

What's Wrong With Posthumanism?

Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus

[a] Theory has always been aware of its other(s). It could scarcely have been otherwise. Theory's own sustained and variegated concern with the nature and structure of alterity, [1] the unignorable realities of the institutional and interdisciplinary "resistance to theory," [2] and dissension within theory's conceptualities and constituencies have all contributed to otherness being constitutive of theory. [3] One might even want to hazard the kind of provocation which would say, in the tradition of statements like "deconstruction is justice," [4] "theory *is* otherness." To speak of *Theory's Others*, as this collection of *Rhizomes* invites us to do, is therefore potentially to speak of everything within and without theory: to include everything and exclude nothing according to a logic of such capacious comprehensiveness that differences between the proper and the other become almost obscured. Hence for the sake of rigor, if for nothing else, a narrowing focus must be selected here. And ideally it would be one that could allegorize the general relation between theory and otherness.

[b] Accordingly we should like to take as our cue the fact that the title *Theory's Others* might encourage perceiving theory in terms of some characterizable univocity that might be individuatingly other to something else. In very practical terms, one implication of that would be that theory stands in an apprehensibly distinctive relation to diverse disciplinary and notional practices within the university. Such a conception risks overlooking the extent to which theory has been shaped by a remarkable tendency towards miscellaneity. Derrida acknowledges this when speaking of theory as "an original articulation of literary criticism, philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and so forth." [5] The suggestion is that theory depends more on an aggregation rather than a harmonization of constituent discourses.

[c] That theory is always already an encounter of alterities, with minimal desire for any coalescence of discipline-forming and integralizing perspectives and protocols, is confirmed by Jonathan Culler in the opening to his accessible but nonetheless shrewd introduction to theory. Culler speaks of theory as a "miscellaneous genre," made up of "an unbounded group of writings about everything under the sun," and extending (in a list far more miscellaneous than Derrida's) to "works of anthropology, art history, film studies, gender studies, linguistics, philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, science studies, social and intellectual history, and sociology." He goes on to suggest that theory internalizes alterity through the fact that it "has come to designate works that succeed in challenging and reorienting fields other than those to which they apparently belong." Consequently "the works in question become 'theory' because their visions or arguments have been suggestive or productive for people who are not studying these disciplines." [6] On that basis theory cannot help itself being always already other—and that because of a quasi-foundational relation between theory's miscellaneity and its very (e)strange(ing) affiliatedness-cum-otherness to diverse disciplinary integralities.

[d] One result of what Culler draws attention to is surely that other disciplines will not be able to recognize (in all the senses of this term) theory. To them theory renders other that which should be familiar. Of course, this non-recognition of what might have been proper can lead to all sorts of interdisciplinary tensions. It is therefore significant that, on the rare occasions when the different "denominations" of theory have tended to

put up a united front, this has tended to happen when theory was being attacked from the "outside." A good example is the notorious Sokal affair. That polemic was important because it came to overshadow theory's nature as miscellany. What was targeted was theory's tendency to distort what it borrows. [7] Sokal's attack, it will be recalled, was intended to demonstrate that much within theory, especially when seeking engagement with scientific concepts, is characterized by "meaningless or absurd statements, name-dropping and the display of false erudition," as well as "sloppy thinking," "bad philosophy," and "glib relativism." [8] A number of figures in the theoretical canon—Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Jean Baudrillard, for instance—were singled out for some very specific rubbishing. [9] Whatever one's opinion on the justifiability of those attacks—and the jury on that is still out—it identified theory as liable to a certain *gaucherie* in those interdisciplinary situations where the conceptualities aggregated to theory's repertoire originate not from the humanities, but from without. One might, of course, want to contest the whole issue of whether conceptualities should properly "belong" anywhere, especially in view of the fact that theory's investment in the possibilities of "living on borderlines" would both critique and be critiqued by attempts to protect disciplinary essentialities. [10] But the import of the attack is clear. It has to do with the possibility that there might be some discourses, or aspects of some discourses, which theory's miscellany just cannot arrogate to itself. That, of course, raises some very serious questions not only on the viability of interdisciplinarity generally, but also on whether theory should continue to configure itself, to think of itself, as a miscellany. Those questions, however, can go against theory's grain. A conference held in June 2003 on the subject of theory's futures—"Whither Theory?"—reasserted the principle that "the word 'theory' can only be understood in the plural." [11] This points to a blind spot of theory, located at theory's reluctance to think its "whithering"/withering in terms of possible limits to its plurality and miscellaneity. For that reason, the question driving our essay is both urgent and dramatic. What would happen if theory were to encounter a discourse to which it finds it cannot quite extend affiliation, and which it therefore aggregates to its miscellany uneasily, if at all?

[e] We should like to explore that issue on the basis of identifying posthumanism as a discourse that appears to be less amenable to theory's inclusiveness than most. We are curious to see whether posthumanism will emerge as "yet another" mode of theory's being, thereby confirming the flexibility and capaciousness of theory's miscellany, or whether it will emerge as unnegotiably "other" to theory, thereby asserting a "proper" resistant to the latter's appropriation. Through this reading of theory's and posthumanism's reciprocal readability to each other, we should be able to arrive also at some conclusions on the broader relations between theory and its disciplinary others.

