Project MUSE®
http://muse.jhu.edu

THEORIZING POSTHUMANISM

Neil Badmington

"Someday we will be dead but not now."

—Ted Mooney, *Easy Travel to Other Planets*

KNOW APOCALYPSE? NOT NOW, OR THEORY, WE HARDLY KNEW YE

Posthumanism, the story often goes, needs no theorizing. How could it? Only the most foolish or self-absorbed cultural critic would spend time speculating about something that was actually staring him or her in the face. "'Man,'" as Steve Beard confidently puts it, "does not have to be theorized away; the intersection of consumerism and techno-culture has already done the job" (1998, 114). All that was solid has melted into air. Posthumanism has finally arrived, and theory, like "Man" "himself," no longer has a place.

I am not quite ready to be seduced by such an approach. It is, I think, too easy, too complacent, too premature, and I want to stress the importance of theory—above all, poststructuralist theory—in the posthumanist landscape. Posthumanism, I want to suggest, needs theory, needs theorizing, needs above all to reconsider the untimely celebration of the absolute end of "Man." What Jacques Derrida calls the "apocalyptic tone"[1] should be toned down a little, for, as Nietzsche once pointed out, it is remarkably difficult to cut off the human(ist) head through which we (continue to) "behold all things" (1996, 15). While I am not for one moment interested in preserving humanism, keeping its head firmly on its shoulders, I do think that it is worth remembering the tale of the Lernaean hydra (the mythical beast that, of course, re-members itself). "The hydra throve on its wounds," Ovid recalls, "and none of its hundred heads could be cut off with impunity, without being replaced by two new ones which

Copyright 2003 Regents of the University of Minnesota

made its neck stronger than ever" (1955, 203). Apocalyptic accounts of the end of "Man," it seems to me, ignore humanism's capacity for regeneration and, quite literally, recapitulation. In the approach to posthumanism on which I want to insist, the glorious moment of Herculean victory cannot yet come, for humanism continues to raise its head(s).

N. Katherine Hayles has, of course, done much to reveal the dangers of what might be called apocalyptic or complacent posthumanism.[2] This, in fact, is precisely where *How We Became Posthuman* commences:

> This book began with a roboticist's dream that struck me as a nightmare. I was reading Hans Moravec's *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*, enjoying the ingenious variety of his robots, when I happened upon the passage where he argues it will soon be possible to download human consciousness into a computer. To illustrate, he invents a fantasy scenario in which a robot surgeon purees the human brain in a kind of cranial liposuction, reading the information in each molecular layer as it is stripped away and transferring the information into a computer. At the end of the operation, the cranial cavity is empty, and the patient, now inhabiting the metallic body of the computer, wakens to find his consciousness exactly the same as it was before.
>
> How, I asked myself, was it possible for someone of Moravec's obvious intelligence to believe that mind could be separated from body? Even assuming such a separation was possible, how could anyone think that consciousness in an entirely different medium would remain unchanged, as if it had no connection with embodiment? Shocked into awareness, I began to notice he was far from alone. (1999, 1)

Moravec, Hayles concludes, "is not abandoning the autonomous liberal subject but is expanding its prerogatives into the realm of the posthuman" (287), for the seemingly posthumanist desire to download consciousness into a gleaming digital environment is itself downloaded from the distinctly humanist matrix of Cartesian dualism. Humanism survives the apparent apocalypse and, more worryingly, fools many into thinking that it has perished. Rumors of its death are greatly exaggerated.[3]

Moravec's fatally seductive narrative does not, of course, "exhaust the meanings of the posthuman" (Hayles 1999, 283), and *How We Became Posthuman* offers an admirably nuanced approach that seeks to avoid the "lethal … grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist

view of the self" (286–87). What remains to haunt the book, however, is the *possibility* that humanism will haunt or taint posthumanism, and it is precisely this problem that will concern me here—a problem of what remains, a problem of remains.[4] If Hayles's project is to imagine a posthumanism that does not fall into the kind of trap that ensnares Moravec, mine is slightly different (though not unrelated), involving instead an attention to what of humanism itself persists, insists, and ultimately *desists*.[5] I want, in short, to ask an apparently straightforward question, with deliberately Leninist overtones: if traces of humanism find their way into even the most apocalyptic accounts of the posthumanist condition, *what is to be done?*

