” strives to put an apocalyptic slant on what is a recurrent aesthetic evasion on which the future may indeed be said to rest. Humanity as a now empty trope opposes, here, the post-humanism that grows out of its own logic, and it opposes that with star power. Here the pseudo-humanism of Hollywood representationalism (parodically symbolized in the real machine-man, the Kennedy-Republican Arnold) beats off the invasion of French post-structuralism and non-representational logic, cast as a threat to the human, as materiality as such. (Cohen, 1994: 261)

Here Cohen strategically uses the so-called “theory wars” to illustrate how SF cinema opens up post-humanist possibilities only to foreclose them and restore the more or less repressive status quo. The “anti-mimetic Other” is literally undone in the end. The T2000 is in fact “amalgamated” into the “melting pot.” His radical difference is thereby blended away. In a strange reverse anamorphism, all the human forms the T2000 had taken on (and, by taking on, killed off) reappear and are almost exorcised until the final image, the shape of a human skull, which remains as the ultimate de- and re-humanised form. Representation seems reinstalled, anamorphosis appropriated, but the unleashing of an “Other” (fictional or not) is never entirely recuperable. The “irruption” of such an ambiguity, the haunting of a terrifying “real,” a what if-scenario (what if we take the anamorphic threat seriously and even start seeing it outside the logic of the “threat,” i.e. as a combination of anxiety and desire), leaves a trace in the form of radical posthumanist moments in which the vulnerability of the humanist model is exposed or at least remains exposable.

The question of why an anamorphic other is to “die” (with death here understood as the ultimate loss of “form,” the “unrepresentable”) as a result of the “expulsion” of all forms and of melting away into “formlessness” (and perhaps complete anonymity) is only one such posthumanist moment out of which a challenge to representationalist or “mimetic” humanism arises. Another is also pointed out by Cohen. It occurs in the last scene, where the “good” Terminator must also “disappear” to guarantee that the technology that will lead to the disappearance of the human in the future can be destroyed here and now. But since the representationalist machine has now become an ally, indeed in many respects “more-human-than-the-human-itself,” he-it is granted a humane and dignified even heroic self-effacement – suicide. Tellingly, and in sharp contrast to the T2000’s meltdown, the last scene the spectator visualises is the machine’s “own”

perspective. The spectator “becomes” or “inhabits” Arnold’s vision one last time before the mechanical eye-I “shuts down.” One could argue that this is the ultimate “imagination” (representation) of the essential humanist “self” that “envisages” its own death as the “end of seeing” and the descent into absolute “darkness.” It ties in with Jameson’s discussion of the “android cogito” and of the difficulty that what is alien to the human “can never be ‘empathized from within” (2005: 140-1). Under technocultural conditions this envisaging and this attempt at impossible empathy has, ironically, been computerised and digitalised – and internalised. Our death is imaginable only as a “switching-off” process. In a literal, maybe even “digital” sense, we have become (posthuman) machines in the process of warding off the inhuman other. This seems quite a high price to pay, as Cohen explains:

Of course, in this scene, the machine-as-human, Arnold, must go through the misleading gesture of (human) self-sacrifice at the end, virtually erasing not a terrifying future but the opportunity of the “human” present to read itself. The (inhuman) “human” wins out over the real – suppression is restituted. (1994: 262)

Cohen’s wider claim, namely that “commodified forms of humanism prevail through mimetic ideology that suppresses figural logic” (262), means that for a “posthumanist reading” these moments in which humanism is threatened and the posthumanist other is unleashed need to be taken seriously (maybe even “literally”) and forced back onto the texts. In fact it is a kind of ethical demand that confronts texts with their own liberal humanist conservatism. The aim is not in any way to “overcome” the human but to challenge its fundamental humanism, including its theoretical and philosophical underpinnings and allies (e.g. anthropocentrism, speciesism, universalism). Might it

therefore be a sign of theory's waning impact that in *Terminator 3* (2003), subtitled *Rise of the Machines*, the anamorphic logic seems to have been successfully appropriated and indeed "feminised"? The latest model of the machines' killing machine is eminently "sexy," "bitchy," and everything else you would expect from a "man-eating blonde." That, of course, is hardly in keeping with the undercutting of any cultural logic.