2. Theory and Posthumanism: Is One Open to the Other?

[f] *Posthumanism*, as the name of a discourse, suggests an *episteme* which comes "after" humanism ("post-humanism") or even after the human itself ("post-human-ism"). Implicit in both these articulations is a sense of the supplanting operations wrought by time, and of the obsolescence in question affecting not simply humanism as displaced *episteme* but also, more radically, the notion and nature of the human as fact and idea. Neither of these is a particularly novel notion. The end of humanism has been amply announced and even chronicled in the past, while the end of the human is a familiar topos in countless apocalyptic narratives from *Revelations* through H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* to *The Matrix*. Posthumanism, therefore, might be the study of formulations of various terminalities and apocalyptic scenarios, especially when these are approached according to certain distinct associations involving "the posthuman condition." This is seen by Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, in an inaugural text, as "denoting a world in which humans are mixtures of machine and organism, where nature has been modified (enculturated) by

technologies, which in turn have become assimilated into "nature" as a functioning component of organic bodies." [12] In truth, however, "there is no consensus on what the posthuman portends," not least because how the posthuman is constructed and imagined varies so widely." [13]

[g] Nevertheless, some recurrent definitional strategies in regard to the posthuman persist. There is, most powerfully, the focus on the human-machine symbiosis already witnessed above. There is Hayles's very influential quadripartite characterization, in her book *How We Became Posthuman*, of the equivalence of the posthuman to all of the following: scepticism about life being inevitably dependent on "embodiment in a biological substrate"; a readiness to see consciousness as an "epiphenomenon" and a "minor sideshow" in determining "human identity"; a willingness to regard the body as an "original prosthesis" whose principle can be extended; faith in the promise of "seamless" articulations with "intelligent machines." [14] There is, as a variation, the focus on the "cybernatural" and the "postnatural," pointing towards "the possibility of forms of vitality which do not find their support in the organic processes of matter . . . but rather in the arena of the artificial," such that "the cybernatural designates any practice which uses the space of the virtual screen as a space of 'second nature' through a conflation of information with vitality." [15] One could trawl for further characterizations of the posthuman, but the import should be fairly clear by now. Posthumanism is the discourse which articulates our hopes, fears, thoughts, and reflections at a post-millenarian time haunted by the prospects of technology's apparently essential and causal link with the finiteness of the human as a biological, cognitive, informational, and autonomous integrality.

[h] With all of these notions to its name, posthumanism cannot fail to be provocative. It stands to irk all of the following: defenders of humanism; those who in the face of current and impending technologies dedicated to the reengineering of the human wish to remain secure in the integrality of human-ity and indeed of the human-ities; those who are sceptical of apocalypticism generally; those who prefer to read the post not according to a logic of successiveness that makes it tempting to study "how we became posthuman," but according to "a procedure in 'ana-': a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy and anamorphosis which elaborates an 'initial forgetting'." [16] It is also potentially irksome to all those loyal to a concept of culture that would be letter-ed rather than digit-al, for posthumanism embraces everything that might be born in the space of a cultural moment that George Steiner recognized some time ago as having become increasingly numerate rather than literate. [17]

[i] On the basis of all of this, therefore, posthumanism is bound to provoke theory as well. Elsewhere we have considered the nature of that provocation in some detail. [18] Here we should like to focus attention on the extent to which posthumanism and theory might be "other" to each other, why they might be getting the other wrong, and the implications of this reciprocal misreading for the issue of "theory's others" generally. To do that, however, we shall have to be extremely clear-minded on what it is exactly that is "other" to something else. For if it is true, as suggested in the first section of our essay, that theory speaks with more than one voice and not necessarily harmoniously, and if it is also true that posthumanism is itself, as declared above, "constructed and imagined" variously, then the "otherness" of theory and posthumanism to each other is surely going to be characterized by a continuum of modalities that runs from opacity (where neither will be able to read the other in any form) to opportunity (where it becomes possible for at least one instantiation of the one to read at least one expression of the other). We should like to consider the extremes of this continuum: the situations where theory and posthumanism cannot help being other to each other, and those where opportunities open up for the overcoming of this irreconcilability.

[j] A lot will surely be gained if we were to contrast those extremes on the basis of an encounter between one constituent of "theory" and one constituent of "posthumanism." This goes against the tendency to speak

of specific theoretical discourses in the plural—hence, for instance, the currency of "feminisms" or postmodernisms" [19] — and thereby runs counter to the insistence that a discourse can be plurally other to itself and resist univocity. But to speak of "theory in the plural" and "posthumanisms" would be unhelpful here, as what needs to be communicated is a more precise sense of how and why the apparent lack of affinity between specific modes of either discourse keys broader differences and alterities. Which "modes" of theory and posthumanism, therefore, might usefully be contrasted? As far as theory is concerned, we have chosen to speak of deconstruction. Perhaps this potentially contentious privileging of deconstruction as a preeminent mode of "high" theory, in a manner that seemingly downplays theory's other constituencies, should be explained. Indeed: why deconstruction and not, for instance, everything that has emanated from the work of Michel Foucault, whose attention to what he referred to as "technologies of the self" and to the question "What are we today?" appears to prompt reflections not irrelevant to an understanding of the posthuman? [20] Why, also, not Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose references to "the body without organs" might be considered unignorable in contexts addressing the posthuman? [21] After all, Deleuze himself—as if to further reinforce conviction about his unignorability in contexts like the present, and not coincidentally in a text where he was commenting on the work of Foucault—tended to speak with startling appositeness about the posthuman even when he was not invoking it "as such":

