

BODY DRIFT

BUTLER, HAYLES, HARAWAY

ARTHUR KROKER

posthumanities 22



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BODY DRIFT

Body drift is everywhere in culture and society.

Though it was anticipated that the speed and intensity of technological change would effectively marginalize concern with the body, highlighting the digital rather than the corporeal, subordinating human flesh to data flesh, quite the opposite has occurred. Images of the corporeal body are the key visual language of contemporary politics. We may live in the shadow of an empire of cyber-power with what the German theorist Peter Sloterdijk has described as “terror from the air,” but the messianic goals of “total information warfare” are effectively stymied by bombs strapped to bodies of religious and political fighters, whether in the markets of Pakistan, the streets of Baghdad, the parched hills of Afghanistan, or the subways of Moscow. While the triumph of mass media, particularly television, may portend a future of pure simulation, the overriding cultural reality is that the image machine is itself haunted by memories of the body: bodies of missing children; crime victims; bodies of those abused, violated, accidented, disappeared. While the privileged language of genomics might anticipate a future of delirious genetic engineering, the political reality today is that the future of genomics is itself challenged by religious concerns with the sanctity of the body. Of course, the rise of religious fundamentalism is itself challenged in turn by the new body politics of gays, lesbians, transsexuals, and transgendered persons.

We are literally drifting through many different specular performances of the body, from the reactionary to the progressive, but for that, all commonly transformational, all evoking the sign

of the body as a fateful talisman of that which must be alternatively protected, forbidden, sheltered, transgressed, emancipated. There is no longer, if there ever was, a single, binding, universal history of the body, nor is it possible to speak today of the body as a cohesive singularity. Indeed, if so many issues related to bodily politics can inflect public space and private time, it is because the very meaning, both surfaces and structure, of the body has begun to drift. Body drift refers to the fact that we no longer inhabit *a* body in any meaningful sense of the term but rather occupy a multiplicity of bodies—imaginary, sexualized, disciplined, gendered, laboring, technologically augmented bodies. Moreover, the codes governing behavior across this multiplicity of bodies have no real stability but are themselves in drift—random, fluctuating, changing. There are no longer fixed, unchallenged codes governing sexuality, gender, class, or power but only an evolving field of contestation among different interpretations and practices of different bodily codes. The multiplicity of bodies that we are, or are struggling to become, is invested by code-perspectives. Never fixed and unchanging, code-perspectives are always subject to random fluctuations, always evolving, always intermediated by other objects, by other code-perspectives. We know this as a matter of personal autobiography. For all the hype surrounding discussions of the extropian bodies of technological futurism, who has not had the experience of drifting within her own bodily history, selectively but no less intensely remembering past events, measuring past against present and future, drifting episodically, randomly, between the pull of social networking technologies and the always constraining push of individual autobiography? Body drift is how we circulate so effortlessly from one medium of communication to another; it is how we explore intimately and with incredible granularity of detail the multiplicity of bodies that we have become; it is how our bodies are inflected, intermediated, complicated. It is a double movement, then: we drift within and across the multiplicity of our own bodily inflections; and the multiplicity of bodies that we have become—the who we

are and what we would like to be—is itself caught up in a larger, more heterogeneous current of code drift. Indeed, to the question, What allows the body to be such a broad category of analysis and, at the same time, not to have any apparent coherence? it might be responded that it is precisely the lack of coherence on the part of the body that is the essential, constitutive condition for the specter of the body to continue to circulate as a phantasmagoric sign of putative unity. In this case, the body can inflate as a universal sign of equivalence precisely to the extent that the *actual* meaning of the body has radically dispersed. Circuited by all the flows of power, patterned by codeworks, shaped by norms of cultural intelligibility, an object of viral invasion, with its subjectivity increasingly taking the form of possessed individualism, the body can acquire such a powerful epistemological presence as a universal sign because the bodies that we are or would like to become are themselves increasingly dispersed, intermediated, unfinished, spliced, straining.