Another ally in this attempt to characterise a specifically "posthumanist" critical practice is the work of Neil Badmington. In *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within* (2004), Badmington investigates the inevitable "contamination" of the human by its inhuman others, and in particular in the representation of aliens in science fiction. Humanism – the hegemonic belief system that ultimately relies on "an absolute difference between the human and the inhuman" (2004: 124), and which manifests and reproduces itself through cultural texts – reveals itself, if read against the grain (or "*in a certain way*", as Badmington says; 134), "to have been always already housing the alien of posthumanism" (124). There is thus a deep affinity between the Barthesian idea of "demythologisation" understood as "denaturalisation" (i.e. there is nothing "obvious" about the human as such, instead there is only a "discourse" – humanism – that is trying, through the construction of "myths," or through "mystification/mythification," to legitimate a hierarchical system in which the human manages to retain its absolute supremacy by expelling differences outside its "own" category and projecting them onto constructed "others," i.e. non-humans). And culture, ironically, is precisely that which is designed to guarantee human "nature." Humanism's "work," however, is never done because the otherness constructed and projected into the world (which might be the equivalent of a "posthumanist" definition of culture: the sum of the otherness projected by humans into their world) comes back to haunt and threaten the borderlines of difference drawn around the human as its protection. It's a dialectic of "probing" and

“haunting” that keeps the play of humanist hegemony alive. But the threat is already the beginning of a contamination. The purification process is never complete and grows more desperate and “tragic” as more borderlines are crossed and eroded.

It becomes equally clear that there is also a close affinity between deconstruction and psychoanalysis in any “critical posthumanist reading.” For example, what Badmington calls “humanism’s faith in identity” (2004: 129) is undermined through the very process of differentiation and “othering.” In setting up a binary or absolute opposition between humans and aliens, for example, it becomes clear that the alienness used to distinguish between the two has a side-effect. It is the invasion of the selfsameness (or, the identity of the human) by “its” other. As Badmington shows, “[a]liens differ from humans, but humans differ from themselves” (130). The other ends up being “in the same” – a process that might be referred to as the “deconstruction of the human” – so that “the human is never quite at home with itself, and never without the alien” (134). Though it may be glib to say this, there is therefore a sense that the kind of critical posthumanism we are advocating is far from a threat to the human(ist). Rather, it may be viewed as a strategy in meeting the fear that governs humanism’s logic of contamination/purification. By problematising humanness or “the human” we are not in the least advocating a “dehumanising” process. On the contrary, and as will be argued later, dehumanisation and annihilation is precisely the “terror” humanism itself helps to construct or at least to maintain. Which – and this might seem *very* glib – means that humans might be critical posthumanists out of humanitarian interest.

Before we explore that, let us dwell a little on another science fiction film. The invasion of the human by its other(s) could not be more drastically and intriguingly represented than in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). The idea here is that humans are surreptitiously “supplanted” by the inhuman other – in this case alien “plants,” seeds

falling out of the sky producing pods that gradually generate a perfect copy of a human body and then eliminate the real human body to replace it. The strange familiarity and uncanny resemblance – the “legumes”/aliens *look* human – requires the generation of difference. How can you “tell” the difference? Humans, apparently, have feelings and these aliens do not. As Badmington explains,

[t]his binary opposition supports the film’s humanism in four principle ways. First, there is a belief in an absolute difference between the human and the inhuman. Second, this difference is hierarchical. Third, there is an appeal to a uniquely human essence that cannot be replicated. Fourth, there are clearly identifiable rules according to which a simple versus – humans versus aliens – may be maintained. (2004: 137)

This “versus,” however, is what is “in crisis.” The other, by definition, brings not only control but uncertainty. It is an uncertainty, at the very centre of humanism, about the meaning of the “human.” In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* it is the very ambiguity of human emotion, used as an absolute marker of distinction between humans and non-humans, which threatens to break down the barriers set up to protect the integrity of the human. As Badmington says, “love is the problem” (138). Love, figured ultimately as an essentially human characteristic, remains “alien,” mysterious, and inexplicable. It is ungovernable, inextricable from desire. Can one “love” the alien, the inhuman, the non-human? Desire, as psychoanalysis tells us, is at once blind and uncontrollable. It is an essential aspect of the human but at the same time it is a threat because it does not distinguish in its object choice between human or inhuman. “To be human is to desire,” Badmington claims, “but to desire is to trouble the sacred distinction between the human

and the inhuman” (139). Desire makes humanism “tremble.” The most essential means by which the human is defined must remain mysterious and somehow exterior to it. It is predicated on a necessary ambiguity, on a certain “*je ne sais quoi*.” Love, basically, is no guarantee. It will uphold neither the essence of the human nor the institutions cherished by humanism.