The forces within man enter into a relation with forces from the outside, those of silicon which supersedes carbon, or genetic components which supersede the organism, or agrammaticalities which supersede the signifier. In each case we must study the operations of the superfold, of which the "double helix" is the best-known example. What is the superman? It is the formal compound of the forces within man and these new forces. . . . As Foucault would say, the superman is much less than the disappearance of living men, and much more than a change of concept: it is the advent of a new form that is neither God nor man and which, it is hoped, will not prove worse than its two previous forms. [22]

[k] There is no doubt that this is tantalizing, that it demonstrates the scope for a broadly sourced review of the relations between theory and posthumanism, and that it hints that those relations might in fact be more characterizable by reciprocity rather than alterity. If all that is not being addressed in its rich and tempting fullness here, and if what is broached instead proceeds through deconstruction, it is partly because of the pressing if mundane need for a concentrated succinctness. In a paper of this length, where focus must prevail over comprehensiveness, a review of the affinities or otherwise between theory and posthumanism proceeds most effectively through staging an encounter between a representative of the one and a formulation of the other. And as it happens, deconstruction appears to be the discourse which is most often taken to be most metonymically representative of theory—as indicated, for instance, by the fact that Herman Rapaport's *The Theory Mess* views theory's fortunes according to the ebb and flow of deconstruction's. [23] In addition, in a manner that immediately raises the issue of antagonistic relations with "others," deconstruction has a record of embroilment in some of theory's most momentous conflicts, both when these have been internecine but also when they've engaged with discourses unassimilated by theory. One recalls, for instance, Jacques Derrida's responses to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Searle, Alan Sokal, and Jacques Lacan himself. [24] Crucially, the first of those responses will provide, in what follows below, a particularly instructive analogy with the (non-)response of theory to the posthuman, and is a further reason why we are granting deconstruction such attention here. There is, additionally, the fact that the most focused theoretical consideration of "resistance to theory," Paul de Man's essay by that name, is perceivable as deconstructionist in its outlook and strategies.

[l] From posthumanism, meanwhile, we have chosen to speak of transhumanism. The transhuman is a particularly uncompromising expression of the posthuman and one that sets up an intriguing contrast with

deconstruction as an expression of theory. To appreciate this, and to properly engage with transhumanism, one must necessarily go online, for instance to «<http://nanotech-now.com/extropian.htm>». This already spells out one important difference in regard to deconstruction. The latter, we should recall, is fascinated by "the literality of literarity," and by the fact that literature is the discourse most engaged by the mysteries of the letter. [25] Although there have been attempts to conceive deconstruction away from a print-bound determinism—one might recall here that Geoffrey Bennington would have liked to "systematize J. D.'s thought to the point of turning it into an interactive program"—the impression persists that deconstruction remains a fundamentally print-bound, *bookish* discourse. [26] The medium of the transhuman, meanwhile, is certainly not bound to the order of the book. Let us overlook, for a moment, the supremely salient fact that the proper medium of the transhuman is the human itself—as that which must be written upon, worked upon, in its status as an incomplete state or intermediate stage to something more "finished" in its "seamless articulation" with technology as prosthesis. What remains then is to acknowledge that a high proportion of crucial documents in the area is available as electronic copy. As transhumanism is therefore already a discourse more digital than print-bound, readers of this essay are invited to follow up the hyperlink rather than the footnote trail. Particularly relevant will be sites like the one above, indicating that *transhumanism* refers to "philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values." And while they surf, readers might also wish to try the following links:

«<http://www.transhumanism.com/>»

«<http://www.aleph.se/Trans/Global/Posthumanity/>»

«<http://www.maxmore.com/becoming.htm>»

«<http://www.kurzweilai.net/>»

[m] Assuming that our readers have returned from their surfing, they will have experienced the disjunction of returning from such electronic "texts" to this context, where textuality remains a primary concern. For that is a major difference between deconstruction and diverse modes of the posthuman. The former is interested in the nature of textuality and language. The latter is interested in language only insofar as this could enhancedly mediate what it wants to express—as, for instance, through the "Lextricon"

(«<http://www.extropy.org/ideas/lextropicon.html>»), which defines some of the neologisms that seek to achieve linguistic adequation to the "extropian vision." This has to do with the concept of "extropy" ("the extent of a system's intelligence, information, order, vitality, and capacity for improvement"), and with acceptance that posthumanism refers to the possibility for "unprecedented physical, intellectual, and psychological capacity, (and) self-programming, self-constituting, potentially immortal, unlimited individuals."