Nothing is as imaginary as the material body. Circulating, fluid, borderless, with no certain boundaries or predetermined history, the body has no meaning today other than its intermediations, no autobiography that does not possess its own hauntologies, and certainly no drift that does not leave a trace of its presence. There definitely are codes of gender that can be transgressed only at the price of punishment, but there are always gender drifters who remix, recombine, and resplice the codes of gender performance. There certainly is a disciplinary regime of sexuality, but there are also sex-code drifters who make of their own sexual assignment an opportunity to transgress the codes, to refuse the normative, to overcome the predetermined. Against class inequities burned into disciplined, laboring bodies, there are class drifters who make of their own protesting, rebelling, insurgent bodies a marker of the struggle for freedom. While the age of specialization resulted in the definitive separation of the senses, body drift begins with a grand unification of the human sensorium.

In genomics, new scientific theories focused on “genetic drift”

support an image of the body deeply influenced by random fluctuations, shaped by accidental events, and inflected by the vicissitudes of material history. In the artistic imagination, representational depictions of the bounded body of modernist times have been challenged by images of bodies circulating, crossing boundaries, in flux with no definite purpose or certain direction. In cinema, body drift is the visual essence of powerful visualization of bodies of the future, with their complex intermediations of code, flesh, and desire. Interpolated by ideology, addressed by power, circulating within the image vectors of mass media, mobilized within vast data archives, and, at all times and places, deeply inflected by questions of gender, sexuality, race, and class, the body today knows only drift in its mediated surfaces and deepest biological structures. Always circulating at the edge of codes old and new, knowing no certain boundaries, never simply a product of gender construction or essential identity, body drift is our real technological autobiography.

That contemporary body politics focuses today with such elemental ferocity on highly contested attempts to freeze the circulation of bodies, codes, and histories is probably motivated in large part by the actual, objective presence of body drift as the animating energy of culture and society. The political theorist Wendy Brown has evocatively described our current politics as powerfully marked by “states of injury,” namely, by powerful psychological reaction-formations generated by deep and lasting attachments to anger from any perceived attempts to cross sexual borders, imagine new genders, or remix bodily codes.¹ The anger directed today against body drift is palpable, diffuse, and often violent. It has, of course, its privileged targets: same-sex marriage; the bodily politics of gays, lesbians, transgenders, and transsexuals; stem cell research; reproductive rights debates. Sometimes assuming the electoral form of Proposition 8 campaigns in California, aimed at preserving the rights of heterosexual normativity, at other times adopting restrictive measures aimed at marginalizing the sudden proliferation of countersexualities, seemingly in country after country marked by

strikingly reactionary attempts to maintain the masculine as the universal signifier, body drift is under attack.

And well it might be. Both symptomatic sign and precondition of a fundamentally new way of understanding the body, the specter of body drift is a very real threat to defenders of ideological purity. More than a panic response to the sudden collapse of images of the body bound up with an *idée fixe* from the normative regimes of religion, politics, or gender, the circulation of imaginary bodies that is the essence of body drift provokes in its wake the most bitter of cultural backlash. After all, crashing boundaries open up new possibilities, but they also aggravate the most recidivist feelings, attitudes, and perspectives. But for all that, body drift cannot really be stopped. It is constituted by the blast of information culture, envisioned by artists, implicitly communicated by social networking technologies, signified by those ineffable signs of body drift—tattoos, rings, and scarification—and lived daily by remixing, resplicing, and redesigning codes: codes of gender, sexuality, class, ideology, identity. But most of all, body drift has its key theorists—Judith Butler, N. Katherine Hayles,² and Donna Haraway—whose writings provide the vocabulary so desperately required to understand the contingencies, complexities, and inter-mediations of body drift.

Contingency, Complexity, and Hybridity

Taken together, the writings of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway provide a coherent, critical, and eloquent account of body drift: its hauntologies, complexities, and intermediations. Their theorizations of the body in its complicated inflections with the languages of gender, sexuality, science, ideology, power, and politics are never reducible to description but are actually part of the discourse of the body—not as ideological prefiguration but in the subtler sense that their theoretical imaginations are directly invested in the fate of the body. To engage with their writings is to be caught up in the

language of body drift itself, exploring from within the often hidden traces of gender construction, passionately invested in the struggle for bodies that matter, understanding that the stakes of debates in cognitive science are nothing less than the future of posthuman bodies, finally leaving behind the anthropomorphic foundations of species-logic to join that spectacular trajectory represented in all its enigmatic promise by the term *companion species*.³ Indeed, if the theoretical constructions of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway capture so powerfully the essential currents of body drift, if their reflections crystallize the implosion of tightly scripted bodily regimes followed by the swift emergence of body drift—deconstructed genders, hybrid species, circulating desire, mobilized identities—this may originate in the fact that each thinker represents a very different, yet complementary, theoretical inflection.