BOTH SIDES NOW, OR WHY E.T. WANTED TO GO HOME

I chose to begin the introduction to my book on posthumanism with a reference to an image from the cover of *Time* that I have since realized raises the problem of human(ist) remains (Badmington 2000, "Introduction," 1). The issue in question dates from the first week of January 1983 when, according to the *Time*-honored tradition, the magazine was expected to announce its "Man of the Year." There was, however, something strange about the winner. "Several human candidates might have represented 1982," the magazine's publisher explained to his readers, "but none symbolized the past year more richly, or will be viewed by history as more significant, than a machine: the computer."[6] There had, of course, been previous years in which the honor was not, strictly speaking, bestowed upon a "real" person (G.I. Joe towered over 1950, while Middle Americans dutifully represented 1969, for instance), but this time something far more dramatic had occurred. Humans had failed to leave their mark.[7] "Man of the Year" had given way to "Machine of the Year," and what looked like humanism's epitaph loomed over the cover's striking scene: "The computer moves in."

The event did not go unnoticed. Three weeks later, *Time*'s letters page carried over thirty responses to the award. Only a handful of the readers who chose to write in were happy with the magazine's decision. Irving Kullback of New Jersey was one of these: "I never dreamed," he gushed, "that *Time*'s Man of the Year would be living

in my house, my TRS-80. You made a great choice." Perhaps predictably, however, most responses were hostile. "An abomination," fumed Andrew Rubin of Los Angeles. "You blew it," sighed Joseph A. Lacey of Redding, California. "The Man of the Year has no soul," declared the more metaphysically inclined Shakti Saran of Allston, Massachusetts, while Ohio's Joseph Hoelscher finally understood the real meaning of the box office success of the year: "Your cover relegates man to a papier-maché dummy and glorifies a machine. No wonder ET wanted to go home."[8]

These irate readers need not have worried too much about "Man." "He" was still alive, still in the picture. Quite literally, in fact, as I realized several months after submitting the manuscript of *Posthumanism* to the publishers. In my haste to draw attention to the obvious headline and the presence of the computer at the center of the picture, I had overlooked the significance of the somewhat pathetic anthropomorphic figure that sat to the left, looking on.[9] Here, in the margins of the image, another side of the story began to emerge. Why, if the computer has "moved in," should there be a human witness? What might such an onlooker reveal about the apparent apocalypse? If technology has truly sped "us" outside and beyond the space of humanism, why is "Man" still at "our" side? If "Man" is present at "his" own funeral, how can "he" possibly be dead? What looks on lives on. The end of "Man" was suddenly in doubt. I had come up against the problem of what to do with human remains.

Margins. Remains. The inside and the outside. Death. This already sounds a lot like the work of Jacques Derrida, a theorist whose work I want to bring to bear on the question of posthumanism. Although he was writing at the same time and in the same city as explicitly antihumanist thinkers like Lacan, Foucault, and Althusser,[10] Derrida took a somewhat different approach, arguing that, simply because thought always takes place within a certain tradition, thought itself is bound to bear some trace of that tradition. No one can think (himself or herself) entirely without. In "The Ends of Man," an essay first published in 1968, he turned his attention to the manner in which some of his contemporaries were conducting their "questioning of humanism" (1982, 117) by "affirming an absolute break and absolute difference" from established anthropocentric

thought (135).[11] Such "transgressions," Derrida points out, can all too easily become "false exits," as the "force and the efficiency" of tradition effect a stricter and more naive reinstatement of "the new terrain on the oldest ground" (135). The outside carries the inside beyond the apparent apocalypse. The new *now* secretes the old *then*. Humanism remains.