[n] Opposed to all that is deconstruction's scorn for outlooks sold on uncritical futurology, [27] as well as its defining concern with language. Paul de Man had characterized the resistance to theory as "resistance to the use of language about language." [28] Posthumanism, in its most extreme formulations, gives a startling demonstration of that resistance: "Post-Humans never get bogged down in arguments about language. The scholars and humanists will always try to restrict debate to the battleground of language because they know no one can win." [29] Very significant and in marked contrast to that is what occurs in another essay from the deconstructionist "canon." Derrida's "The End of Man," though it does contain the tantalizing phrase "one may imagine a consciousness without man," approached the subject promised by the title not according to any remotely posthumanist vision but in terms of the relation between humanism and metaphysics, and in the spaces opened by the intersections of Hegel's, Husserl's, and Heidegger's thought. [30] This apparent incommensurability between deconstruction and transhumanism makes one wonder

about the possibility of an underlying lack of affinity between theory and posthumanism, and whether it might in turn allegorize a mutual impenetrability between theory and its others. To accept the viability of that allegory on the basis of the evidence provided so far might seem hasty, but as we argue below it is significant that the relation between deconstruction and transhumanism does seem liable to be one where they would tend to behold each other with suspicion, even prejudice.

[o] The significance of that can start to emerge more clearly if the nature of prejudice within interdisciplinary and indeed *intradisciplinary* contexts is considered. Now prejudice happens to be a modality of the relation to the other which has been studied to some purpose in the context of the notoriously abortive encounter between deconstruction and another of theory's "denominations," hermeneutics. Philippe Forget explains that

(i)n the course of organizing a meeting in April 1981 between Gadamer and Derrida□these figureheads of two conflicting currents in Western philosophical thinking□I did not intend to force an encounter between them. At most, I was hoping that this event (if indeed there was one, and nothing is less certain) would make a contribution towards forming the conditions under which these two currents of thought would confront each other head-on rather than mutually avoiding each other□in other words, that they would agree to subsume denial (*déni*) within the challenge (*défi*). As it turned out, the encounter would uphold denial, at the challenge's expense. [31]

Might it not be instructive to inquire why such an encounter between "what are often taken to be clashing, even mutually exclusive standpoints" [32] *within theory* proved abortive and upheld the *déni* rather than the *défi*□especially since it might throw light on the relations between deconstruction and the transhuman and thence on those between theory and the posthuman, with the latter discourse being *possibly within and possibly without theory*? In this light, it is telling that Forget remarks that Derrida's response to Gadamer was marked by "aloofness" and even "apathy." [33] That (non-)reaction foiled a number of eager expectations. Gadamer's view that "the success of dialogue depends on the continuing willingness of its participants . . . to 'give in' to language, to be carried along by the conversation for the purpose of letting meaning emerge in an 'event' of mutual understanding" had been expected to be brought in Paris into more articulated relation with the Derridean alertness to "how otherness lurks within meaning," to "the irreducible equivocation and undecidability of meaning" which leads to the spoken word being always "an already disrupted sign, infiltrated by absence." [34] What emerged in Paris instead was the contrast between a theoretical outlook believing that otherness is negotiable through language and another theoretical outlook believing that the difference and deferral in language will only entrench otherness.

[p] That nothing much happened in this drama of alterity, where what was at stake was precisely the otherness to each other of two of theory's constituencies, may ultimately have had something to do with the fact that Derrida found a central postulate of hermeneutics somewhat underwhelming:

During the lecture and ensuing discussion yesterday evening, I began to ask myself if anything was taking place here other than improbable debates, counter-questioning, and inquiries into unfindable objects of thought□to recall some of the formulations we heard. I am still asking myself this question.

We are gathered together here around Professor Gadamer. It is to him, then, that I wish to address these words, paying him the homage of a few questions.

The first question concerns what he said to us last evening about 'good will,' about an appeal to good will, and to the absolute commitment to the desire for consensus in understanding. How could anyone not be tempted to acknowledge how *extremely evident* this axiom is? [35] (emphasis added)

The phrase *extremely evident* is damning. Its positive associations, which have to do with what is consensually acknowledged to be very recognizably relevant and opportune, are undercut by the phrase's negative connotations, which suggest that what is generally obvious risks growing unconvincing and insipid. And of course it is possible to be "aloof" and "apathetic" about the extremely evident out of a desire to conceal not bothering having an opinion about what is tediously obvious in what the other is saying. Now what it was that Derrida seems to have found extremely evident in Gadamer concerned a constitutive prejudice of hermeneutics. Forget explains the latter thus:

(Gadamer's) is a universality enclosed in itself, since it exists only under the condition of universalizing its own constitutive prejudices. An interpretive practice of this type cannot be active—that is also to say, transforming—because it replenishes itself only from itself, or more exactly from this founding prejudice which is not simply identifiable with the thought that it leads or lures, since, according to the all-powerful logic of *adaequatio* under which one can subsume Gadamer's thought, that thought itself must assimilate the founding prejudice (to the point of no longer seeing it as a prejudice), which in return would maintain itself (as the founding prejudice) at a distance which thought cannot cross. One could only say that it embodies it (*elle l'a incorporé*). [36]

This explanation of Forget's is of course something of a deconstruction of Gadamerian hermeneutics. It is tempting to suppose that Derrida, as the foundational figure in deconstruction, would already have intuited the thrust of what Forget reveals about hermeneutics and, all too aware of his own prejudice (as pre-judgement) about another system's constitutive prejudice, felt discretionary aloofness to be the better part of valorous engagement.