Contingency

For example, Judith Butler literally enacts in the eloquence and precision of her writings a theory of the contingent body, its disavowals, hauntologies, repressions, and possible reflexivity. Focused at first on the disciplinary regimes associated with “compulsory heterosexual normativity,” Butler no sooner deconstructs scenes of identity misrecognition in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* than her thought is itself caught up in the larger drift of power and its resistances.⁴ In texts ranging from *Antigone’s Claim*, *The Psychic Life of Power*, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, *Undoing Gender*, and *Precarious Life*,⁵ her theoretical imagination travels well beyond the domain of heterosexual normativity, touching directly on issues of mourning and violence, with all their disavowals and politics of resentment. Everywhere in her writings, there is something resembling a faithful reenactment of what she once described as the “shameless impurity” of Antigone, a passionate evocation of that which is vulnerable, unintelligible, unknowable, unrepresentable in the human condition. Here the body is performed in its full

multiplicity: performing gender, ideology, reflexivity, melancholic subjectivity, and compulsory heterosexual normativity. As well it must be since Butler's overall thesis has everything to do with hauntologies of body drift, with the elemental fact that bodies are always between living and dying, forever destabilized between the social claims of heterosexual normativity and political ambitions toward "critical desubjectivation." For all her hopeful focus on strategies, which take advantage of any and all failures of interpellation, Butler remains a realist on the enduring presence in bodily politics of a passionate attachment to subjection. Of course, many philosophers have gone this way before: Hegel's *unhappy consciousness*, Freud's *melancholic ego*, Althusser's *interpellation*, Nietzsche's *bad conscience*. Yet Butler pursues the why of our passionate attachment to subjection with such relentlessness that the body is forced finally to confess that it is possessed—indeed, structured—by an "unconscious of power," one that operates by turning back on itself as both origin and destination. When Butler writes *Precarious Life: Powers of Mourning and Violence*, what is at stake is not only a critical reflection on the presence of Heidegger's "abuse value" in contemporary politics—ethnic scapegoating, indefinite detention, disappearances, and oppressions—but a more pessimistic assessment that the unconscious of power may, in the end, be resistant to strategies of reflexivity. But if the politics of compulsory heterosexuality, with its phantasmatic identification, reveals itself to be fully proximate to power, this can only mean that resistance to such compulsion can *only* take the form of body drift: queering bodies, ideology, politics, gender. Literally, the act of bringing into presence melancholic disavowals represents an opportunity for finally *undoing* the phantasmatic body.

Consequently, it is to the language of psychoanalysis (the incest taboo, bodily confession, the end of sexual difference) as well as to the question of the philosophy of sexuality itself (the limits of sexual autonomy, longing for recognition, gender regulations, letting the other of philosophy speak) that she turns—turns, that is, both to

reassert the deconstructive spirit of *Gender Trouble* and rethink in a new key the basic theses of *Bodies That Matter*: in her texts, what it might mean for that which has been excluded—transexuality, intersexuality, transgendered persons—to be included, not only in the normativity of society but, more to the point, in the regime of truth of feminist and queer theory. After all, like every discourse, feminist and queer theory has its particular regimes of truth, its discursive limits that are rigorously policed, and on behalf of which, both have often been reluctant to undo the question of gender in a way that would be receptive to the claims of what is perceived as a *mauvais plis*—the third term of sexuality—in such a way that the revolt of the third term of sexuality, neither pure male or pure female but intersexual, transsexual, transgendered, also destabilizes the narrative of modernity. Here gender assignment is also a way of keeping intact the ruling political binaries. When gender begins to drift, when the contingency of the body can no longer be contained within the deconstructive terms of *Gender Trouble* or the aporias of *Bodies That Matter*, what occurs in Butler's thought is a fateful inflection of gender in the direction of an ethics of kinship (*Antigone's Claim*), moral philosophy (*Giving an Account of Oneself*), predatory power (*The Psychic Life of Power*), melancholic subjectivity (*Precarious Life*), and interpellation (*Excitable Speech*). In her thought, bodily contingency drift is rendered fully, both in detail and definition.