Unease with what he would later term the "apocalyptic tone" does not, however, mark the end of Derrida's critique. Neither does it lead to a call for a simple return or surrender to the humanism that had dominated French philosophy in the postwar years, largely under the guidance of Jean-Paul Sartre.[12] There is, Derrida proposes, another way to question humanism, and this involves

> attempting the exit and the deconstruction without changing terrain, by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic, by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house, that is, equally, in language. The risk here is one of ceaselessly confirming, consolidating, *relifting [relever],* at an always more certain depth, that which one claims to be deconstructing. The continuous process of making explicit, moving towards the opening, risks sinking *[risque de s'enfoncer]* into the autism of the closure. (135)[13]

Alone, however, this is still not enough, and Derrida goes on to suggest that there is no "simple and unique" (135) choice to be made between the two methods of challenging humanism. A "new writing," he concludes, "must weave and interlace the two motifs" (135),[14] and the apocalyptic desire to leap wholly beyond needs to be married to the recognition that "[t]he outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority" (1976, 35). This, in short, "amounts to saying that it is necessary to speak several languages and produce several texts at once" (1982, 135).[15] The ease of speed and the speed of ease had found themselves called into question.

Given the unfashionable status of antihumanist theory at the present moment, it would be easy to argue that "we" do not really need Derrida to tell "us," in an essay written some time ago, that the antihumanists were somewhat wide of the mark. Their moment, the story so often goes, has passed. Why would cultural critics interested in posthumanism want to bother with Derrida's dense and difficult prose when they have the thrilling, far newer work of Donna J. Haraway,

N. Katherine Hayles, Chris Hables Gray, and Elaine L. Graham on their shelves? I certainly do not want to suggest that "we" stop reading books like *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (Haraway 1991), *How We Became Posthuman* (Hayles 1999), *Cyborg Citizen* (Gray 2001), and *Representations of the Post/Human* (Graham 2002). I do, however, want to bring Derrida into the picture, to theorize posthumanism from a position made possible by his work.

I think that Derrida's reluctance to be seduced by the "apocalyptic tone" bears repeating today, as posthumanism begins to find its feet within the academy.[16] It seems to me that many are a little too quick to affirm an absolute break with humanism, and a little too reluctant to attend to what remains of humanism in the posthumanist landscape.[17] From one perspective, this is perfectly understandable: posthumans are far more exciting, far sexier than humans. To misquote Haraway, I, for one, would rather go to bed with a cyborg than a "Man" of reason.[18] But someone has to do the dirty work: humanism requires attention (and, as my argument unfolds, I hope to show why this phrase should be understood in all its senses). The familiar, easy announcements of a complete change of terrain, a pure outside, need to be complemented by work that speaks to humanism's ghost, to the reappearance of the inside within the outside. Both halves of the signifier in question demand attention: posthumanism, as I have argued elsewhere, is as much *post*humanist as it is post*humanist* (2001, 13).[19]

This should not be read as a regressive or reactionary gesture. To engage with humanism, to acknowledge its persistence, is not necessarily to support humanism. Derrida's call for critics to repeat "what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic" is by no means a demand for a simple, straightforward repetition of those concepts. Deconstruction, rather, as he has insisted on various occasions, consists in repeating things *"in a certain way,"*[20] in order to expose the overwhelming uncertainty of even the most apparently certain discourses. If the version of posthumanism that I am trying to develop here repeats humanism, it does so *in a certain way* and with a view to the deconstruction of anthropocentric thought. If the pure outside is a myth, it is nonetheless possible to "lodg[e] oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it" (Derrida 1978, "Violence," 111), to reveal the internal instabilities, the fatal contradictions,

that expose how humanism is forever rewriting itself as posthumanism. Repetition, that is to say, can be a form of questioning: to restate is not always to reinstate. And while there may be a fine line between insurrection and resurrection, the risk, I think, must be measured against the alternative, for, as Hayles shows so well, there is nothing more terrifying than a posthumanism that claims to be terminating "Man" while actually extending "his" term in office.

DESCARTES'S MONKEY, OR SIMIANS, CARTESIANS, AND PRIMATE (RE)VISIONS

How might this somewhat abstract theory actually be put into practice? I have tried elsewhere to work through some of the implications of my approach with reference to Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (also known as *He, She, and It*) and Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Badmington 2000, "Posthumanist"; 2001). Here, however, I want to travel further back in time, to the seventeenth century and a figure who might well be called one of the founders of humanism.