[q] The reader will have realized why indulgence in that temptation is relevant here. For is it not thinkable that the relation between transhumanism and deconstruction, were they to look upon one another, would proceed on the basis of a similar instant recognition that, as far as either was concerned, the other was being "extremely evidently" unconvincing? Would not the result be that they would look past each other, and aloofly avoid encounter? On those grounds, the phrase *Theory's Others* could refer not only to those discourses which oppose or stand outside theory, but also those which theory (or its discourses) reads disinclinedly, perfunctorily, or always already with a prejudicial perspective on their alterity—as when deconstruction opts not to meet hermeneutics, or when deconstruction and transhumanism remain unconvincing to each other. It may well be that on this basis deconstruction's and transhumanism's alleged irreconcilability to each other's prejudices *and* predilections prefigures theory's broader apathy about the posthuman generally. As an example: theory's investment in the "linguistic turn" would seem to predispose it to bias against much that is associated with "cybernetic syntax" [37] and with the "cybernetic turn" in biomedicine and the biosciences more generally." [38] Correspondingly, posthumanism's investment in a temporal logic of straightforward successiveness, allowing for progression and teleology, will mean that it has little patience for what will appear to it as theory's over-refined problematization of "the meaning of post-" and its interest in "languages of the unsayable." [39]

[r] Perhaps, however, it would be hasty to believe that these two discourses will be unable to rise above their prejudices against each other. For while it is fair to suppose that prejudice, in the sense defined by Forget as a "preliminary verdict before the final judgment," [40] might prevent one discourse from giving time to another, it is in fact by no means clear that theory and posthumanism have not encountered each other already and profitably. Although this is not a bibliographical essay, it is worth referring here to a number of engagements with the posthuman that appear to have extended theory's constituency in that direction. For instance Hayles, while giving time to Moravecian speculation on the possibility of downloading human consciousness onto a computer and to scenarios involving Artificial Life, is attentive also to prefigurations of

the posthuman in literature and culture. [41] That is taken further by Elaine Graham in a study which, together with the work of Joseph Tabbi, is arguably the most extensive review of representations of the posthuman in contemporary popular culture but also in literature's genealogies. [42] Also useful is Neil Badmington's *Posthumanism*, which provides an anthology of theoretical texts which can with hindsight be construed as prefiguring posthumanist concerns. [43] There is also a wealth of other studies delving further into related issues, including the landmark *The Cybercultures Reader*, Chris Hables Gray's ongoing work on cyborgs, culture, and the popular imagination, and frequent considerations of the posthuman in sundry articles appearing in journals like *Science Fiction Studies*. [44] And of course it is impossible to forget that feminism, as one of theory's most prominent constituencies, was there at the inception of posthuman awareness and indeed played a formative role in its development through Donna Haraway's foundational texts in the field, most notably "The Cyborg Manifesto." [45] Nor can a context like *Rhizomes* overlook, as was anticipated above, the amenability of the posthuman to what was glimpsed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their work on "the body without organs." So in the face of all that, why should one think that posthumanism and theory are mutually exclusive?

[s] In response it might be observed that what does tend to be privileged in a number of the studies mentioned is an orientation of theory that distances itself from poststructuralist concern with the "literality" of texts and signification to one where the mode of theory becomes more identifiable with an extension of cultural studies. This might also be happening as the logical culmination of what Antony Easthope referred to over ten years ago as the process of literary studies giving itself over to cultural studies. In much the same way, theory is arguably more and more about "culture" rather than literature or psychoanalysis or philosophy or metaphysics, and to that extent perhaps compromises on a specificity that might almost be what is most proper to it: that is, to deploy again a far-reaching phrase from de Man, the concern with the use of language about language. In this ever more numerate age, cultural studies is itself now closer to what has been called, in a term synonymous with posthumanism, "new cultural theory": a field engaged with all that happens in the wake of "machinic modulations." [46] And how could that not happen, it might be said, when posthumanism is so obviously relevant and opportune and the objects of its study so ubiquitous in the midst of the contemporary interest in everything ranging from the mapping of the human genome to the pervasiveness of cyborgs in popular culture? It appears that it would be unconscionable to be uninterested in the posthuman. Theory, in reading the posthuman, is only adequating itself to this cultural and epistemological moment all too aware of the precariousness of the humanist heritage and of the diverse apocalypses that think the end of the human. And if, in the process, the place of the literary, the philosophical, and indeed the theoretical is reconsidered, that is only in reflection of the rethinking of their relative urgency in a culture where the pressure of digitality might well cue a de- or rehierarchization of discourses.