Complexity

If the writings of Judith Butler can chronicle with such passionate eloquence the traces of the contingent body as it is simultaneously constituted by and, in turn, working through its often painful history of repression, disavowals, and exclusions, the perspective of Katherine Hayles does just the opposite. Refusing the language of psychoanalysis in favor of the new science(s) of information theory, privileging complexity theory over hauntology, the conflict

between simulation and materiality in the regime of computation over problematics involved in performing gender, Hayles' thought captures the trajectory of body drift as it becomes fully entangled with its technological condition. It is not so much that Hayles is disinterested in questions of sexual difference, gender constitution, and queering bodies as that her thought is framed by its own hauntology, namely, her increasingly urgent understanding that the history of the human as we have traditionally understood the term, not only its social imperatives and political power but also its disavowals, exclusions, and repressions, has been overwhelmed by the sudden coming to be of a fundamental shift in the order of things, specifically, the appearance of the "regime of computation" as the dominant principle in a new house of (cyber-human) being. Refusing either to blissfully celebrate the digitizing of human experience within the soft skin of code-works or to lament the passing from history of the human as the ascendant species-form, Hayles pursues a very different strategy. In her thought, the regime of computation is chronicled with such philosophical passion, literary creativity, and scientific precision precisely because Hayles has grasped deeply and immediately the *political* significance of code studies, specifically, that the arrival of posthuman subjectivity is accompanied by the complex arrival of all other things beyond the "post-": postgender, postsexuality, postidentity, and postconsciousness. A champion of neither violent apocalypse nor quiet capitulation, Hayles suggests the possibility of a new humanism developed directly at the borderline of simulation and materiality. In her perspective, the scientific language of complexity theory—dissipative structures, fluidities, porous boundaries, and bifurcations—is projected beyond the boundaries of scientific debate to become the constitutive principles of a form of humanism enabled by the regime of computation. Here the grammar of the body is shifted from exclusive concern with questions of sexual normativity and gendered identity to a creative interrogation of what happens to questions of consciousness, sexuality, power, and culture in a computational culture

in which the code moves aggressively from the visible to the invisible, from a history of prosthetics external to the body to a language of simulation fully internal to identity formation.

Indeed, in an important trilogy of books—*Writing Machines*, *How We Became Posthuman*, and *My Mother Was a Computer*⁶—Hayles elevated her concern with the unfolding development of cybernetic culture from a purely literary concern with digital humanities to a larger, and more intense, focus on the question of embodied consciousness in an age when information lost its body. Drawing the hard lesson from her interpretive history of cybernetics that the triumph of computational culture had introduced a worldview in which information was conceived as increasingly disembodied and immaterial, Hayles' project became that of introducing embodiment back into the picture and, with it, the question of subjectivity itself:

I was interested in how we could put embodiment back into the picture while not neglecting the effect on subjectivities of this disembodied notion of information. And having explored that in *How We Became Posthuman*, it then seemed to me that I should take these lessons onto my home ground of literary studies and talk about texts as embodied entities, and that led to the second book in the trilogy, *Writing Machines*, where I was developing the idea of media-specific analysis, analysis that would be attentive to the material mode in which the texts were instantiated. And since computation is looming larger and larger in our contemporary world, the third book, *My Mother Was a Computer*, was then an attempt to extend these ideas into both a theoretical and interpretive practice that would talk about intermediation as the interaction of language and code, of print and electronic textuality, and analog and digital modes of transmission.⁷

For Hayles, complexity theory is bound up with these ideas “because complexity is about multi-agent, multi-causal situations

which, of course, describes all of the social world and much of the biological world as well.”⁸ When the regime of computation, with its operating language of simulation models, replaces the signifying regimes of normativity, when the inherent complexity of recursive, “multi-agent, multi-causal situations” substitutes itself for the contingent language of disavowals, exclusions, and hauntology, then what is suddenly put at stake are received understandings of the liberal human subject. Hayles is explicit about this:

Historically the idea of the liberal humanist subject which was accompanied by notions of free will, autonomy, rationality, consciousness as the seed of identity, and so forth, was deeply bound up with causal explanations in science. It was a science that was equipped to deal with a world in which there were weak or negligible interactions between different bodies, particles, etc. And so you can see how that notion translates into the idea of an autonomous self, possessed of rationality and free will. Those ideas, those paradigms, grew up together, they mutually reinforced each other and as much as those scientific ideas contributed to knowledge and technology and so forth, their weak point was always not being able to deal very effectively with complex systems. . . . So I think that these ideas of how the dynamics of complex systems work are applicable not only to explain social systems and the natural world, but also different disciplinary formations, like in my case literature and scientific fields as well. It’s distributed, it relies on a whole infrastructure of extended cognition, it is multi-causal and intensely recursive.⁹

A visionary of the digital future, Hayles refuses received interpretations of the liberal human subject in favor of drawing the truly radical lessons to be learned from the regime of computation. Here the body of the future is enabled by distributed consciousness; augmented by extended cognition; circulated through fast-moving, recursive loops of information; always caught up in multicausal, multiagent networks of information; and all the while never

constrained by the causal but motivated by recombinant possibilities. When the “idea of the liberal human subject” is undermined by the recursive loops of complexity theory, when code replaces logos, serious implications follow for understanding the body in society. Not only are the politics of the body suddenly interpolated by the language of software as ideology but also, in Hayles’ perspective, the traditional relationship of human subjectivity to technology undergoes a historic, perhaps cosmological, revision. Rejecting the perspective of technological determinism as much as the celebration of technology as a (religious) singularity, Hayles’ cultural achievement lies in suggesting a critical perspective on technology, in which the human species limits itself to that of a “co-evolving” partner in the relationship, and, against the technical will to disembodiment and immateriality, that human subjectivity recover the possibility of embodied consciousness. Everything in Hayles’ writings anticipates depth participation by the body in the question of technology. Forgoing a perspective on technology in society in which technicity remains external to the body, Hayles explores the multiple ways by which the body has been effectively territorialized by the regime of computation. An intellectual pilgrim exploring the digital future, her writings are present at the transformation of the body literally into a writing machine, simultaneously a writer of code by also inscribing in its deepest interiority the language of code. In her writings, technological humanism finally finds its theoretical voice. Abjuring a form of thought that remains purely exterior to the object of its attention, Hayles writes out in text after text the multiplicity of bodies—scientific, literary, aesthetic, practical—that we have become in the age of distributed consciousness and extended cognition. Aligning her thought with the latest developments in neuroscience as the cultural zeitgeist of the digital age, Hayles chronicles the tentative, yet irresistible, emergence of the body wearing the skin of computation. Finding her “tutor texts” wherever she can, her writings trace the regulatory codes of the soft skin body from its first discovery in the history of

computer science proper to its later appearances in literary fiction and digital textuality and, finally, to its most recent, recursive iterations in mobility and augmentation. More than is customary for a theorist of the digital humanities, Hayles' thought runs alongside the great cultural discoveries of the twentieth-first century. And well it might, for what is really at stake in her theorizations is less a prolegomenon to a new paradigm of digital humanities—although that, too—and more the emergence of a form of thought that has successfully captured the very first glimmerings of the unfolding, yet unknowable, destiny of the deeply coded, deeply embodied multicausal, multiagent bodies that we increasingly inhabit in the regime of computation. A feminist of distributed consciousness, a scientist of the body recursive, a designer of writing machines, a poet of code studies, Hayles can recommend so insistently, and enthusiastically, the methodological strategy of “intermediations” because that is what her intellectual compartment represents in the end: an intensive, layered, recursive intermediation of the very best of the creative human imagination with the stubborn facts of a regime of computation still in the process of emerging into the light-time and light-space of society.

Hybridity

If Judith Butler destabilizes both feminism and queer theory by problematizing gendered sexuality, on one hand, and the shifting boundaries of lesbian and gay sexuality, on the other, in favor of a critical exploration of the necessarily fluid yet materially situated space of alternative forms of sexuality—transgendered, transsexual, and intersex—Donna Haraway goes one step further. Motivated by the same spirit of patient, critical deconstruction but aiming at the sexual inscriptions and gendered identities imposed by the “informatics of domination,” Haraway undermines her earlier self, the cybernetic self of her famous essay “The Cyborg Manifesto.” Whatever the reason—the slow passage of time, the immediate