Interestingly, a simple reversal of humanism is often played with in certain instances of contemporary apocalyptic science fiction where the human is explicitly under threat of becoming extinct or in a curious way has already lost the final war – for example, the one against the machines (cf. the *Terminator* scenario) – and is merely “surviving.” We agree with Badmington, of course, when he claims that posthumanism is not to be understood as a simple “after-humanism,” but rather that posthumanism “inhabits” humanism: that is, it is always a repressed possibility *of* and *inside* humanism. Hence the necessarily psychoanalytic-*cum*-deconstructive approach favoured by a critical posthumanist reading of texts and their humanist tradition. In this sense, anti-humanism is not enough because anti-humanism is still humanist. In other words, anti-humanism may not take the dialectic between human and non-human seriously or “literally” enough. While Badmington’s focus is the subgenre of science fiction he calls “Alien Chic,” it might also be possible to extend this “deconstruction of the binary opposition between the human and the inhuman that is forever happening *within* humanism itself” (2004: 151) to other subgenres of science fiction, and ultimately to all cultural texts, past and present.

Within the parameters of this paper, meanwhile a good third example may be the way in which the film *Minority Report* (2002) goes about policing another boundary around a fundamentally humanist concept: free will. John Anderton (Tom Cruise) undergoes a transformation from a firm believer in the idea and execution of crime prevention through the use of “precogs” (specially gifted humans whose nightmarish preconsciousness predicts

murders that are about to happen) to a sceptic and victim of the system. The particular “posthumanist” moment or angle of this film lies in the question of whether the absolutely essential humanist value of free will should be overruled in the case of the imminent murder of a human being. As countless critics of detective fiction have argued, there is something “special” about murder as opposed to other crimes, so that it is significant that the film portrays society as having moved “beyond” trusting the human to be “perfectible” and capable of that judgement which, in the moment of an absolute decision, makes the morally right choice in a “better” world. This world seems in many ways *post*-humanist in the sense that it has moved beyond human decision taking towards dehumanised automated bureaucratic systems driven by efficiency and pre-emption or, to use another current buzzword, “pro-activeness.” These systems are supposedly “infallible.” The age-old problem the systems encounter, however, is the uncertainty around human “intentionality” – probably the most crucial aspect of human law. An “intention to kill” is precisely the proof that needs to be “established” for there to be a murder case. The sceptic investigator into the precrime unit’s practices voices this concern: “It’s not the future if you stop it!” The context for this is that the “precrime unit” evades the problem of judging intention by absolute “trust” in the accuracy of the precogs’ visions: “Precogs don’t see what you intend to do, only what you will do.” Intention is in fact no longer needed, because the vision of a murder that is about to occur is taken literally as a murder that has already been committed and is punished accordingly. Yet the matter is not so simple, as it is in the suppressed complexity of that outlook that the film’s drama positions itself. For predetermination is everywhere, as John explains: “The fact that you prevent something from happening doesn’t change the fact that it was going to happen.” In simply presupposing intention, the idea of precrime abolishes the doubt over what constitutes human intentionality and drastically

circumscribes the space for conscious choice, or free will. This implies that the desire to protect humans (from each other) leads to a denial of what, for humanism, ultimately constitutes the human as such: the uncertainty necessary for a possible choice between right and wrong to exist. Not surprisingly, this dystopian vision is put forward by the filmic narrative as an illustration of the fact that free will needs to be defended in the face of an inhuman(e) system that is less perfect than it makes itself out to be. The “posthuman scenario” the film paints therefore needs to be rejected and humanism reconstituted and reconfirmed.

This is seemingly achieved through two ideas that are connected with human free will: fallibility and vulnerability, or the possibility of suffering. Fallibility turns out to be the “repressed” of the system. The precogs do not always agree in their vision. There are so-called “minority reports” where there is one alternative scenario in which the predicted murder does not in fact occur. The system needs human interpretation and decision if it wants to do “justice” to the complexity of life and human unpredictability. Fallibility is therefore put forward as a necessary component of human(ist) constitutivity. Vulnerability is the other narrative lever against the film’s posthumanist vision. Who, in fact, are the “precogs,” and what links them with the embattled hero, John Anderton? Initially John is offhand about them. “Don’t think of them as human,” he tells his rival, the policeman who will go on to investigate the murder John is predicted to commit himself. However his rival, as the representative of a “religious” form of humanism, explains that “they are much more than [human], namely our connection to the divine.” In this sense, the precogs are both less and more human than human, and thereby also the “most” human: representatives of the human as such. They have attained their “gift” of prescience through suffering caused by humans (the mother of Agatha, “author” of the minority report which drives the film’s plot, was both a drug addict and a murder victim

herself). John shares this background of suffering. He has lost his son and endures mental instability as a result of his drug use. He is the typical Hollywood hero in the sense that his suffering leads him to doubt the human and trust the inhuman system until he becomes a victim of the system himself, so that in fighting his own demons he reconfirms his human essence through a decisive moment of “free choice” (he resists his urge to kill the presumed murderer of his son and instead entrusts him to the “law”).