[t] There is a niggling worry, therefore, that posthumanism is in the process not so much of being appraised by theory as going along with it. Theory's strength has always been its claims on the radical, on "thinking otherwise," on problematizing that which appears commonsensical. [47] It would be a pity were it not also to think the posthuman according to that ethic but also in terms of poststructuralism, which has tended to be the discourse in theory most inclined to "undoingly" *reading* other discourses. One fancies that posthumanism might not be worse off in the long term if it were itself to get the poststructuralist "treatment." Before we explain why that is important, however, let us acknowledge that it would be imprecise to believe that there has been no poststructuralist engagement with posthumanism. Of course this is not going to sanction any glib assertions to the effect that posthumanism has always already been poststructuralist, but the two discourses might not be as mutually exclusive as they might prejudicially appear. This would be

clearer if we were to consult what is perhaps a more poststructuralist reading of the posthuman than most, R. L. Rutsky's *High Technē*. Rutsky's approach indicates how it is possible for a warning sounded by Derrida in "The Ends of Man" to be heeded. In that essay Derrida had said the following:

Any questioning of humanism that does not first catch up with the archeological radicalness of the questions sketched by Heidegger (in "Letter on Humanism"), and does not make use of the information he provides concerning the genesis of the concept and the value of man (the reedition of the Greek *paideia* in Roman culture, the Christianizing of the Latin *humanitas*, the rebirth of Hellenism in the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, etc.), any metahumanist position that does not place itself within the opening of these questions remains historically regional, periodic and peripheral, judicially secondary and dependent, whatever interest and necessity it might retain as such. [48]

Can there be any doubt that these words spell out the risks for theory's engagement with the posthuman, and indeed for the posthuman itself—and that despite not speaking about the posthuman as such? Rutsky, for his part, does not himself invoke these lines, but the response to Heidegger's reflections on technology exerts a formative influence in his study. His book eschews the temptation to merely extend theory's fields of operation to the posthuman and instead undertakes a *questioning* of the posthuman. [49] For is it not true that posthumanism, like logocentrism, or phonocentrism, or psychoanalysis, or religion, or democracy, or law—all of which have been insightfully deconstructed—is itself in need of being critically read? Otherwise Derrida's warning that theory might be too reactive in its engagement with anything "metahumanist" would ring true also of posthumanism. And it is in fact clear to us that when theory and posthumanism meet, as they have done in some of the studies cited, it is by and large the former that undertakes more self-transformation. A simple, even crass test will prove that: while some theorists strive to grapple with cyborgs and Artificial Life, is there any indication that those wowed by transhumanism are open to terms like *différance* or even *rhizomes*? Would they be attuned, for instance, to David Wills' philosophical investigation of the nature and experience of the prosthetic? Just as importantly, if not more, *would they be ready to regard theory as a parable for the posthuman*, in the manner of Brian Massumi's investigation of the virtual through Deleuzian and Foucauldian perspectives? [50] If not, could it be because posthumanism's tonality, topicality, and the ubiquity of its objects appear to have paralysed a more general attunement to theory's capacity to question the posthuman? Might not the effects of such an engagement pervade and enhance, in time, popular apprehension of the posthuman?

[u] It is because of this that we call, at the end of this section, for a "critical posthumanism," for more work of the kind attempted by commentators like Rutsky, Wills, and Massumi, and for more attention to theoretically informed studies of the virtual like those provided (to cite further examples here of what, happily, is in fact not a denuded field) by Mark C. Taylor, Rosi Braidotti, and, indeed, Jean Baudrillard. [51] The absence of a critical posthumanism would mean that reactions to posthumanism would remain, to echo Derrida's "The Ends of Man," "historically regional, periodic and peripheral, judicially secondary and dependent, whatever interest and necessity it might retain as such." Theory would therefore do well to contrive a "metaposthumanism," with the *meta-* understood not in the sense of any of the totalizing impulses theory critiques elsewhere (as in its readings of "Western metaphysics"), but according to a signalling of theory's disposition to step back from the general breathless excitement over the digital, the cybernetic, and the technologically prosthetic to cast a sober, evaluative eye over posthumanist orthodoxy. Theory has done that with other discourses in the past, and "for humans' sake" it should do it again with posthumanism.

4. What Is Wrong with Posthumanism (If Not Theory)? What Is Wrong with Theory (If Not Posthumanism)?

[v] After the above appeal, it is best to return in this concluding section to the question of theory as miscellany. Is posthumanism going to be another mode of theory or one of "theory's others"? We feel that what has been reviewed amply suggests that theory has already aggregated posthumanism to its miscellany to a very significant extent. We are not reassured that the accommodation has been as critically transformative as it might have been, but that is not to say that the two discourses have remained opaque to each other. Yet the opacity is not uniformly overcome, not least because theory does not act concertedly. Its sundry constituents set up contrasting encounters with posthumanism, which is itself heterogeneous, and this again signals the importance of distinguishing between the various kinds of encounter engaged in by the very miscellaneous modes of theory and posthumanism. [52] With that proviso in place, it is possible to reassert that posthumanism is *de facto* a discourse within theory, and that this will become "officialized" once introductions and companions to theory recognize that. [53]