pressure of political events, her attunement to the field of genetic biology, or simply a deep desire on her part to rethink the foundational logic of animals, humans, plants, and minerals—this Haraway, the Haraway of such important books as *Primate Visions*, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, and *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*—cannot, and most certainly does not, think any longer in binary terms. She has even fled the comfortable feminist space of preferring “to be a cyborg than a goddess.”¹⁰ Now she would prefer to be a “companion species”—to understand other evocative forms of communication between animals and humans. And she does not stop there but has actually written out in words the textual pleasures of a hybrid language—creative essays that are populated with asides, memories, scientific theory, political critique, part autobiography, part eloquent conceptualization. It is not only a woman’s theory, although that, too—knotted, messy, uncomfortable, full of pauses and replacements and sudden surprising juxtapositions of meaning—but something else, truly hybrid writing that honors a form of theorizing the body and that has hybridity as both its privileged object of attention and its aesthetic style.

While the thought of Katherine Hayles delivers us to a world populated with a new appearance of being—data flesh—Haraway’s concept of hybridity is different. In a way that can only be fictionally suggested by the double personality of Katherine and Kate in *Writing Machines*, the hybrid body only knows the borderlines, the intersections, the ruptures, the unsituated. This is the case for a specific reason. Neither pure information nor pure flesh, the hybrid body knots the strange experience of being digital, being plant, being animal, being mineral into a beautiful labyrinth of knowledge. Refusing to stay at the borderline of literature and science or, for that matter, of biology and feminism, Haraway explores different forms of life that appear when the borderline comes inside our bodies and *we* become the intersections, ruptures, and intermediations of our most creative imagination. All this to say that while Haraway’s hybrid body has much in common politically

with Butler's courageous resistance to the demands of heterosexual normative intelligibility and definitely shares the same sense of complexity that winds through Hayles' complex bodies, it rises beyond both complexity and contingency to become their common borderline—not a borderline conceived as a permanent line of division but as a beautifully tangled knot where profound issues raised by Butler and Hayles, from bodies that matter to mothering computers, from regimes of sexual signification to regimes of computation, finally find ways of intermingling, intermediating, and perhaps even beginning the always difficult task of working through their differences. If that is the case, this would indicate that the thought of Donna Haraway, and with it the hybrid body, may well constitute the supplement, the difference, the margin to the two poles of the contingent body and the body of complexity.

The back legend to all of Haraway's thought is the notion that today more than ever, we no longer inhabit, if we ever have, a solitary body of flesh and bone but are ourselves the intersection of a multiplicity of bodies, with life itself as a fluid intersection of humans and plants and animals and minerals. Of course, from Haraway's perspective, perish the thought that such intersections will inevitably result in romantic naturalism. To study what she has to say about powerful parallels among barbaric practices directed against primates, racial violence directed against the black diaspora, and abuse of women suggests that Haraway privileges the intersection, the knot, the intermediation, not as utopian imaginaries but as ways of deepening her epic story of domination. It is the same situation when Haraway transitions her perspective on the science of the cyborg to the politics involved in the informatics of domination. While others might conclude their studies of the very same history of technology with more utopian aspirations for "being digital," Haraway proceeds to deepen the intersection of digital technology and laboring (women's) bodies into a grisly scenario involved with the informatics of domination as the newest, recursive loop in hypercapitalist globalization.

What Hayles suggests by paying attention to the scientific language of information theory, with its fractals and recursive loops, Haraway actually practices by way of a counterscience that attends closely to knots of exclusion, tangled semiotic webs of disavowal, and disappeared intermediations. Here the scientific language of information theory meets the recalcitrant hard matter of individual life histories, material social formations, and power alignments. What results is a vision of the hybrid body that captures so comprehensively and meticulously the future adventures and often tragic histories of the multiplicity of the bodies that we inhabit precisely because it resurfaces once again a forgotten form of thought, namely, the mythopoetic discourse surrounding the four humors—Earth, Air, Fire, Water. Haraway actually has written a book or a significant essay specializing in each of the four humors: Earth is *Primate Visions*, with its entangled story of biology, paleoanthropology, and rich material histories of racism; Air is the brilliant light-stream of thought that is “The Cyborg Manifesto”; Fire is the implosive, intellectual energy of *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, with its profound intersectional themes tracing a hegemonic history of cultural domination across the gender, the species, and the machines; and finally, Water is the liquid imagination of *Companion Species*, with its circulatory flows of evocative communication among the coevolving partnership of animals and humans. Equally, in the ancient spirit of discourse, the four humors, which never were considered in isolation from one another but rather as deeply inflected, deeply complementary dimensions of the body, nature, and life itself, all of Haraway’s writings represent an eloquent attempt to begin again the conversation of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water—except this time with the addition of the distinctly new element involved with the emergence of the informatics of domination, to reconfigure the myth of the four humors to include spaces of indeterminacy, uncertainty, and unsituated hybridities. When biology itself is blasted away by technologies moving at the speed of light; when paleoanthropology is forced to accommodate power speaking in the name of neuroscience;