The most curious association and the one which is just as necessary as it is unintended by the deeply humanist desire that drives *Minority Report*'s narrative is the very “metaphysics of murder” which acts as the unacknowledged force behind the affirmation of the human in the face of posthuman adversity. The “metaphysics of murder” is briefly explained early on in the film. The inventor of the precrime programme, Iris Hineman, is quoted as saying: “There is nothing more destructive to the metaphysical fabric that binds us than the untimely murder of one human being by another.” But what is one to conclude from this rather strange logic in which the most human act, the act of human self-legitimation, is also the desire for the elimination of the human? What makes “us” human is the capacity for murder. Murder is more than a crime, it's a sacrilege for humanism. What is terrifying is that it is a *necessary* sacrilege (like, ultimately, all sacrileges). One is most (abjectly) human in the moment of annihilating another human. Animals kill, humans murder each other. The affirmation of the human, according to humanism's “metaphysics of murder,” passes at once through the committing and the suffering of murder. Murder as the most in/human(e) act affirms the fallibility *and* vulnerability of the human *at the same time*. Strange logic indeed, but, at least, in articulating the logic, a critical post-humanism, i.e. a humanism intent on working through its own represseds, may be the starting point for a more open and less metaphysical definition of humans and their laws.

What, then, binds these films together? It is the instinct to affirm the human in the face of posthumanist scenarios, to discover in subjectivity, fallibility and vulnerability themselves the resources through which to allay the unease envisioned by the very thought of the enhancements promised by “our posthumanist future.” Human lack and weakness, therefore, are figured as strengths in those moments where the human is most at crisis and most precarious, particularly when they are mobilised in the name of values like love, loyalty, free choice and self-sacrifice. They are what secure the integrity of the human and justify the desire for non-contamination, for non-assimilation within the posthuman other. Human(ist) integrity is thereby preserved in the face of posthuman(ist) othering. Set in posthumanist settings, these stories are therefore impeccably humanist parables.

And yet the unease persists.

The Human(ist) Need for Posthumanist “Care,” or, Why We are Not Entirely Reassured by Humanist Parables on Posthuman Othering

In the face of that unease, we would like to point towards some other erosions of the human/non-human opposition that have been under way for some time in science fiction. Take the figure of the “cyborg” for example – not, of course, an innocent example, but rather striking in its specificity, as Donna Haraway has shown. More recent films, like *Artificial Intelligence: AI* (2001) and *I, Robot* (2004), all testify to the working through of the boundary between human and non-human. The desire for and anxiety of “becoming-machine,” or “cyborgisation,” is irrepressible. What happens to the human once it is invaded by its machinic other? And what happens to the machine? Is there such a

“thing”? A rather more quiet and low-tech representation of this anxiety is of course already present in, for example, *Stepford Wives* (1975) and then again in classics like *Blade Runner* (1982). In each case there is a necessary contamination of the categories “human” and “machinic human other” – a temporary blurring of boundaries which justifies a subsequent purification process. The machinic other is allowed to temporarily threaten, invade and hybridise the selfsameness of the human in order to indulge both: the desire of the “what if?” (for example, what if there was no real boundary between human and machines?) and the anxiety of maintaining the status quo (that is, to reconfirm the humanist essentials in the face of posthuman threats). Usually doubting heroes overcome their obsessions at the price of first “becoming other” (e.g. like the machine) and then regaining their true self and redrawing the blurred lines (e.g. the machine “becomes” human, indeed more human than human to affirm human control over it). Alternatively, in somewhat “darker” scenarios like *Blade Runner* and the early version of *Stepford Wives*, but also in *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, doubt is sustained as an additional “thrill” (in other contexts it also helps set up sequels, of course). What makes science fiction such a powerful genre and, ironically and unintentionally, such a strong ally for critical posthumanism, is the fictional indulgence in the desires and anxieties of “becoming posthuman” while remaining in the ultimate safety of a fictional framework. A posthumanist reading thus merely needs to “force” the narrative a little to arrive at a “meta-fictional” level. What if the “what if” was not just fiction? Not in the sense of “not-yet-reality” (which would just be a more radical notion of science fiction itself) but rather in a deconstructive sense of what is a “fiction of fiction,” comparable to what if “difference” differs from itself – in which case the opposition between identity and difference begins to break down.