[w] In conclusion it is important to acknowledge also that a review of posthumanism's and theory's apprehensibility to each other necessarily connects not only with the question of "theory's others," but also with that of interdisciplinarity. Indeed, on occasions where the (non-)encounter between one theoretical discourse and another grows abortive, as happened with that between deconstruction and hermeneutics but arguably not with that currently proceeding in a range of contexts between theory generally and posthumanism, there cannot fail to be implications not only for theory, but for the practice of interdisciplinary exchange generally. Perhaps Bernasconi's positive gloss on the (non-)encounter in Paris between Derrida and Gadamer, which comes to stand in representation of all instances (not simply those within theory) of not reading the other, is too panglossian: "Is it the task of thinkers to try to come to an agreement across their languages? Could they do so without opting for the flatness of unitary understanding? Or is it enough if at rare moments they intersect with one another and in such a way that the contours of their thinking are highlighted? Is it not enough for that thought to have received new definitions□and further dispersal□by the new contexts in which it appears?" [54] It is, in fact, not clear that this is enough, but at least as far as theory and posthumanism are concerned there can be no doubt that there have been some intriguing redefinitions and dispersals of what might previously have been thought to be respectively proper to each.

[x] For that reason it is opportune to explain that our title, "What's Wrong with Posthumanism?" ought to be understood not only in the sense of "what is it about posthumanism that might need to be 'corrected,'" but according to the more querulous tonality of "what's so wrong about posthumanism□it's actually not a bad thing at all" For theory, indeed, an attention to the posthuman is no bad thing; it can thereby extend its repertoires and constituency to something that is so evidently topical and "in," but without abdicating the task of probing posthumanism's weaknesses. For on this Gadamer, when probing the nature of encounter between discourses, was surely right. Such an encounter should proceed according to "what Plato called *εὐμενεις λενχοι* (*eumenis elenchoi*)," that is, according to an ethic that holds that "one does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person has to say in order to prove that one is always right, but one seeks instead as far as possible to strengthen the other's viewpoint so that what the other has to say becomes illuminating." [55]

[y] On the back of this we should like to give some brief space, at the end, to some remarks on how theory itself might be enhanced by its engagement with the posthuman. And we should like to do so by asking whether posthumanism might be synonymous with what has been termed "post-theory," or the time "after theory," or "the future of theory." [56] Is posthumanism, in other words, what theory does when it starts to have intimations of its mortality? The editors of the volume *Post-Theory* are illuminating about the fact that theory has been pathologically interested in its own death, so that it might be thought that there would be

nothing new about theory's jitteriness before the posthuman. [57] But there is, discernibly, a qualitative difference between the standard doubts over theory's longevity, and current reflections on where theory is going. What is astounding is that relatively little space is in fact being given to the implications for theory of everything definable under "posthumanism." Valentine Cunningham, for instance, speaks comprehensively of the options for theory at a time when we read "after theory" (though as he makes it clear, can one ever not read after theory?)□but there is little space given to the challenges of the digitally and cybernetically extra-textual. Significantly, such engagements tend to occur not in print, but electronically; see, for instance:

«<http://www.cyberartsweb.org/cpace/>»

«<http://tekhnama.free.fr/>»

«<http://eserver.org/cultronix/>»

Cunningham, meanwhile, cites from "a list of 115 deplorable Theory items" the U.S. National Association of Scholars has drawn up to help identify whether a department is given to what might be called "theorese"; remarkably, there is little that might be classifiable under posthumanism (see «www.nas.org»). [58] The blindness in question, if blindness it be, is therefore not solely his, but theory's generally. Correspondingly, one turns to Rabaté's *The Future of Theory*, and specifically to the chapter "Theory, Science, Technology," with admiration for its sensitive rereading of a constitutive "scientificity" of theory; again, however, the specific challenge of the posthuman is ignored. [59] We have not picked on these two books, for which we in fact have great respect, willfully. Rather it is because for all their profound insight in other matters, both studies seem unwittingly symptomatic of a general neglect of the portents of the posthuman for theory's future development and practice. Nor are we, thereby, contradicting ourselves□just in case the reader feels unable to square that statement with our prior indication that, on the strength of a number of studies, posthumanism is already a discourse of theory. True: there exist works which seek to orient theory's passing in the posthumanist moment, but those works represent a paltry proportion of what theory is miscellaneously doing now. The suggestion is that theory's concern with the posthuman remains marginal. It seems, therefore, that in the end posthumanism and theory each have a good turn to do the other, and that this involves some counter-modeling. For it is at least thinkable that if what's wrong with posthumanism has to do with the fact that it might not be theoretical enough, what's wrong with theory might well be that it is not posthumanist enough, that it is too complacent about what it thinks it can comfortably go on doing, as if posthumanism had not come to transformingly stay. This admonition of theory is not the conclusion we would have predicted, especially as it goes against the drift of our essay, which had tended to be sterner towards poasthumanism than theory. But it is the one to which, in the end, we inevitably feel compelled.

Notes

[1] See, for instance, Jacques Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Alterités* (Paris: Osiris, 1986), and Shoshana Felman, ed., *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading□Otherwise*, *Yale French Studies* 55-56 (1977).

