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# Critical posthumanism or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology

Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter  
University of Malta and Leeds Trinity and All Saints College, UK

[W]hat can be the deconstructive effects of an invention?  
(Derrida 1989: 42)

Our purpose in this essay is to suggest why it might be critical to envisage a posthumanism without technology. The idea will seem desperately misconceived. To speak of a posthumanism without technology is tantamount to speaking of humanism without humanity. One might as well consider language without articulation, science without measurement, art without creativity, or any act of extreme and absolute divestiture that compels contemplation of denaturing itself, seeing that what is in question is taking what is most integral to a discourse or practice and discounting it so completely that one would be left only with unthinkability. This remainder would be more radical than a counter-discourse, with the undoing implied being far more comprehensive than what might be undertaken within, for instance, deconstructive engagement. It would involve us in the willingness to retain the names of discourses or epistemes but not their intuitions, memory, history, protocols, perceptions, (dis)positions, repertoire - or boundaries. It forces what has been attached to an 'ism' to be formulated anew, with its stakes and wagers re-negotiated in the very open modes of the unthought and the unbroached, the untried and the forgotten.

Anything we present below must represent a falling away from this envisaging. A posthumanism without technology is configurable in grammar and conceivable as a thought-experiment, but its absoluteness cannot be instantiated. We shall therefore come across as mounting something of an apophantic performance, so that all of this might sound like so much rhetoric. We shall indeed have to return to the question of rhetoric later. For the moment let us acknowledge, since the admission has some consequence, that contexts discussing the posthuman typically shun rhetoric. Posthumanism, it would appear, must do away with the play and ploys of a certain kind of language. Was it not asserted, in one manifesto of posthumanism, that "Post-Humans never get bogged down in arguments about language" (Pepperell 1995: 183)? That assertion is itself a not unrhethorical move, of course,

but it captures an important reflex of posthumanism. This is the tendency to shy away from any 'linguistic turn' or philosophical speculation and to constrict the scope for rhetoric or abstraction. To put it another way, that emblematic figure of the posthuman, the cyborg, is not into wool-gathering. The posthuman is more about the doable (not to say about the done) than it is about the speculative. The posthuman sees things to their end - seeing things to their end being, incidentally, itself as ready a definition of posthumanism as any. This idea of ends - whether they be discerned or experienced, embraced or resisted - cannot be ignored when what is in process is nothing less than "the unfolding story of how a specific historical construction called the human is giving way to a different construction called the posthuman" (Hayles 1999: 2). To this different construction the devices of nanotechnology, bioengineering, or digitality, to mention just three ultra-technological resources, are integral. Moreover they "participate in the technology(de)construction of humanism" (Milburn 2004: 124). Technology is what makes that happen; hence a posthumanism without technology is unthinkable, impossible. It could not possibly open onto anything.

By an interesting paradox, however, posthumanism is a discourse which in envisaging the beyond of the human opens onto openness itself. It is the unknowable itself, the unthinkable itself. Is it therefore just sophistry to say that a posthumanism without technology shares, somehow, in the spirit of the posthuman? Such sophistry is best responded to by robustly spelling things out, mindful that the person in the street (whose prospects and the nature of whose being and time, it is not fanciful to say, are what is ultimately at stake in all this) tends towards greater tolerance of the mystery of new technologies rather than of the mystifications of rhetoric. Nothing is more conducive to spelling things out than a list. Lists have the merit of raw, direct, unvarnished presentation of facts and evidence. Here therefore is an itemising from various traditions of some well and lesser known formulations of the posthuman. Some mention the posthuman as such and some don't, some embrace it and others suspect it, but all serve to underline the folly of considering the possibility of a posthumanism without technology:

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 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 the 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 (Hayles 1999: 2-3).

Due to the spectacular advances of molecular genetics, more and more of what we are "by nature" is coming within the reach of biotechnological intervention . . . [T]his technological control of human nature is but another manifestation of our tendency to extend continuously the range of what we can control within our natural environment (Habermas 2003: 23).

New technologies have complicated the question of what it means to be human . . . (Graham 2002: 2).

[Posthumanism] refers to the general convergence of organisms and technology to the point where they become indistinguishable (Pepperell 1995: 1).