When Descartes writes about what it means to be human, his words exude certainty, security, and mastery. Near the beginning of the *Discourse on the Method*, for instance, reason is held aloft as "the only thing that makes us men and distinguishes us from the beasts" (1988, 21). This essential "power of judging well and distinguishing the true from the false . . . is naturally equal in all men" (20), and it is precisely this ability to determine the truth that convinces Descartes of his human being: "*I think, therefore I am*" (36).[21]

The truth of the human, of what it means to be human, lies, that is to say, in the rational mind, or soul,[22] which is entirely distinct from the body:

> Next, examining attentively what I was, and seeing that I could pretend that I had no body and that there was neither world nor place where I was; but that I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist; and that on the contrary, simply because I was thinking about doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed; whereas, if I had merely ceased thinking, even if everything else I had imagined had been true, I should have had no reason to believe that I existed; I knew from there that I was a substance whose whole essence

> or nature is solely to think, and who, in order to exist, does not require any place, or depend on any material thing. So much so that this "I," that is to say the soul, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body. (Descartes 1988, *Discourse on the Method,* 36)[23]

Although the *Meditations*, published four years after the *Discourse on the Method*, concede that there is some kind of link between the mind and the body, the fundamental dualism is soon reaffirmed:

> [W]hen I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is cut off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. (1988, *Meditations,* 120)

The human being, in this account, is completely known, knowable, and present to the very being that is engaged in the meditation on what it means to be human. As Jean-François Lyotard once put it: "the genre of first-person narration chosen by Descartes to explain his method . . . confesses . . . the effort of the 'I' to master every given, including itself" (1992, "Missive," 36). *I think, therefore I am*.

But if Descartes is famous for his descriptions of the human, he also told fascinating stories about the inhuman. There is, in fact, a passage in the *Discourse on the Method* that reads to me like seventeenth-century science fiction (and, not being a philosopher, this is the only way that I really know how to approach Descartes).[24] If, the argument runs, there were a machine that looked like a monkey, it would not be possible to distinguish between a real monkey and the fake—at the level of essence—because the fact that neither the animal nor the machine could ever exercise rational thought means that there would be no essential difference. Both figures are, in Descartes's eyes, ultimately inhuman. If, however, machines were to attempt to simulate humans, "we" would, for two simple reasons, always be able to tell the difference between the true and the false:

> The first of these is that they could never use words or other signs, composing them as we do in order to declare our thoughts to others. For we can certainly conceive of a machine so constructed that it utters words,

> and even utters some regarding the bodily actions that cause certain changes in its organs, for instance if you touch it in one spot it asks what you want to say to it; if in another, it cries out that you are hurting it, and so on; but not that it arranges them [the words] diversely to respond to the meaning of everything said in its presence, as even the most stupid *[hébétés]* of men are capable of doing. Secondly, even though they might do some things as well as or even better than we do them, they would inevitably fail in others, through which we would discover that they were acting not through understanding *[connaissance]* but only from the disposition of their organs. For whereas reason is a universal instrument which can be of use in all kinds of situations, these organs need some particular disposition for each particular action; hence it is impossible to conceive that there would be enough of them in a machine to make it act in all the occurrences of life in the way in which our reason makes us act. (44–45)[25]

The human, in short, is absolutely distinct from the inhuman over which it towers in a position of natural supremacy. *I think, therefore I cannot possibly be an automaton*. But what if that wonderfully confident humanism pulled itself apart? What if the "ontological hygiene" that Elaine L. Graham (2002) locates at the heart of humanism were always already in crisis, always already distinctly unhealthy?

Descartes asserts his anthropocentrism on the grounds that it would be impossible for a machine to possess enough different organs to enable it to respond to the infinite unpredictability of everyday life. Sooner or later, as countless subsequent science fiction narratives conveniently testify, the truth will out. Absolute and natural difference will eventually *tell itself*. There is, however, something of a blind spot, an aporia, in Descartes's account, for if a machine—in keeping with the spirit of his fantastic scenario—were constructed in such a way that it had what might be called "an organ for every occasion,"[26] it would, *according to the letter of Descartes's own argument*, no longer be possible to maintain a clear distinction between the human and the inhuman. Given enough organs, a machine would be capable of responding in a manner utterly indistinguishable from that of a human being. Reason, no longer capable of "distinguish[ing] us from the beasts," would meet its match, its fatal and flawless double.

