An amazing achievement of the cluster of essays on the possible discursive world of the posthuman—published in the last issue of *JAC*—is that it enables us to imagine what it might be like if experience were no longer contained in the biological vessels we now inhabit as selves, but were instead, through cybertechnological shareware, permitted to spill out into self-conscious networks of identity. These essays are about escaping the condition whereby the individual human organism is entirely dependent on culturally mediated signification—trapped, that is, in the prison-house of signifying systems, in a realm of hybrid consciousness represented by the cyborg (or the junkie). In this state, communication could create a perfect community, a global post-McLuhanesque village.

There is great pleasure in contemplating this escape from the limits of corporeality, and much profit in considering how technologies might transform the integrated consciousness of self-identity into an ensemble of "distributed processes," as John Muckelbauer and Debra Hawhee suggest. In their illustrating example, drawn from David Cronenberg’s film and eponymous virtual reality game *eXistenZ*, virtual experiential input is blended into each player’s experience through a “game pod” that is plugged into a bioprot at the base of the spine, turning players into “biologic-machinic complexes.” It must be said that “*eXistenZ*,” the game, raises dystopian anxieties for this reader, for whom Susan Brownmiller’s discussion in *Against Our Will* of the function of prison rape came immediately to mind.

In varying ways, the cluster of essays on the posthuman explore what happens when the self is ruptured, transcended, dispersed; when it is reconfigured in the performance of hacking (Gunkel); when it is reinscribed as a synthesis of culture and nature (Brooke); when it is monetized as capital (Nealon); when it is uploaded into silicon or at least flash frozen (Doyle); and when it is leached away in bodily fluids (Harold). One might read these essays futuristically: as extrapolations or speculations, suggesting what the posthuman experience of cybertechnology might be like. That is the way I first read them.

One might also read these essays as discursive productions of the present, as texts inhabiting a shared historical moment, and therefore as
This way of reading would obey Fredric Jameson’s critical imperative: always historicize. Accordingly, one would always include in a reading those contextual and material forces that make a text intelligible, but not too obvious. One would always be on the lookout for those material interests that express themselves characteristically in a particular lexicon and tropological pattern and in a characteristic range of images and symbols.

So, for example, we might begin by asking why technology, which troubles us so much in the present, is treated so unproblematically in these essays on the posthuman future. “What are we missing here?” we might ask. And we might find an answer by meditating on Richard Doyle’s “Uploading Anticipation, Becoming-Silicon,” the most utopian of the essays in the cluster.

For Doyle, the technologies of becoming-silicon are genuinely to be anticipated. Cybertechnologies will produce the new “externalized” self in the same way that Michel Foucault believes that Christian interiority, the soul, was produced discursively through the practice of confession. Anticipation of being uploaded—“beamed up” into cyberspace—is a rhetorical effect that works like late capitalist markets in which value is the relation between what a commodity or currency was worth in the most recent past and, as Brian Rotman says, “what the market judges say it will be worth at different points in the future” (qtd. in Doyle 850).

Markets, however, are only for people of means. Most would concede, I think, that technologies have historically been ways to enrich some and, more frequently, to despoil, dispossess, and even destroy others (see Braun in this issue of JAC). While some technologies have been applied humanely, they are always in the first instance instrumental to the aggregation and regulation of social power. Technology is always for something, and indeed to represent a technology unambiguously is really to present an argument for the way it situates those who control it in their social and material environment.

Surprisingly, the relationship of cybertechnology to gender doesn’t receive much attention in these essays on the posthuman, even though technology is strongly coded male, both historically as well as in contemporary American culture. It might not be going too far to suggest that masculinity is defined in large part by its relationship to technology. This means that being a man has always meant having one’s identity distributed to some extent throughout social networks—armies, teams, gangs,
corporations, and other hierarchies—that derive their power from technologies of domination, material or symbolic.

Let me offer just a brief example of the symbolic. These words appear in the aftermath of the NFL season, with its embarrassingly masculinist displays of male identity: ritually painted men in cheeseheads and pig snouts with their torsos bared to winter weather, flailing, ranting, and jumping up and down. These are men who “belong to” the Redskins or the Raiders or some other professional football team. They are already, figuratively at least, cyborgs who have subordinated their individuality to a system of virtual domination in order to share in its aggregate power. We men have always been “uploaded subjects,” in Doyle’s term, and that may be a problem to be investigated.