There is thus at once a desire to take the constructed posthuman scenarios “seriously” while critically working through the narcissistic humanist baggage that even the most radical and transhumanist vision of the human future or non-future carries around. All this for the sake of the human probably, since “care” for the human paradoxically departs from posthumanist horizons. The cue for understanding this comes from a rephrasing of Bruno Latour. If it is true that we have never been modern, it would equally be possible to say that science fiction and critical posthumanist readings of them make clear that “we have never been human.” This fearful doubt is expressed throughout the genre of science fiction, from the fear in *I, Robot* of “becoming machine” to *Blade Runner*’s fear of “unauthenticity.” It is “as if” the unimaginable (the “end of the human,” of human “after-life”) has at once already happened and in having done so actually never manages to arrive. The posthuman future of *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, for example, is and remains remarkably human in the sense that the robot-boy, like some hi-tech Pinocchio, is captured in his desire for a human mother and for becoming human. It seems there is no choice for humanism but to humanise the machinic other, the animal, the object, God, etc. Whereas, if one took the idea of “artificial intelligence” seriously, this would of course not leave the human, never mind humanism, unchanged. Indeed, the insistence on projecting human(ist) values and assumptions as essentially unchanged within posthumanist scenarios is one of the most intriguing instincts in this form of science fiction.

Nor is otherness exclusively para-organic in those scenarios. As Donna Haraway already pointed out in her “Cyborg Manifesto,” the erosion of one human/non-human boundary inevitably leads to breakdowns in other boundaries. The whole humanist edifice is under threat. While the cyborg threatens from one end of the technological spectrum, the animal threatens from the other. Animalisation, cyborgisation,

biotechnology, robotics, and cybernetics bring about an accentuated “hauntology” of the spectralised human. The animal-threat, already apparent in *Planet of the Apes* (1968), is even more apparent in *Gattaca* (1997). In *Gattaca* the narrative desire is to overcome genetic determinism through affirmation of human mortality and imperfection. Jerome, the hero, cheats by putting his imperfections against those of the system. He demonstrates that human freedom lies in overcoming one’s material, biological, and other limitations by sheer willpower and determination and belief (in oneself, one’s ideals etc.). He is helped in critical moments by the most human of sentiments: love and compassion. When the fulfilment of Jerome’s dream to travel into space is confronted with one last hurdle, one final urine sample, the “scientist” overrules the system because his son is in a similar (genetically imperfect) position as Jerome. In denouncing “geneticism,” the “future” form of discrimination that is based on perceptions of genetic “deficiency,” as it is called in *Gattaca* (the title is an allusion to the chromosome sequencing in human DNA, *Gattaca* being composed of the initial letters of the four DNA nucleotides: adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine), the film affirms free will and idealism as the core of what it means to be human. In this respect the film’s tagline is an emblematic posthumanist moment in itself: “There’s no gene for the human spirit.” It is tempting to compare the stirring assurance of that line with the doubt, which is much more deconstructive and critically posthumanist, that drives Jacques Derrida’s essay on the topic, “The Aforementioned So-Called Human Genome.” “What might the so-called *genome* of the said *man* be?” Derrida asks in an essay which “call[s] for a deconstruction and reconstruction of the legal and of the legal concept of the “human” (2002: 202-3). Here, however, commentary on the film must take priority, and it is interesting to note that ironically but rather representatively, the most human (i.e. deficient) hero must first expel all humanity (must become like the genetically perfect, automated, uniform,

“machinic” other – the “inhuman” *par excellence*) to fulfil his dream of “humanity” – his very own conquering of space. The reversal follows the (self)deconstructive logic already described. The “longing for the human” as the driving force behind humanism’s constant self-replication expresses itself through the variation produced by constant self-transformation. It recalls Nietzsche’s most humanist expression in anti-humanist disguise: become who you (already) are!

Similarly, in *Planet of the Apes* (1968) the distinction between human and animal is explored, challenged, and reconfirmed under different conditions. Humans first have to experience “animality” – being treated like animals by a superior species – to be able to overcome their own animality and live in peace with and respect for animals (at least with simians, of course). The film never breaks out of its anthropocentrism, however, in first projecting human “evil” onto the animal other and in the end presupposing the need for atonement and humility within “the animal.” First, humans have to become more animal than (the “worst”) animal, and animals more human than (the “best”) human, before “animality” (and not humanity – which means that the hierarchy and absolute distinction between the two is never fundamentally challenged) can be safely contained. The end, as usual, proposes a re-establishment of “happy family” as the cornerstone of humanist society, while humanity is almost extended (at least partially) to the apes (the ultimate taboo, namely “miscegenation” – evoked throughout the film in the female ape’s sexual “desire” for the male human hero – is quickly discarded). It seems that similarities between “speciesism,” racism, and sexism are not only intended but absolutely necessary to safeguard the humanist system of values.