On closer inspection, in other words, there lies within Descartes's ontological hygiene a real sense in which, to take a line from one of Philip K. Dick's novels, *"[l]iving and unliving things are exchanging*

properties" (1996, 223; emphasis in original). Between the lines of the text, the lines of humanism cross themselves (out), and the moment at which humanism insists becomes the moment at which it nonetheless desists. Quite against his will, quite against all odds, Descartes has begun to resemble Deckard,[27] the troubled protagonist of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick 1972) and *Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982), who utterly fails to police the boundary between the real and the fake. The philosopher's monkey gets the better of him; it monkeys around with humanism. Refusing merely to ape the human, it becomes a simian simulacrum (a "simulacrian," if you will), a copy for which there is no longer an original. Humanism has slipped into posthumanism, and the *Discourse on the Method* has begun to tell a story not unlike that of Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*.

Anthropocentrism always already contains the conditions of its own transcendence.[28] Its structure, to use Derrida's words, "bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (1978, "Structure," 284); its inside turns itself inside out. I think that the trick—and this would certainly not be what Haraway calls a "god trick" (1991, 189)—is to learn what the characters who experience the strange building in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) know all too well: the straightforward distinction between inside and outside is not always that straightforward.[29] The boundaries that ought to fall into line with common sense, the laws of science and the land, turn out to be far more uncertain. Things are not what they seem. The task of posthumanism is to uncover those uncanny moments at which things start to drift, of reading humanism *in a certain way,* against itself and the grain. This clearly involves a rethinking of the meaning of the "post-," and while Derrida's philosophy implicitly demands a cautious approach to the prefix in question, Lyotard's writings on the postmodern might be more immediately relevant to the work of theorizing posthumanism along these lines.

IS THERE SOME "THING" I SHOULD KNOW? OR THE TRAUMA OF HUMANISM

Following the publication of *La condition postmoderne* (1979), Lyotard spent much of the rest of his life urging his readers to resist easy,

complacent understandings of the postmodern. Essays such as "Answer to the Question: What Is the Postmodern?" (1992) and "Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'" (1992) repeatedly confounded popular opinion by insisting, among other things, that the postmodern should not be seen as a historical period and even that postmodernity comes *before* modernity. It is, however, to a text first published in 1987 that I want to turn here.

"Rewriting Modernity" opens with the suggestion that its title "seems far preferable to the usual headings, like 'postmodernity,' 'postmodernism,' 'postmodern,' under which this sort of reflection is usually placed" (Lyotard 1991, 24). Developing his earlier insistence that the signifier *postmodern* "simply indicates a mood, or better, a state of mind" (1986/87, 209), Lyotard goes on to declare that:

> Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity, and first of all modernity's claim to ground its legitimacy on the project of liberating humanity as a whole through science and technology. But as I have said, that rewriting has been at work, for a long time now, in modernity itself. (1991, 34)

Modernity and postmodernity, that is to say, should not be thought of as entirely distinct entities: postmodernity is the rewriting of modernity, which is itself "constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity" (25). The "post-" is forever tied up with what it is "post-ing." This is no cause for despair, and should not for one moment be confused with Habermas's claim that modernity is a project that still calls for (and, moreover, is capable of) completion.[30] Lyotard's postmodern, on the contrary, attends to the modern in the name of *questioning*. The "re-" of the rewriting, as he puts it, "in no way signifies a return to the beginning but rather what Freud called a 'working through'" (1991, 26).

The brief paper to which Lyotard is alluding at this point was composed in 1914, shortly after Freud had completed his analysis of the Wolf Man, and makes an important theoretical distinction between remembering *(Erinnern),* repeating *(Wiederholen),* and working-through *(Durcharbeitung)*. The latter term refers to the delicate situation that arises when a patient initially resists the procedure of analysis. "One must," Freud stresses,

> allow the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to *work through* it, to overcome it, by continuing, in defiance of it, the analytic work according to the fundamental rule of analysis. Only when the resistance is at its height can the analyst, working in common with his patient, discover the repressed instinctual impulses which are feeding the resistance; and it is this kind of experience which convinces the patient of the existence and power of such impulses. The doctor has nothing else to do than to wait, and let things take their course, a course which cannot be avoided nor always hastened. (Freud 1953–74, 155; emphasis in original)