In a larger sense, culture itself is software plugged into the subject’s central nervous system like the bioport gameware of eXistenZ. And I would like us to pay more attention to what happens to gender—and, in particular, to masculinity—when culture goes posthuman. Doyle begins with the film Blade Runner: “… more life, fucker,” which is the fugitive android’s ambiguous demand of his “wetware” father. It may be a demand for more experience, more time; or, it may be a demand to be artificially (or at least non-organically) replicated, as Doyle suggests. It may also be a demand to change states, to reproduce, to be a fucker himself. Sexual politics has always been about men trying to control or regulate reproduction. In the futuristic world of Blade Runner, even when DNA is no longer destiny and replication can replace reproduction, new life—more life—is still conferred by men: Tyrell, who is the originary fucker, the intellectual father of Nexus Six bodies; and Deckard, who possesses the almost maternal instinct necessary to detect the now-blurred difference that separates beings born of man and those born of woman. In the wake of the Ashcroft appointment, men will retain the power over reproductive rights. Le plus changer . . .

Collin Gifford Brooke is less sanguine than Doyle about the posthuman promise to liberate us from traditional western binary logic and the dualism that underwrites it: body/mind; nature/culture; organic/machinic. He is concerned that (post)modernism “threatens to disembody our rhetorical practices, leaving the binary between nature and culture in place even as we render it increasingly invisible with the sophistication of our information technologies” (777). This is a fair representation of my concern here, and it might be illustrated by turning to the hacker/cyberspace binary.

David Gunkel’s excellent extended analogy between hacking and
deconstruction can serve as a starting point. Gunkel sets out to “question the network of preconditions and assumptions that already inform and delimit our modes of inquiry [and that infiltrate] . . . existing systems of rationality” (797-98). He proposes hacking as a means of questioning assumptions that are “too often taken for granted” (798). However, hacking, like deconstruction, is a two-edged sword: once we agree to destabilize meanings, our own preconditions and assumptions are liable to become decipherable.

In what follows, then, I want to attend to the representation of hacking in Gunkel’s essay, being on the lookout for patterns of signification that might uncover the cultural work that hacking does in reproducing a gendered understanding of the world and, in particular, that would betray the social relations enabling white men to perpetuate our privileged position—to profit, that is, from our social capital—in tomorrow’s cyber-economy. Of course, I myself am uncomfortably aware of inhabiting just such a gendered position: a place where it’s possible to use a theory—a piece of cultural software—to hack the “rationality” of these essays and, in so doing, to reproduce the privileged (and parasitic) role of the critic who tries to work his will on the passive, if resistant, texts that have been coerced, editorially, into this blind date.

That being said, it would be hard to avoid the conclusion that Gunkel’s rhetoric does create something of a gendered relationship between hackers and, as Andrew Ross puts it, the cyber-systems of rationality they “penetrate”: “‘hacking’ suggests an alternative mode of examination that learns, so to speak, how to enter, explore, and rework the basic systems and programs that have informed and regulated investigations of cyberspace.” Hacking “designates an activity that is simultaneously applauded for its creativity and reviled for its criminal transgressions, while cyberspace . . . is pulled in every conceivable direction by every conceivable interest” (798). Hacking consists of “particular practices and movements that only become manifest through specific performances”; and it designates “both creative innovation and a form of illicit behavior” (799). Gunkel quotes Derrida in this context on the parasitism of deconstruction: the parasite “is by definition never simply external, never simply something that can be excluded from or kept outside of the body ‘proper,’ shut out from the ‘familial’ table or house” (800). Bad-boy hackers, we learn, are “crackers,” white boys kicking ass (see Gunkel 799). And so on.

While it is true that any exercise in this kind of “unrestrained lexical drift,” as Gunkel calls it, will ultimately lead back to the primal scene, the
pervasiveness of this tropological pattern does confirm the commonplace of the hacker as (post)adolescent male, working alone perhaps but imbricated nonetheless in a loosely affiliated subculture of getting over on (transgressing) the established rules (the domesticities) of society—the trickster cuckolding proprieties.