Ultimately, however, neither biotechnology nor robotics, neither animalisation nor cyborgisation constitute the “real” threat to the survival of the human under current technological and cultural conditions. Rather, “digitalisation” and “virtualisation”

promise to question humanism and human essence much more radically than humanism – including its most “advanced” genre, science fiction – might be able to imagine. It is no coincidence that many recent science fiction films start not only from the hypothesis that the human might not be what “he” used to be or what “he” seems, but that “culture,” humanity’s web of signification and purveyor of (social) reality, might not be so human, after all. The *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003) is of course only the latest representative of this “subgenre,” but it is maybe the most characteristic. At stake is not only the “integrity” of the human form – questions of embodiment are fundamental to the *Matrix* scenario (i.e. am I where my body is?) – but whether the human as human can survive its translation into (digital) information. In this sense, it is not so much a case of whether “Thought can go on without a body,” as Jean-François Lyotard has it (1988: 8-23), or whether the mind is downloadable into a computer, as Moravec speculates (1988: 109-10), as much as a question of what constitutes “digital embodiment.” The reason why the first part of the *Matrix* trilogy gives the general impression of being so much more “profound” and “interesting” than the sequels is that it probes this possibility of a digital body. To follow the narrative’s Christian undertone (one among others), what happens in the analogue telephone lines through which the cyber-rebels can access virtual reality and interfere in “real life” is the absolute mystery of transubstantiation. How, indeed does one become “code”? Is the genetically coded information inscribed in humans compatible with or translatable into the digital? Neo’s final mastery over the matrix and its digital environment and laws could make him the first “posthuman” completely immersed into a new, digital, culture. His two bodies – the physical and the virtual, to speak – become one. The curious thing is of course that Neo has to become “real” first before he can master the “virtual” (in which, however, he has grown up and already been the “hacker” he is supposed to become).

This ultimate confirmation and reinscription of humanism into the film happens at the end of the first part and in the playing out of the story in the sequels. First of all, what is necessary for Neo's posthumanisation is again a very human ingredient: Trinity's unconditional love and self-effacing femininity. It seems that the posthuman digital future will not have to worry about the continuation of sexual difference, gender, and race (compare the mapping of race onto space in the sequels). Second, in filling in the void left at the end of the first part, and inevitably providing explanations for philosophical "problems" put forward, the sequels are much more "conservative" in giving shape to a possible posthuman scenario. Neo, it turns out, is and never has been human, after all. He is that third, metaphysically "blank" element between fiction and reality called "software." Neither hardware nor wetware, Neo is in fact a "medium," or "translation itself." Neither human nor inhuman, he is technoculture's (posthuman) "angel," ministering to both human and inhuman at once. In this sense he is the very incarnation of *programmed* "care." It is the gradual and simultaneous "divinisation" of "Neo" as code which makes watching the trilogy "progress" so painful to witness – an expulsion of the sacred within the human into the realm of spirituality, and into the "city of the machines" which is also the city of God. With that kind of contaminative logic, it is no wonder that these posthumanist parables are troubling. Their "posthuman moments" are unnerving. For that reason, as we shall see below, it is tempting to think that "posthuman moments" where care (of and for both the human and the posthuman) prevails might set up a different resolution.

Conclusion: What If Humans Don't Care?

In summary, what is a posthumanist reading? It is an expression of “care” that is critical of the ideology that has been pre-empting the most fundamental questioning – and not the annihilation – of the human, as a species, as a construction, as an “invention,” as a “myth.” In reading the humanism inscribed within texts that at the same time explore humanism’s limits, a critical posthumanist approach aims to open up possibilities for alternatives to the constraints of humanism as a system of values. It is not theoretical sophistry to claim that the care of a posthumanist reading lies in the exposure of the strategies by which human(ist) integrity is re-conscripted into science fiction narratives. It is also possible to say that caring after the human – which might be rewritten/reread as “caring, after the human” – is what posthumanism, counter-intuitively, can thereby be seen to engage in.

This conclusion is possible if we assume that humans, and humanism, are in need of “care” before the spectre of posthumanism. But science fiction cinema is interesting also in its projections of an uncaring *humanity* when faced with *posthumanist* vulnerability. In the *X-Men* trilogy (2000-2006) – a cinematic adaptation which, like all such films, bears intriguing departures from its novelistic or textual source, in this case the Marvel Comics stable – the posthuman threat comes from within, as a result of evolution that is alienating in its effects but not alien in its origins. Humans – some *humans* – have evolved “naturally” and without any of the posthumanist reengineering envisioned in the four stages of “evolution” described in Hayles’s *How We Became Posthuman*, which are about another kind of “development” that “thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate,” and that conscripts to that end “bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (1999: 4). Instead, as the voiceover at the beginning of *X-Men* (2000) and the end of *X2* (2003) has it (spoken in each instance by a different mutant):

Mutation. It is the key to our evolution. It is how we have evolved from a single-celled organism into the dominant species on the planet. This process is slow, normally taking thousands and thousands of years. But every few hundred millennia, evolution leaps forward.