The *homo creator* is he who responds to his feeling of inadequacy by rebelling against the fatalism of his human limits; who puts his bodily nature to the test by exploring what is most extremely possible and bearable, to the point of producing precisely that 'second nature' which today is no longer a metaphor, but a concrete and disturbing reality of Human Engineering (Pulcini 2004: 15; our translation).

The above re-confirm the integrality of technology to the posthuman. What they assume as also self-evident, to the extent of scarcely bothering to make a point of it, is what technology both hinges on and makes possible. This is *invention*, understood as capacity for original and creative thought, and then *invention* again, as the new or enhanced object or instrumentality that after the proverbial inspiration and the consequent perspiration is the breakthrough opening onto possibility itself, onto the future itself. The possibility and future mentioned here, however, have little to do with the order of the *avenir*, of event-ness, which would need to be problematised in any longer discussion of the nature of invention. That would require addressing Derrida's 'Psyché: inventions of the other', which suggests that "[n]ever does an invention appear, never does an invention take place, without an inaugural event. Nor is there any invention without an advent . . ." (Derrida 1989: 28). We invoke Derrida's essay repeatedly in this paper without, in the space available, considering in detail the analytic of invention that it explores. Nevertheless let us acknowledge that invention is key to technology: present in it and to it as both source and end. Hence it is key, also, to the posthuman, its futures, and its futurologies. There is no construction of the "archaeologies of the future" without invention (Jameson 2005).

plausibility to a posthumanism without technology. It depends, of course, on an 'extraordinary' thinking of the technological: one whose *inventio* downplays *instrumentum* and privileges, instead, the conceit of *poiesis*. Such a posthumanism will uncover different truths underlying this digital and biotechnological age of ours to those concerning how "information loses its body", and focuses instead on how to think through the posthuman condition if it were to be considered for a moment that the posthuman might not be inescapably grounded in "the union of the human with the intelligent machine" (Hayles 1995: 2). In that perspective, technology, as prosthetic emergence in the order of the human, is not what defines the posthuman. We shall consider soon what an alternative thinking of the posthuman might involve, and how it might spell out a 'critical posthumanism' that would be 'critical' in the sense both of its importance as a modulation of cyborg-riddled scenarios and cloning-savvy idioms, and also through its capacity to cue a critique of those scenarios and idioms.

Before we come to that, however, it is as well to acknowledge a point that could prompt a *refutatio* within our argument, were it not for the fact that it cannot be refuted. For a posthumanism without technology, if it is to be rigorous, must envisage not only a 'posthumanism without *instrumentum*' - and hence a tool-less, machine-less and ultimately unmediated condition (itself unthinkable) that would render talk of "cyborg synthetic ecstasy" (Wills 1995: 2), "downloaded consciousness" (Moravec 1988: 109-10) or "the prosthetic aesthetic" (Smith and Morra, 2001) utterly meaningless - but concurrently a 'posthumanism without *poiesis*' - and hence a negation of everything inherent to the potential of the human. The posthuman condition thus envisaged, deprived of bringing-forth and all possibility of advent-ness, and of *invention* and *inventio*, would constrict both expectation and event. In both 'withouts', in both of these despoliations of the essential, what must follow is the voiding or at any rate the denaturing of the human. The posthuman, according to this view, could only really occur in the time of the exhaustion of the human and of its capacity for bringing-forth. Independently of whether the object of bringing-forth be truth, poetry, *instrumentum*, or idea, such a posthumanism without technology would be the most devastating experience of divestiture. There could be no emergence in this extreme experience of the end - only the unrelieved perpetuity of stasis.

We consider expressions of this scarcely imaginable condition below, but let us first follow some consequences of Heidegger's *inventio* concerning *poiesis*. As R. L. Rutsky (1999) has shown, Heidegger's thinking of technology set the scene for later approaches to the technological that also fight shy of unquestioning investments in instrumentality and progress (or what Heidegger discusses in terms of *telos*). What Rutsky's work suggests, even when not spelling it out, is that there is no contemporary approach to technology, or *technē*, that is more rooted in Heidegger's thinking of technology than poststructuralism's. This suffices to