when companion species sometimes stumble over the bedrock of fixed genders, sexual stereotyping, and (human) species hubris; the discourse of the four humors must admit a small, but relevant, revision in the direction of Speed-Earth, Speed-Air, Speed-Fire, and Speed-Water.

If the multiplicity of bodies that we are now inhabit a world of hyper-humors, if even the most ancient understandings of the elementary matter of life have been fully penetrated by technologies of globalization and their powerful ideologies supporting heterosexual normativity, hierarchy of species, and disciplinary knowledge, it follows that we are in desperate need of a new way of being multiple, hybrid, and bodily. The singularity of Donna Haraway finds its most intense expression in the fact that producing such an imaginative reconsideration of new relations among species, bodies, and power is exactly what has gained her writing such immense purchase on contemporary intellectuality. And of course, in the way of all things historically understood, the earliest intimation of profound changes in future cultural constructions is most often found in those creative knots of thought, those brilliant intermediations, in this case, of the possibility of the hybrid body that is the intellectual legacy of Donna Haraway. Returning to the discourse of biology from which her thought originally emerged, Haraway's vision of the hybrid body is a theoretical genome intermediating past and future, an idea so germane, so suitable for its recombinant times, that it already exists as the *unconscious knowledge* of the future—not simply anticipatory, as in the case of preconsciousness, or fully aware, like consciousness itself, but resolutely the unconscious knowledge that will most certainly be carried by words, bodies, struggles, strange intersections, yet unknowable circumstances from past and present to the future. Like a shaman at the meeting of earthly racism, liquid technologies of power, digital clouds, and political fires, Haraway's thought, unconsciously but no less decisively, has reconciled the contingent and the complex into a vision of the hybridity that we are fated to become in this future-land of the present.

Theory Drift: Visions of the Posthuman Future

To study the thought of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway is to be suddenly caught up in a space and time of incommensurability, shadowed by the thought of those who have come before and yet open to new histories emergent. Definitely refusing to remain inscribed within the boundaries of canonical knowledge, they have had the intellectual courage to absorb fully into their thought the repressed instincts of melancholic culture, the nihilism of world alienation, and the profound social transformations produced by the triumph of the regime of computation. As singular representatives of a form of thought that is fully alert to its historical times, the texts of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway permit meditative entrance directly into the great crises of contemporary society, politics, and culture. Butler takes us to the edge of rethinking the boundaries of the human in a time of perpetual war; Hayles turns herself into a parodic “writing machine” to find a dwelling place for the creative imagination within the austere landscape of the culture of code; and Haraway is the one contemporary thinker to have begun the necessary ethical project of working through a new language of possible reconciliation among previously warring species.

And yet for all this, if their thought can be so brilliantly resonant of the primary crises of these posthuman times, it is probably because each of their intellectual projects bears the discernible traces of that which has come before. Indeed, in terms of my own intellectual autobiography, I began reflecting on Butler, Hayles, and Haraway after a sustained intellectual journey through the writings of Heidegger, Marx, and Nietzsche. Intent on understanding the pathways of the will as it has moved from its modern expression as a will to power to its posthuman appearance as a will to technology, I was struck by how powerfully the thought of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway completed the still unanswered, still enigmatic pleas for understanding and practice immanent to the texts of Heidegger, Marx, and Nietzsche. Not that there is any necessary logically