The prospects for conflict are clear. As another of the voiceovers in the *X-Men* films states, as it reflects on the challenges of mutated humanity:

Across the planet the debate rages. Are mutants the next link in the evolutionary chain? Or simply a new species of humanity, fighting for their share of the world? Either way, it is a historical fact that sharing the world has never been humanity's defining attribute.

Thus, in *X-Men* Charles Xavier (the "saintly" surname is significant) is a mutant (played by Patrick Stewart) whose foresight and benevolence sees that it is important that the next leap forward is achieving coexistence between unevolved humanity and "mutants." A number of mutants, it so happens, are endowed as well as cursed with special powers. Many of them do not regard this as "mutant chic." They are frightened by these powers, which they only partially control.⁴ These include such abilities as passing through walls; rapid healing from wounds; telekinesis; anamorphing; flight; telepathy; control of fire, ice, and weather; etc. The mutants' naturally evolved state has, therefore, rendered them "unnatural." Mindful of humans' difficulty with interpreting "natural" let alone "unnatural" difference, and conscious of human difficulty with figuring continuities and coextensiveness between the two, Charles Xavier takes a number of these "posthuman"

mutants into a special school. In effect, he takes them “into care.” There they can live and grow in a sheltering environment, but one which puts paid to any inclusive politics for their abnormal abilities or, indeed, their “disability” in regard to human “ability,” to the ability to be human, or, one might say, to “humanability.” Thus the originality of the *X-Men* series lies in placing the onus of the humane on unevolved humanity: on that proportion of the human species which has not mutated and which, the films occasionally suggest, may for all it knows (for it is repeatedly frustrated in discovering how many mutants now inhabit the Earth) be a *repressing minority*.

There are, then, two ways of being human in the films. “Humanability” is implicitly demanded of unevolved humans who must learn to extend the human(ist) values of enlightened acceptance and tolerance and universality to those mutants seeking coexistence and “integration” and guaranteed difference. The pariahs, in this case, are those mutants who seek to conquer the Earth, who express dismay as well as disdain when the “good” mutants range themselves against them. These “bad” mutants interestingly construct humans as the oppressive agency. Magneto (Ian McKellen), their leader and the inspiration behind the “Brotherhood” of aggressively disaffected mutants, is proven right in his predictions that a war might be coming and that first blood will be drawn by humans, for whom sharing the world remains as unthinkable as it was for Cro-Magnon man. Magneto thereby places the responsibility for the inhumane on that part of humanity which is unevolved. The humans, indeed, work and plan and fight to eliminate difference, the centre of these operations being the putative seat and ultimate bulwark of humanity, the White House. In *X-Men 3: The Last Stand* (2006), the pharmakon for that *difference* is not care but a “cure” which promises to reverse mutation, reverting mutants to unevolved humanity, and eliciting from a particularly enraged and embattled mutant the incredulous cry, “Do we look like we need your help?”

Elimination of difference, in the name of reversion to the “natural” and according to a rhetoric of “help” (or “care”), is the human way of dealing with the posthuman. But in these dealings there are instances where a different prospect presents itself. Thus, *X2* opens with an attack on the President by a mutant who later reveals himself to be reformable and, very humanly, repents; more interestingly, it ends with a “posthuman moment” where the President is given an ultimatum by the otherwise peace-loving Charles Xavier, whose care home, or school for “gifted children,” has just been ravaged in the previous conflict. The President had just been about to announce an escalation in confrontation with mutants. His live address starts off with the following words, before it is frozen in time by Charles Xavier:

My fellow Americans, in this time of adversity, we are being offered a moment. A moment to recognise a growing threat within our population and take a unique role in the shape of human affairs.

Charles Xavier warns the President: “This is an opportunity.” “This *is* a moment,” he tells him, making clear that the shaping of (post)human affairs is in the balance. “A moment to repeat the mistakes of the past, or to work together for a better future. We’re here to stay, Mr President.”