We position this problematic of *invention* here as a point of reference to which we shall need to return. In particular, we shall need to recall "the human subject's aptitude for invention, in the double sense of narrative fiction or historical fabulation and of technical or technosystemic innovation" (Derrida 1989: 44). Meanwhile we refer to Martin Heidegger's essay "The question concerning technology", surely the foundational reflection on technology within twentieth-century Western thought. Resourcing a philosophical rhetoric that posthumanism must apparently shun, Heidegger, "the theorist par excellence of the digital future" (Kroker 2002), asserts that "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological" (Heidegger 1994: 311). This makes it immediately tempting to cite him in support of the view that since the technological is not essential even to itself, then a posthumanism without technology need not seem so insubstantial an idea, so absolutely lacking in essence (in another sense). Such a syllogistic flourish must be resisted. We ought rather to spell out that Heidegger is anxious to undercut the assumption that technology, as an *instrumentum*, is a means to an end (Heidegger 1994: 312). Rather, technology is implicated in *poiesis*, that is, in bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*] (Heidegger 1994: 317). We may think we recognise this. *Poiesis* is what permits invention to be understood as ideation bringing forth its end. The recognition grows troubled on discovering that for Heidegger *poiesis* is bound up with *technē*, which he sees as "the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Technē* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*, it is something poetic" (Heidegger 1994: 318).

This counter-intuitive co-implication of the technological and the poetic relies on a feat of rhetoric. It is spun on speculative and linguistic turns bound to provoke those believing that posthumanism ought not to be bogged down in language. The provocation arises because, as George Steiner intuits, the age of the digital cannot suffer the ruses and slipperiness of the letter (Steiner 1989: 114-5). And indeed, by critiquing the understanding of technology as an *instrumentum* consequent on invention, Heidegger pins everything on a very 'lettered' *inventio*: one which casts technology as *poiesis*, as poetry. *Inventio*, it will be remembered, is the first of the five activities of rhetoric in the classical system come down through Hermagoras and later Cicero and Quintilian. Strictly defined, it involves heuristics and the finding of arguments. It "finds and discovers things", as Derrida confirms in "Psyché" (1989: 26), and thereby enables the other four activities: arrangement (*taxis dispositio*), style (*lexis, elocutio*), delivery (*hypokrisis, actio*), and memory (*mneme, memoria*). In this sense, Heidegger discovers his *inventio* in "The question concerning technology". In language and its effects, etymology and its resources among them. This, after all, is the essay in which he asserts that "[a]ll ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language in a manner that is extraordinary" (Heidegger 1994: 311; emphasis added). A Heideggerian thinking of the posthuman certainly answers to that description, and in the process lends

otherness. Before this kind of rhetoric and play on the double meaning of *pas* as 'not' and 'step' (see also Blanchot 1992) we may decide that we do not have much time - much like we do not have much time to remain human(ist) before the posthuman - and also because it might be felt that within the institution of criticism the times are no longer amenable to this kind of performance. Perhaps, then, neither time nor space should be made for it. Perhaps it is wiser to move immediately to an example of posthumanism without technology (since we are intent on persisting with it) taken from literature, where the order of time is sometimes suspended, sometimes subverted, to (re)turn, afterwards, to theory again and one of its most comprehensive figurings of excision, excision being after all what the proposition in 'posthumanism without technology' puts us in mind of.

That move shall be made - but not immediately. Reluctance to disambiguate one of poststructuralism's most vexed 'relations' is understandable, but it should at least attempt to understand what might be at stake in this *sans* which appears to inscribe only the impossible. And the relevance of the thought of the 'relation without relation' which we find in Derrida and which he finds in Maurice Blanchot, but which as Geoffrey Bennington (2000: 194) notes is also prefigured in Kant's *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*, must clearly be acknowledged given that it provides the pre-text for reflection on a posthumanism without technology. We ought to be able to spell out some conclusions on the very odd 'x without x' relation where the *pas*, as the step presumably directed to progress, is disallowed from forgetting the *pas* of negation, the (im)possibility that a relation can always be *sans* itself, without itself. Just enough time, then, to draw attention to what unthinkable gathers around this 'without', which Derrida probes beyond 'Pas' in discussions of such constructions as 'messianism without messiah' (Derrida 1994) or 'religion without religion' (Derrida 1998), but which is even more extremely analysed elsewhere in terms of "a *without* without *without*" (Derrida 1987a: 401). Language and rhetoric are thereby wrested into an impossible articulation of the negation of what is fundamentally constituting, even of what is coincident with ipseity, and which yet contrives to be not a movement in self-denial or annihilation but an opening to a relation with the entirely other. That is because "an invention has to declare itself to be the invention of that which did not appear to be possible; otherwise it only makes explicit a program of possibilities within the economy of the same" (Derrida 1989: 60). At stake, then, is the radical impossibility that is the possibility of event and of absolute difference, which cannot be thought except through the invention of extraordinary language. The consequences of this for a posthuman that goes beyond plans for "machines for programming invention" and "the dream of reinventing invention on the far side of the programmed matrices" (Derrida 1989: 46) might appear clearer - in a scenario for critical practice where by definition nothing could be clear - when Marian Hobson points out that what is at stake in the insistence on the *sans* is "the relation of non-relation with the radically new" (1998: 146). The posthuman, foreseen and figured in multiple discourses through the tones of the