The traumatic event cannot be remembered as such, cannot be simply and surely re-presented to consciousness. But neither can it be forgotten, for if the patient could turn his or her back on the past, he or she would not require the help of the analyst. This strange condition, this twilight zone, is the predicament of *anamnesis*. Faced with such a situation, analysis must move slowly. "This working-through of the resistance," Freud concludes, "may in practice turn out to be an arduous task for the subject of the analysis and a trial of patience for the analyst" (155). There can be no simple settling of scores, no sudden breaks with the troublesome past.

Lyotard is quick to heed Freud's warning. Cultural analysis, he proposes, can learn from psychoanalysis. Modernity, that monstrous "Thing" with which postmodernity is trying to come to terms, must be worked through, patiently rewritten: "Rewriting, as I mean it here, obviously concerns the anamnesis of the Thing. Not only that Thing that starts off a supposedly 'individual' singularity, but of the Thing that haunts the 'language,' the tradition and the material with, against and in which one writes" (Lyotard 1991, 33). And it is precisely this elaborate, laborious, labyrinthine rewriting that Lyotard names postmodernity.

I want to borrow Lyotard's borrowing, to carry it—along with the work of Derrida—to the space of posthumanism.[31] Both thinkers, it seems to me, invite a careful (re)consideration of the signifier in question. From a perspective informed by their thought, the "post-" of posthumanism does not (and, moreover, cannot) mark or make an absolute break from the legacy of humanism. "Post-"s speak (to) ghosts, and cultural criticism must not forget that it cannot simply

forget the past. The writing of the posthumanist condition should not seek to fashion "scriptural tombs"[32] for humanism, but must, rather, take the form of a critical practice that occurs *inside* humanism, consisting not of the wake but the working-through of humanist discourse. Humanism has happened and continues to happen to "us" (it is the very "Thing" that makes "us" "us," in fact), and the experience—however traumatic, however unpleasant—cannot be erased without trace in an instant. The present moment may well be one in which the hegemony and heredity of humanism feel a little less certain, a little less inevitable, but there is, I think, a real sense in which the crisis, as Gramsci once put it, "consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born" (1971, 276). The scene is changing but the guard is not. Not yet, not now. A working-through remains underway, and this coming to terms is, of course, a gradual and difficult process that lacks sudden breaks. An uneasy patience is called for.[33]

Ted Mooney's haunting novel *Easy Travel to Other Planets* knows and writes this very demand. In its strange near-future world, humans—called on in countless ways to rethink established assumptions about their relationship to the inhuman—are beginning to experience "a new emotion, one that no one had ever felt before" (1992, 186). But these are early days, for the characters and the text cannot yet name this feeling. "It's like . . . I don't know," someone remarks, "it's like being in a big crowd of people without the people. And you're all traveling somewhere at this incredible speed. But without the speed" (108; ellipsis in original). Travel to a wholly other space, a purely posthumanist problematic, is not easy, for tradition is still working, being worked through, worked over, worked out. Or, more precisely (and this is probably the most difficult point to grasp), it is working through *itself*.[34] "We" ignore this at "our" peril, for speed no longer signifies success or succession.[35] And if this gentle, gradual working-through is at once an engagement with humanism, it does not follow that things stand still, that the deliberate reckoning with the weight of tradition means a blindness toward things to come. If, to invoke Celan, there are still songs to be sung beyond the human, posthumanism marks the recognition that humanism, always already in disharmony with itself, forever sounds of other airs, other heirs. "Questioning," as Heidegger once insisted, "builds a way" (1977, 3),

and I think that questioning humanism—posthumanism itself—begins to build ways for being different in the future. "We" have nothing to lose but "our"selves.

Notes

Earlier versions of this paper were given at the University of Warwick, the University of Oxford, and at the Third Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference, University of Birmingham, in 2000. I owe special thanks to my copanelists in Birmingham, particularly Bart Simon. Iain Morland and Julia Thomas generously commented on previous drafts.