Adopting a point from Collin Brooke, I would hope that the conversation about posthuman rhetoric would carry into the next millennium that old modernist trick of being suspicious about itself, being wary about reinscribing the hierarchies and inequities of what used to be called, fairly commonly, patriarchy and about reproducing the “ludic quietism” of what Mas’ud Zavarzadeh has called “post-ality.” Post-ality is a species of argument maintaining that heretofore unforeseen changes in the material relations between labor and capital—like cybertechnologies—render Marxist cultural critique outmoded. Zavarzadeh explains: “Post-ality is the ensemble of practices that, as a totality, obscure the production practices of capitalism—which is based on the extraction of surplus labor (the source of accumulation of capital)—by announcing the arrival of a new society which is post-production, post-labor, post-ideology, post-white, and post-capitalist” (1). We should be certain that posthumanism is not a component of post-ality.

To guard against a posthuman rhetoric that serves as a post-apologetic for capitalism—which permits that shareware of culture to reproduce extant social and economic relations—we ought to consider the extent to which hyper-reality and the distributed identities of cyborg consciousness are products of the capitalist marketplace (the connection between the two is one of Doyle’s keen insights).

Jeffrey Nealon, drawing on Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Foucault, answers emphatically in the affirmative but decides that nothing can or ought to be done about it. Nothing can be done about consumer capitalism because there is no “outside” from which one might seriously resist the “axiomatic pronouncement” Just Do It! And nothing should be done, anyway, even if it could be done, because the process of commodification must run its course: the bourgeois subjectivity that capitalism has produced is the enemy, and the enemy is us.

I suppose that this is one way to historicize the postmodern, to point out the congruence of consumer culture and the deeper social logic of multinational capitalism. As a teacher, however, I’m committed to activism, intervention, and enough optimism to believe genuine critique is liberating. Professing rhetoric commits me to the proposition that knowledge enables justice, that justice depends on knowing how things
work. If people understand how "to map the ways in which misery is produced by capital," as Nealon puts it, they might wake up one day and say, "Wait! You mean all you'd have to do is democratize capital and a thousand flowers would bloom? Let's give it a try!" However, utopian this sentiment may be, those of us who teach students to compose—to organize themselves around discursive representations of the way things are and ought to be—are obligated to make informal critical judgments about the ethics of the system that we are paid to reproduce.

To historicize the posthuman, then, I think we are obligated to ask if the hyper-world represented in the essays on which I'm now reflecting is really the "superstructural" effect of the penetration of capital into new areas of human experience. That makes a big difference to someone in the business of teaching students how to negotiate in "truth markets."

To suggest, therefore, the relationship between cyber-consciousness and hyper-capitalism, we might briefly consider green futurologist (and master of post-ality) Jeremy Rifkin's most recent work, The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where All of Life Is a Paid-for Experience. Rifkin believes that what's really going on today is a shift in the way people relate to commodities, making the very idea of "market" obsolete as a metaphor for doing commercial transactions. A better metaphor, not surprisingly, is "network." Just as dispersed consciousness has replaced integrated identity in the discourse of posthumanism, so "access" has replaced ownership as the preferred relationship to the commodity under the regime of hyper-capitalism. Products (those solid things called "goods") will increasingly be replaced by services, while at the same time industrial production based on physical capital will give way to the cultural production of intellectual property—what we might want to think of as "virtual" production and consumption. Rifkin explains:

Imagine a world where virtually every activity outside the confines of family relations is a paid-for experience, a world in which traditional reciprocal obligations and expectations—mediated by feelings of faith, empathy, and solidarity—are replaced by contractual relations in the form of paid memberships, subscriptions, admission charges, retainers, and fees. (9)

This might almost be a paraphrase of The Communist Manifesto, except that the name Marx does not appear in The Age of Access.

Rifkin argues that the commodification of human relationships and all aspects of personal experience will have cognitive effects that sound
very much like the "distributed identities" of the posthuman: "multiple personas'—short-lived fragmented frames of consciousness, each used to negotiate whatever virtual world or network they happen to be in at any particular moment of time..." and resulting in a "freeing up of human consciousness to be more playful, flexible, and even transient..." and "a more interdependent and embedded means of perceiving reality" (13).