highlight a further not irrelevant fact. It is one based on recognising that poststructuralism (a field significantly committed to language and the 'extraordinary' therein) finds itself 'between' humanism and posthumanism. If the relation between epistemes is to be (mis)understood in terms of the successiveness which chronology supposedly institutes, then poststructuralism's time follows humanism's and predates posthumanism's. Poststructuralism, however, stands between humanism and posthumanism in another way. It mediates (itself) between the two, familiar with both but overfamiliar with neither as it stands apart from the two of them, gauging and reading their respective ground and more than once undercutting it, just like a mediator must, pointing out how and why the basis for any position struck might shift, and how it might be more reasonably and trenchantly reclaimed.

Of all the 'facts' mentioned so far, this is the one we shall need to run with a little harder. It is well known that poststructuralism has engaged with the question of the human and of humanism. One remembers, for instance, Derrida's watershed intervention at the 1966 'The languages of criticism and the sciences of man' conference in Baltimore (see Derrida 1978), together with his essay on 'The ends of man' (Derrida 1982a) and the influence on the momentous *Les Fins de l'Homme* anthology (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1981). There are also - we claim licence to define poststructuralism broadly here - Deleuze's much cited references within posthumanist texts to "the body without organs" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), Foucault's to "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988), Lyotard's to the inhuman and its pertinence to a time that winds down to the end of the sun (Lyotard 1991). More significantly still, the question of *techné* and time is invoked as such in a number of other relevant texts (see, for instance, Stiegler 1998). Where, however, is the scope for discerning more trenchant correspondences between poststructuralism and posthumanism, which might lead enhanced feasibility and scope to a posthumanism without technology?

The key pre-text is what Derrida has taught us, in his commentary on Blanchot in the essay 'Pas' but also elsewhere, on the importance of thinking through the 'x without x' relation (Derrida 1986). In a passage that is far too long to quote in its entirety, Derrida provides what is practically an inventory of the formulations and texts in Blanchot (in effect, a good part of the Blanchot corpus) where this relation exerts contrary sustaining and dematuring energies on the integral and the indivisible. This is where we are brought face to face with the extensiveness of the logic of the *sans*, the without, in Blanchot. It is where we encounter its force in formulations like "death without death", or "myself without myself", or, to give a third example that captures what is in process in this strange logic, "destroys without destruction" (Derrida 1986: 92-93; our translation). In every instance of 'x without x' the syntax of the relation juxtaposes two apparently identical words across a space where the *sans* is the abyssal mark of unrelatable difference and

futurological, the devices of the fantastical, the imaginings of the seeing, the pre-constructions of the scientific, and the projections of the confident, must yet be the unforeseeable itself, exceeding the measure of the human and outreaching what is expected. In this it is radically new, and there can be no relation with that radicality other than through the 'without' - the *sans*, the detachment - of *sens*, of logic, of the intuitive, of the organic, of the integral. So that it is not entirely surprising to find Derrida asserting that "on this *sans* which is not a lack, science has nothing to say" (Derrida 1987b: 89).

What, then, do literature and other texts in theory have to say? The posthuman in which the "without-end or the without-concept of finality" (we are giving a new context to Derrida's words on Kant here, see Derrida 1987b: 85) is literally constructed as a condition cues the first example we promised above. Dante penetrates this posthuman condition and understands its unnering affinity with the fact that "the end of man in man is not human" (Bennington 2000: 151). Let us remind ourselves of just three lines in the first *Canito* of Dante's *Paradiso*:

Trasumanar significar per verba  
non si poria; però l'essemplo basti  
a cui esperienza grazia serba.