1. See Derrida (1984), "Of an Apocalyptic Tone." For a related discussion of the problems of apocalypse, see Derrida (1984), "No Apocalypse, Not Now."
2. I take the latter to be the counterpart, the terrible twin, to what Jill Didur usefully names in her contribution to this volume, *critical posthumanism*.
3. Laura Bartlett and Thomas B. Byers reach similar conclusions about *The Matrix* in their timely contribution to this issue. For a related point, see Wolfe (1999).
4. For a somewhat different approach to the problem of what remains in the apparently posthumanist moment, see Botting (1999). While my account will call upon Derrida and Lyotard in an attempt to question the assumptions of some contemporary versions of posthumanism, Botting enlists Jacques Lacan to tell a fascinating story about the return or the resilience of the Real in these allegedly hyperreal times.
5. I take the question of what *desists* from Lacoue-Labarthe (1998).
6. *Time*, January 3, 1983, 3.
7. Well, almost. Deep within the issue in question (26–27), the editors—in what was surely a desperate attempt to shore up humanism—listed several human "runners-up": Menachem Begin, Paul A. Volcker, and Margaret Thatcher. I resist the temptation to interpret the choice of the latter as yet another instance of humanism merrily siding with the inhuman.
8. Letters page, *Time*, January 24, 1983.
9. I owe thanks to Marjorie Garber and Rainer Emig for pushing me, in a seminar on posthumanism at Cardiff University in 1999, to think further about this figure.
10. For a fine account of how these and other thinkers addressed the demands of antihumanism, see Soper (1986).
11. Translation modified. For the original French wording, see Derrida (1972, 162).
12. Sartre was, of course, quite happy for his philosophy to be described as humanist. See, in particular, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946), a title translated for some inexplicable reason as *Existentialism and Humanism* (1997).

13. Translation modified; emphasis in original. For the original French wording, see Derrida (1972, 162).

14. Translation modified. For the original French wording, see Derrida (1972, 163).

15. Translation modified. For the original French wording, see Derrida (1972, 163).

16. Or, more precisely, on what Bill Readings (1996) describes as the ruins of the university.

17. My targets here are certainly not Haraway, Hayles, Gray, or Graham, all of whom adopt—in different ways—a measured approach to the question of the posthuman. I am, rather, thinking of figures like Hans Moravec (1988) and Robert Pepperell (1997).

18. See Penley and Ross (1991, 18): "I would rather go to bed with a cyborg than a sensitive man, I'll tell you that much."

19. The turn of phrase here is an allusion to the description that Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe provide of their own work near the beginning of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985, 4): "But if our intellectual project in this book is *post*-Marxist, it is evidently also post-*Marxist*."

20. For a particularly memorable use of the phrase in question, see Derrida (1976): "The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it" (24; emphasis in original).

21. I have modified the translation here in order to preserve the more familiar rendering of Descartes's most famous phrase. For the original French wording, see Descartes (1984, 100).

22. The two terms, as John Cottingham (1992, 236) has pointed out, are synonymous in Cartesian thought.

23. Translation modified. For the original French wording, see Descartes (1984, 100–102).

24. I briefly alluded to this particular moment in Descartes's text in my introduction to *Posthumanism* (2000, 3–4), but lacked the space in that context to work through the complexities and, moreover, the contradictions of Descartes's position.

25. Translation modified. For the original French wording, see Descartes (1984, 134–35).

26. This wonderful phrase was suggested to me by Catherine Belsey.

27. I am by no means the first person to play on this virtual homonym. See, for instance, Žižek (1993, 12) and McCarron (1995, 264).

28. I owe this sentence, or something like it, to Bart Simon.

29. Derrida, of course, makes several appearances—some "real," some "fake"—in Danielewski's book.

30. See, for instance, Habermas (1981).

31. Since this essay was written, Iain Chambers has published *Culture after Humanism: History, Culture, Subjectivity* (2001), a wonderful book that also works with (and through) the theories of Lyotard and Freud in an attempt to rethink the relationship between humanism and posthumanism.

32. I take this beautiful phrase from de Certeau (1988, 2).

33. For more on Derrida's remarkable patience, see Easthope (2002, 140).

34. I thank Malcolm Bull for encouraging me to "work through" this aspect of my argument in more detail.

35. I am thinking here of the now archaic use of the term to mean, in phrases such as "Send me good speed," prosperity or success. Posthumanist cultural criticism needs, I think, to remember and repeat this very obsolescence.