Nike epitomizes this new cyber-economy. It is not really a manufacturer of athletic shoes so much as a virtual discourse, a "front" for dealing in intellectual property: "a research and design studio with a sophisticated marketing formula and a distribution mechanism" built in large measure on the posthuman—or rather superhuman—advertising campaigns of Weiden and Kennedy (47). Young men get a shoe manufactured in Asian sweatshops for a tenth or less of its sales price; plus, they get its exchange value: participation as "uploaded subjects" in the virtual experience of black super-athletes. So Nike will stand for the process by which western posthuman identities are produced by inhuman conditions of labor in the so-called developing world. In this instance, then, the posthuman is a ruse. Instead of liberating us, it merely hides the process by which our metropolitan "paid-for experience" is extracted from subaltern workers in the unwired world.

Not that we can't find exploitation right here in the West. The sun of global capitalism has long since set on the British isles, having now completed the consumption of the industrial working class that Engels analyzed more that one hundred and fifty years ago. Christine Harold wants us to think of the posthuman bodies of heroin addicts in the 1996 film Trainspotting "as unstable, fragmented, or even dispersed across a field of discourses," and she wants us to approach those "bodies as bodies, ... as rhetorical sites" that have ontological standing in their own right (867, 866). This is an important and timely argument particularly as we observe bodies, in places like Texas and Virginia, routinely reduced to objects of moral judgment and instrumental rationality.

To historicize Harold's reading of Trainspotting, however, I would like to understand that the bodies of addicts are meaningful not just as leaky containers of bodily fluids—although that too—but also as subjects of social class embedded in the post-industrial wasteland of urban Scotland. As Harold suggests, addiction is not a property of the "abject Other"; it belongs just as surely to my social psychology (although I get my kicks at the delicatessen, at the mall, or on a trip to Italy). This equivalence is clearest in a scene in which Renton, preparing to detoxify
himself, translates heroin into substitute commodities: "tomato soup (ten tins of), mushroom soup (eight tins of—for consumption cold), magnesia (milk of—one bottle), vitamins, bottled water, mouthwash, pornography... one bottle of Valium, already procured from my mother, who is, in her own domestic and socially acceptable way, also a drug addict" (see Harold 870-71).

When Harold writes about what might be called the "access economy" of heroin addiction in *Trainspotting*—that it represents not only the desire for bodily pleasure but "also a desire to overcome the pain that inevitably attends a life lived on heroin"—I feel compelled to add "yes, and just as certainly, a life lived under the regime of late capitalism, a life lived in terms of the social and economic redundancy present in Edinburgh" (877). This film should remind us of the dystopian possibilities of the posthuman, especially for those without capital, those who, to allude to the discourse of cryonics that Doyle cites, are more worried about getting their asses frozen before they die than afterwards.

From a cautionary perspective, then, the cluster of essays on the posthuman may suggest a post-al allegory that effectively expurgates Marx’s historical materialism. In this version, cyber- and bio-technologies take the global penetration of capital to the next (the final?) stage of history. Culture falls entirely under the instrumental control of "choice." It's plugged into the base of the spine, embedded in the brain, or wherever. The self itself becomes a market; consciousness, a paid-for experience. Meaning systems are chosen from a range of software—intellectual property—that together constitute culture. Every child can have the experience of growing up to be president.

Elsewhere, I have argued for a "post-humanist" rhetorical pedagogy that would focus on teaching students "to assemble and assimilate the fragments of postmodern experience into a coherent, self-conscious identity... by making inquiry into identity-formation itself—into the process of acculturation—the conscious topic of writing assignments..." (149). While most of the essays in *JAC*’s cluster on the posthuman would contest this objective—and all complicate it beyond anything I had in mind when I wrote those words—I think that the posthuman condition they help us imagine underscores the need for a post-humanist pedagogy. In a culture as saturated with technology as ours is, it is no longer possible (if it ever was) to determine whether a certain sequence of information is "software" that we produced or "conditioning" that produced us. We who teach have always been agents of a system that asks us to install certain software, to condition certain responses. Yet, the historical longevity of
the profession (perhaps the third oldest profession) suggests that we have the power to change things for better or worse—and to know the difference between the two.

West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

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