[The passing beyond humanity may not be set forth in words: therefore let the example suffice any for whom grace reserves that experience.]

*Trasumanar* is here imagined very differently to Extopian imaginings, where the transhuman is a strict function of technology. Technology, Heidegger suggested when he wasn't equating it with bringing-forth, "tears men loose from the earth and uproots them" (Heidegger 1993: 105). But this transhuman- without-technology condition, remote from the earthly and remote from language itself, is more extreme than that. Dante's words set forth an insight that rings true. The extremest experiences of what lies beyond the human are too immense for the human to properly sustain or articulate. Admittedly, in the *Inferno* Dante did find sublime words for the inexpressible agony of uninterruptibly experiencing nostalgia for the human while being forever sundered from it. Recall, for instance, the famously poignant words of Paolo and Francesca. There the "end of direction and the sense of the end" (Derrida 1987b: 86) are what drives the despair that comes from realising that the inhabiting of a space and time beyond teleology forecloses hope. The despair arises from resignation to the impossibility of *poïēsis* - of any bringing-forth - still being possible, ever. This infernal posthuman without *poïēsis*, which is akin to a posthuman without technology (if the Heideggerian equation made earlier in this essay is indulged) and akin also to a posthuman without possibility, is redeemable only by the posthuman for which, and of which, there can properly be no relation. This is the extra-human, or transhuman, conceived in the *Paradiso*: the

space of the entirely other where the (im)possibility of the relation without relation must be linked to the central problem faced in Dante's poem. It is that of pulling off "non-representation without falling either into unintelligibility or into silence" (Freccero 1988: 211).

Why is it, indeed, that Dante does not choose the path of silence to safeguard the secrets of the *mirabilia Dei* he witnesses? Posthumanists may speak about downloading human consciousness into a computer, but this is more drastic still. What it asks is: how does mind travel in the beyond, in the entirely other? And, an even more unnering question: can such disembodied journeying be the subject of a transworldly travelogue? The *Divine Comedy*, an untypical yet prototypical (proto)posthumanist text for those disposed to see it as such, addresses those questions. It figures a posthuman condition where technology is at best incidental to the predicament of living out of time, where the torturing memory of the human lingers within the hellishly and purgatorially posthuman, and where the paradisiacally extra-human, or transhuman, is apprehensible only through grace. And in the encounter with that figuring what bears re-stressing is that to Dante the transhuman is beyond words and rhetoric. The transhuman in Dante stands utterly aloof of the 'letteral', and much more absolutely so than posthumanism. This brings forth a stark insight. If, as David Wills and others in the wake of Heidegger and poststructuralism (see below) have shown us, language and writing are themselves *technē* and the most fundamental prosthesis to the human, then a posthumanism without technology would, as the transhuman, be beyond any articulation of the human. It would be impossible, unplaceable, other. As a pre-eminent example of "that unplaceable we call literature" Dante's poem, which journeys beyond the place of the human, contends with "the experience of the other as the invention of the impossible, in other words, as the only possible invention" (Derrida 1989: 36). That Dante's sublimest, inventive language exists at all, taking us out of ourselves and unto the threshold of the beyonds of the known, of the unrepresentable, of the most absolute event - but necessarily, as Dante appreciates, only to the thresholds - suggests, therefore, how viscerally the human resists notions of a posthuman without technology understood as being so radically and entirely outside the order of representation. Such a posthumanism without technology is too absolutely other to allow us to contemplate times and spaces that are utterly beyond the figuring of human imagination and language, which is thinkable as possibility but coincident with an impossibility alien to human thought and yearning. The resistance and the impossibility appear once we fully understand the extraordinary investments in the elliptical thought, "... that there is language ... ." (Fynsk 1996).