[2] See Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-20.

[3] For examples of dissension within theory at different times, see Herman Rapaport, *The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

- [4] Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," trans. Mary Quaintance, *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1990): 945.
- [5] 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), 29.
- [6] Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.
- [7] Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science* (1998; London: Profile, 1999).
- [8] Alan Sokal, 'What the *Social Text* Affair Does and Does Not Prove', in *After the Science Wars*, ed. Keith M. Ashman and Philip S. Baringer (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 17.
- [9] See Sokal and Bricmont, where separate chapters are devoted to each of these theorists.
- [10] See Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Borderlines," trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom and others (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 75-176.
- [11] See «www.cf.ac.uk/encap/sections/cct/conference/english/home.html». for information on the "Whither Theory?" conference, *Centre de recherches en anglistique* (Paris X), 19-21 May 2003. A number of the papers presented at the conference are available online, at the same address.
- [12] See Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 10, and Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, "Introduction: Posthuman Bodies," in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 1-19.
- [13] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 251.
- [14] Hayles, 2-3.
- [15] Catherine Waldby, *The Visible Human Project: Informatic Bodies and Posthuman Medicine* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 121; see also Sean Cubitt, "Supernatural Futures: Theses on Digital Aesthetics," in *FutureNatural: Nature, Science, Culture*, ed. G. Armstrong and others (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).
- [16] Jean-François Lyotard, "Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'," in *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, ed. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (1986; London: Turnaround, 1992), 93.
- [17] George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 114.
- [18] See our "The Irresistibility of the Posthuman: Questioning New Cultural Theory," in *Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)resistibility of Theory*, ed. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus (Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press, forthcoming in 2004).

- [19] See Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, rev. edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); and Charles Altieri, *Postmodernisms Now: Essays on Contemporaneity in the Arts* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).
- [20] See Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self" and "The Political Technology of Individuals," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988), 16-49 and 145-62.
- [21] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1992), 149ff.
- [22] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (London: Athlone, 1988), 131-32.
- [23] See this opening statement by Rapaport of his rationale: "*The Theory Mess* is an account of the general reception of Jacques Derrida's work in Anglo-American academies, since the story of this reception provides insight in the field of critical theory within these academies over roughly the past thirty years" (p. xi).
- [24] See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988); the contributions to *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (State University of New York Press, 1989) hereafter *DD*; "Sokal et Bricmont ne sont pas sérieux," *Le Monde*, 20 November 1997, 17; "Le facteur de la vérité," in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (1980; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 411-96.
- [25] Maurice Blanchot/Jacques Derrida, *The Instant of My Death/Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 23.
- [26] See Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (1991; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.
- [27] See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms About Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms and Other Small Seismisms," in *The States of 'Theory:' History, Art and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
- [28] De Man, p. 12.
- [29] Robert Pepperell, *The Post-Human Condition*, 2nd edn (Exeter: Intellect, 1997), 183.
- [30] Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," in *Margins of Philosophy*, ed. Alan Bass (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 118.
- [31] Philippe Forget, "Arguments," in *DD*, 129.
- [32] Diane (P.) Michelfelder and Richard (E.) Palmer, "Introduction," in *DD*, 1.
- [33] Fred Dallmayr, "Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue," in *DD*, 77 and 86.
- [34] Michelfelder and Palmer, 1-2.

- [35] Jacques Derrida, "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer," trans. Diane (P.) Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, in *DD*, 52.
- [36] Forget, 143.
- [37] Hayles, 113.
- [38] Waldby, 19.
- [39] See Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).
- [40] Forget, 137.
- [41] See Hayles, chapters 1 and 7, and Graham, *passim*.
- [42] See Graham, and Joseph Tabbi, *Cognitive Fictions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- [43] Neil Badmington, ed., *Posthumanism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).
- [44] David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, eds, *The Cybercultures Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Chris Hables Gray, ed., *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- [45] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.
- [46] See Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), and *Angelaki* 4:2 (1999): "Machinic Modulations: New Cultural Theory and Technopolitics".
- [47] All of these issues are addressed in various contributions to Martin McQuillan and others, eds, *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
- [48] Derrida, "The Ends of Man," 128.
- [49] See R. L. Rutsky, *High Technē: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), particularly the introduction.
- [50] See David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), and Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
- [51] See Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. Julia Witwer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- [52] See Rapaport, pp. 147ff. and 2ff, for further reflections on theory's lack of univocity and the implications of the Derridean *faux bond*, or "non-show," when different discourses engage each other.
- [53] Proof that this is already happening is provided in the last chapter of Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley's *Critical Humanisms: Humanist/Anti-Humanist Dialogues* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), called "Technological Humanism (Foucault, Baudrillard, Haraway)," and in the Conclusion, subtitled "Inhuman, Posthuman, Transhuman, Human."

[54] Bernasconi, in "Seeing Double: *Destruktion* and Deconstruction," in *DD*, 250.

[55] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reply to Jacques Derrida," trans. Diane (P.) Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, in *DD*, 55.

[56] See Valentine Cunningham, *Reading After Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

[57] McQuillan, ix ff.

[58] Cunningham, 14.

[59] See Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), chapter 3.