The President, as if in recognition of the best American values, or rhetoric, that are invoked in the opening scene of the film, and which acknowledges Abraham Lincoln’s vision, seizes the opportunity. This is Hollywood: there was never any doubt that he would. And by the end of *X-Men 3*, and having proven their “humanability” and their capacity for tragic sacrifice, the mutants are in the fold, encompassed within the most

inclusive institution of (redefined) human universality. A news flash depicts another President announcing that posthumanity has arrived:

And so it is with the thanks of a grateful nation that I introduce an ambassador to the United Nations, and the representative to the world, for all United States citizens, human and mutant alike—Dr Hank McCoy.

This, then, is the real McCoy: wonderfully different in his mutant status, a “true blue” and besuited Hulk, diplomacy-savvy and a unity candidate. The American dream, it seems, can work for mutants too.

Aside from the depiction of that brand of American politicking, which means that it remains insular even when it is most embracing, the film provides a strikingly different posthumanist parable. The posthuman challenge to human(ist) care is simple but fundamental. Do you care enough for your humanity to allow the posthuman to be? Of course, caring at gunpoint, or after it has been shown that one has almost no choice, is not the most admirable of human motivations. “Care, or we’ll take care of you” – this, in effect, is what the X-Men say – is the oddest of ultimatums. But it is clear enough in spelling out the ultimate lesson of a certain kind of posthumanist reading. In the midst of a call for human(ist) ethics, the peril that scares us most deeply is the end of our capacity for care. It is in rediscovery of that capacity that humanity is revived. Yet this ethics is never more radically challenged than when it must legislate for the possibility of the posthuman. To re-echo Latour, we will never have been human until we have accepted the posthuman. This kind of posthumanist reading, this reading of posthumanist ethics, thereby reaffirms a basic and defining resource of the human(ist). This resource is the opening of the space for human(ist) care. It is also the confidence, which very definitely

should not be underestimated, that care will prevail. In that sense, a posthumanist reading is neither radically transformative of the human nor redefining in its understanding of what it is to be human. Nor is such a posthumanist reading dehumanising or nihilistic. Indeed, there is the danger that it leaves the values and assumptions of humanism, and certainly its rhetoric, intact. There is, moreover, the danger that it may well be almost corny. In that regard, the hope addressed at the end of the Introduction above, namely that it might be possible to come up with a posthumanist reading unpredictable to itself and to posthumanism's already established pieties and protocols, is probably unachieved here. That is a challenge to be taken up again, and elsewhere. For the moment, for this "posthumanist moment," it may be enough to reflect on the fact that when faced with the question of "What Is a Posthumanist Reading?" (a question, incidentally, in which we can read the implicit tag, "Why Are People Saying Such Terrible Things about Posthumanism?"), it might emerge that posthumanism is actually not only quite a caring paradigm after all, but a paradigm for care. Perhaps, then, the danger for humanity and humanism, but for posthumanism too, arises if we are ever past caring.

Notes

¹ The epigraph is taken from the screenplay, by Michael Dougherty, Dan Harris, and David Hayter, of *X2*, dir. Bryan Singer (Twentieth Century Fox, 2003).

² Theory's engagement with humanism, with the nature of the human, and with diversely perceived prospects for the humanities is, of course, too broad and longstanding for us to be able to adequately reference here, but it may be helpful to draw attention to the manner in which Derrida's work provides perspectives that are not only representative of that engagement but also fundamental to it. Hence, apart from the landmark and routinely acknowledged address to the 1966 Baltimore conference at Johns Hopkins on "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," subsequently published as "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," the following might also be cited

as indicative of the manner in which theory has persistently probed outlooks on the human(ities) and humanism: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les fins de l'homme: A partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Colloque de Cerisy. 23 Juillet-2 Août 1980) (Paris: Galilée, 1981); Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982); Jacques Derrida, "The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the 'Humanities', what *could take place* tomorrow," in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Jacques Derrida, "The Aforementioned So-Called Human Genome," in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), Jacques Derrida, "My Sunday Humanities," in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). See also Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley (eds), *Critical Humanisms: Humanist and Anti-Humanist Debates* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) and Neil Badmington (ed.) *Posthumanism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave and New York, 2000).

³ Theory's attack on "common sense" can be traced from its beginnings in, for example, Catherine Belsey's chapter on "Criticism and Common Sense", in *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980: 1-36), right down to the present, cf. Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory, and Common Sense*, trans. Carol Cosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴ Beyond the *X-Men* series, the proliferation in popular culture of stories about humans who evolve to acquire special powers is striking: see (just to cite a few examples), the television series *The 4400* and *Heroes*, as well as the interesting storylines (concerning evolution and its relation to the nonhuman, the inhuman, and posthuman) in practically all DC Comics and Marvel Comics offerings. The portrayal in the latter of the "High Evolutionary" and of the "Inhumans" in the *Fantastic Four* cycles is particularly interesting.

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