Through Dante and a number of other writers whose texts we do not have the space to invoke here, literature, the art form most invested in that 'thereness', clearly has much to say about the *sans*. What, then, about theory, if we were to move beyond Derrida but through other texts that think through the questions of writing and

relation? Let us turn to David Wills, specifically his extraordinary book, *Prosthesis*. Wills's book depends on what we have learnt not to assume: the possibility of relation. "I can relate all this," he says (Wills 1995: 7). This autobiographical, multigeneric, ageneric text of theory, described by Wills himself as "a renegade piece of writing" (29), relates various circumstances involving his father's need for an artificial leg. The appendage, which on his horizons was for Wills "the prosthesis that was there from the very beginning" (7), becomes inescapably bound up with the nature of (his) recounting and writing as prosthesis. The style of the book is dependent upon collage and the piecing together of the disparate, so that it is never far away from the Derridean problematic of paraphrase and quotation, which operate through and alongside excision and hence within the experience of disembodiment from the integral and the original. Yet such excision is critical to understanding Wills's "relation" and his "writing of prosthesis" - with both "inevitably caught in a complex play of displacements; prosthesis being about nothing if not placement, displacement, replacement, standing, dislodging, substituting, setting, amputating, supplementing" (9). Prosthesis thereby reforms the human and its discourse.

All the more surprising then that in this book on prosthesis, a book on technology's appendage(s) to the human, Wills specifies the posthuman only twice. He does so in the context, of all places, of a discussion of the Parisian architecture commissioned by Mitterrand - as if there were always something essentially French in the posthumanist (as indeed in the poststructuralist) gesturings in his text (183 and 326n). Outside those moments the book weaves together, on the basis of a "powerful will-to-analogy function[ing] through the narrative mode that attaches a wooden leg to a theoretical discussion" (14), a rich tapestry of prosthetic imaginings in writing and culture. These link the vicissitudes of his own and his father's life, a painting by Charles Conder, the texts of William Gibson and Raymond Roussel, the malaises of Freud, the amputations performed by Ambroise Paré in the sixteenth century, various treatises of rhetoric, a passage from Derrida referring to his own temporary need for crutches, etc. Common to all this "generalized prosthesis" (11) is technology, conceived however as coincident with discourse, not least a humanistic discourse: *Prosthesis* "begins with a quotation, [and] given that its first uttered pretext is from the literary canon, its conceit would appear to be to undertake an act of criticism or theory that deals with the mechanical in that most humanistic of discourses, the artistic, in order to demonstrate to what extent a supposed natural creation relies on artificial devices of various kinds" (11). (The quotation in question is a line from Virgil - "quadrupedante purem sonitu quatit ungula campum" ["the hoof strikes the dusty plain in a four-footed rhythm"], which Wills's father quoted repeatedly as "an incantation pressed into service to preempt the arrival of the spasm, an affirmation of mind over the random mayhem of phantom matter . . ." [Wills 1995: 3].) But more critical than technology is rhetoric: "At the risk of provoking an abyssal

indistinction, I'd like to call every rhetorical form that comes into effect a prosthetic transfer, I'd like prosthesis to be the figure here for differential, and differential, relations in general" (Wills 1995: 14, emphasis added). For Wills, indeed, prosthesis - this "high-technological" contrivance added to the human that eventually leads to "a refinement of the human, a type of superhuman" (27), this "peculiar appurtenance of the same and the other" (20) - is "the pretext for a generalised examination of rhetorical articulations" (16). And in his very inventively articulating and rhetorical seventh chapter, Wills shows how advances in the surgery of amputation and in the manufacture of artificial limbs coincide, in 1553, with the introduction into the English language of the term 'prosthesis', printed in the margins of a treatise on rhetoric (Wilson 1982). This is a crucial and emblematic coincidence. It is enough to make one want to reword Derrida. "From the posthuman, rhetoric" (see Derrida 1982b: 209).

A posthumanism without technology, then, or at least a posthumanism not utterly sold on technology, depends on a leap of the critical imagination, on tolerance of rhetoric, on words and what emerges from them. This is fundamental to what might be termed its 'invento without invention'. That is because in downplaying posthumanism's investments in technology, the thought-experiment of a posthumanism turning on language and rhetoric challenges the commonplace and the commonsensical. For that reason it can be trying. It complicates further what is already sufficiently vexed, inscrutable, and unpredictable. Perhaps it should therefore have the grace not to insist on its own being. Why burden, after all, the inscrutable and the unpredictable with a thought-experiment so hinged on 'extraordinary' language? The posthuman is already problematic enough. Cleaving it from technology, which is irreducible in posthumanism's canonical texts, places it in crisis. The posthuman, which is always somehow about the terminal, is by its nature always in a critical condition in any case. On that basis to speak of critical posthumanism is tautological. But the nature of the critical posthuman we propose is different. And since rhetoric can occasionally obscure matters, let us spell things out one last time, leaving little to the critical imagination. The raw facts we propose are the following. Again, we shall depend on a list.