Works Cited

Badmington, Neil. "Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism." In *Posthumanism*, ed. Neil Badmington, 1–10. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000.

———. "Posthumanist (Com)Promises: Diffracting Donna Haraway's Cyborg through Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*." In *Posthumanism*, ed. Neil Badmington, 85–97. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000.

———. "Pod Almighty! or Humanism, Posthumanism, and the Strange Case of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*." *Textual Practice* 15, no.1 (2001): 5–22.

Beard, Steve. *Logic Bomb: Transmissions from the Edge of Style Culture*. London and New York: Serpent's Tail, 1998.

Botting, Fred. *Sex, Machines, and Navels: Fiction, Fantasy, and History in the Future Present*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Chambers, Iain. *Culture after Humanism: History, Culture, Subjectivity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

Cottingham, John. "Cartesian Dualism: Theology, Metaphysics, and Science." In *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham, 236–57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Danielewski, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*. London: Anchor, 2000.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Writing of History*. Trans. Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Derrida, Jacques. "Les Fins de l'homme." In *Marges de la philosophie*, 129–64. Paris: Minuit, 1972.

———. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

———. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, 278–93. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

———. "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas." In *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, 79–153. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

———. "The Ends of Man." In *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, 109–36. Hemel Hempstead, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982.

———. "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)." Trans. Catherine Porter. *Diacritics* 14 (1984): 20–31.

———. "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy." Trans. John P. Leavey Jr. *Oxford Literary Review* 6, no. 2 (1984): 3–37.

Descartes, René. *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences*. Paris: Bordas, 1984.

———. *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*. In *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 20–56. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

———. *Meditations on First Philosophy in Which Are Demonstrated the Existence of God and the Distinction between the Human Soul and the Body*. In *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 73–122. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* London: Panther, 1972.

———. *A Scanner Darkly*. London: HarperCollins, 1996.

Easthope, Antony. *Privileging Difference*. Ed. Catherine Belsey. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Freud, Sigmund. "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through: (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-analysis II)." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al., 24 vols., 12: 145–56. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953–74.

Graham, Elaine L. *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

Gray, Chris Hables. *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age*. New York and London: Routledge, 2001.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity versus Postmodernity." Trans. Seyla Ben-Habib. *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3–14.

Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991.

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

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question concerning Technology." In *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, 3–35. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London and New York: Verso, 1985.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*. Ed. Christopher Fynsk. Trans. Christopher Fynsk et al. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Minuit, 1979.

———. "Rules and Paradoxes and Svelte Appendix." Trans. Brian Massumi. *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986/87): 209–19.

———. "Rewriting Modernity." In *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, 24–35. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

———. "Answer to the Question: What Is the Postmodern?" In *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982–1985*, trans. Julian Pefanis et al., 87–93. London: Turnaround, 1992.

———. "Missive on Universal History." In *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982–1985*, trans. Julian Pefanis et al., 33–47. London: Turnaround, 1992.

———. "Note on the Meaning of 'Post-.'" In *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982–1985*, trans. Julian Pefanis et al., 9–25. London: Turnaround, 1992.

McCarron, Kevin. "Corpses, Animals, Machines, and Mannequins: The Body and Cyberpunk." In *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows, 261–73. London: Sage, 1995.

Mooney, Ted. *Easy Travel to Other Planets*. New York: Vintage, 1992.

Moravec, Hans. *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Mary M. Innes. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1955.

Penley, Constance, and Andrew Ross. "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway." In *Technoculture*, ed. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, 1–20. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Pepperell, Robert. *The Post-Human Condition*. 2d ed. Exeter: Intellect Books, 1997.

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. Paris: Nagel, 1946.

———. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Trans. Philip Mairet. London: Methuen, 1997.

Soper, Kate. *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*. London: Hutchinson, 1986.

Wolfe, Cary. "Faux Post-Humanism, or Animal Rights, Neocolonialism, and Michael Crichton's *Congo*." *Arizona Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (1999): 115–53.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993.