- (i) Constructions of the posthuman which problematise the irreducibility of technology have already been rigorously thought through and pursued, in texts we have cited and others we discuss elsewhere (Herbrechter and Callus 2007).
- (ii) Such constructions all qualify as posthumanisms. That these constructions may not be named as such and may not typically feature in mainstream debates on the posthuman indicates only that they may be inconspicuous in those contexts, not that they are untenable.



(iii) Such posthumanisms are implicitly critical of the sometimes irenic, sometimes nightmarish visions of *Vorsprung durch Technik*, introducing strains if not of dissidence or refutation, then of difference and doubt. They tend not to forget or downplay language, even if they sometimes use it tendentiously when speaking, for instance, of “freaked-out intellectuals . . . busy reading the tea-leaves of a naturalistic version of posthumanism” (Habermas 2003: 22).

(iv) Commitment to critique does not imply looking askance at the inclusion of posthumanism within critical canons. Nor does it scorn studies where technology is determining, for a lot of scholarship and indeed invention which have gone into that are exemplary and inspired. We would only point to the scope for different conceptions of the posthuman which would not be overdetermined by technology.

(v) A critical posthumanism would be mindful of how the posthuman is always, by definition, in a critical condition, but would also work to critique constructions of the posthuman that depend on unproblematised conceptions of, for instance, the human, the body, language, science, progress, time, space, information, consciousness, etc. The historical and political dimensions involved, which we did not have the space to explore in this essay, would also need to be addressed. Of course it would be terribly crass to claim that a critical posthumanism is yet to come into being. It is present in the work of contributors to this number of *Subject Matters* and in a number of excellent studies published on issues ranging from emergence to (in)finity. Nor do we wish to suggest that we are pioneers of critical posthumanism. That would be unconscionable when others have recognised that “[t]racking the fluctuations of this new, post-human, disorder is the task of critical theory and it is a task which . . . meets with dense resistance, partly because of the illogical, self-contradictory realities of the realities we are trying to account for” (Braidotti 2002: 264; emphasis added). We would only submit that a critical posthumanism mindful of the value of ‘critique’ and of ‘critical practice’ as these were conceived of in the time of theory, so to speak, might in the time of post-theory undertake some necessary work of modulation, questioning and reformulation in a present that is otherwise set to the futurist rather than to the *avenir*. Bringing the imponderables of the order of the unforeseeable to a subjectivity increasingly given to the in-formation of digital subjectivity (see Hayles 2005b); being as interested in the resources of *inventio* as those of invention; realising that there are other movements to posthumanism than “the technological turn”: such strategies make possible an openness to the thinking of posthuman conditions that might otherwise appear counter-intuitive or self-indulgent. We suspect that while the idea of a posthuman without technology is regarded as provocative and tedious sophistry that openness will not have come about.

We are aware that we have come close to a dissident manifesto of posthumanism. Spelling things out was always going to run that danger. Hence, at the end and to take the edge off things, language and rhetoric again. *Prothèse*, as David Wills shows us, is the device of conjunction and adjunction. In attaching the prefix *post-* to (the) *human* it is what brings forth the thought of the posthuman. Without language’s ‘bits’ the posthuman cannot be (con)figured. Posthumanism, founded in the thought of prosthesis but always on the basis of the morphological and rhetorical possibilities of *prothèse*, must be bodied forth and in-formed in language before it turns to computing the human (Hayles 2005a: 51). Consequently a posthumanism with or without technology can never find itself beyond the order(ings) of the human as starkly as a posthumanism without language. That would be the truest, most devastatingly complete thought of the transhuman: the most extreme posthuman condition from which, as Dante’s invention taught us even before humanism, nothing could be bodied or brought forth.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to Gloria Lauri-Lucente for sharing with us her ideas on these lines, which she discusses further in her forthcoming volume on posthumanism and related themes (Lauri-Lucente 2008). The English translation is Charles S. Singleton’s (Dante 1975: 7).

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