reductive correspondence between these two sets of thinkers, but there is one thing they hold in common, namely, a passionate intensity about registering in words not only what is avowed, coded, animated by the power of the will but also what remains marginalized, silenced, disappeared by the drift of histories that, taken in part or in whole, constitute the posthuman future. While Heidegger, Marx, and Nietzsche may have first anticipated a *human* future that would soon be dominated by the will to technology, it is my sense that it is the specific contribution of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway to have identified body drift as the fateful talisman to the *posthuman* future. In their writings, it is as if the great narratives of theoretical critique—power, sex, gender, species-logic, race, code—have been suddenly set adrift, dispersed, and yet for all that, wonderfully intermediated, entangled, and worked through. The enigma remains, of course, whether the will to technology and body drift are key circuits in a common pattern of political history that quickly ascends through the scale of domination or whether the emergence of body drift as the sign of the posthuman par excellence is only the inception of something fundamentally new, something lying in anxious balance between politically orchestrated cataclysm and an always unlegislated, unanticipated insurgence by bodies that have never mattered, never counted, never coded.

Whatever the case, mindful of the past, dissatisfied with the present, and visionary about the future, critical feminism defines in advance three major vectors of a posthuman future yet to be realized. Here the *postmodernism* of Judith Butler, the *posthumanism* of Katherine Hayles, and the *companionism* of Donna Haraway represent possible pathways to the posthuman future—pathways that both follow a logic of descent into the complexities of contemporary history and yet draw into presence a posthuman future still in the process of revealing itself. Always an uneasy convergence of opposing tendencies—received material histories of the body deeply marked by questions of class, race, and gender versus a future of increasingly virtualized body experiences—the posthuman future

is fully present in the tradition of critical feminism. For example, despite all the enthusiastic extropian visions of technologically ablated bodies driven to feverish moments of technological singularity, it is abundantly clear that the future politics of the body will continue to be contested on the familiar grounds of class, race, and gender. Indeed, it might even be said that the real impact of global technologies of communication has not been so much to realize a much-hoped-for utopia of communicative communitarianism as to expose the enduring political appeal of the most recidivist and violent traditions of sexual violence, gender apartheid, and class inequalities. In such a circumstance, Butler's singular focus on processes of "critical desubjectivation" as possible antidotes to a "passionate attachment to subjection" provides very necessary political guidance to the uncertain future of the posthuman body. Equally, Butler's reflections on the continuing ethical appeal of Antigone are all the more remarkable for their powerful anticipation of a present political history instantly distinguishable by the resurgence of political tyranny, from the new security state so integrated into the political logic of the West to the fundamental struggle between freedom and authoritarianism that is the mark of all the Arab Springs of contemporary politics. While it is still not clear what will ultimately emerge from the crossing of the posthuman syntagm, one thing is fully evident: the future history of the body will surely bear the mark of postmodern signifying processes as much as it will have its subjectivity constituted by regimes of computation. Whether the tension of living at the edge of postmodern signification and posthuman virtualities will ultimately produce forms of subjectivity receptive to the inspiring language of companion species remains to be seen. And yet, for all the indeterminacy of the future, there is no avoiding the conclusion that the multiple bodies that we inhabit are continuing pilgrimages across the landscape of postmodernism, posthumanism, and companionism.

Indeed, Butler, Hayles, and Haraway can so powerfully anticipate the most important tendencies of contemporary society

because their writings do not appear in isolation but rather complement and expand on a powerful tradition of critique elucidated in all its complexity by the different visions proffered by Heidegger, Marx, and Nietzsche. In this case, Butler can interpret Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* with such brilliance because her writing in effect "overcomes" Nietzsche's understanding of prosthetic subjectivity. In Butler's writings, Nietzsche's genealogy of liberal subjectivity, simultaneously constituted by regimes of political intelligibility and fully reactive in its dominant psychological formations, is completed in a way that fully bears the traces of its own hauntologies, disavowals, and exclusions. Equally, while Heidegger privileged an always unreconciled tension between *technē* and *poiēsis* as the essence of the language of technology, Hayles "overcomes" Heidegger by refusing to accept the terms of the binary at the heart of identity and difference, namely, by bringing to the surface of critical consciousness ways of working through the ethics of the complex, the bifurcated, the fractured, the incommensurable. It is the very same with Donna Haraway, whose thought might have begun with a powerful description of the informatics of domination as the essence of the digital commodity-form but whose lasting importance is to have introduced anew those other knots of understanding made possible by the complex hybridities and entangled life-forms of a world composed of companion species. Whereas Marx may have rehearsed in his theoretical imagination the once and future material history associated with the historical triumph of capitalist political economy, it remains the particular contribution of Donna Haraway to have articulated a chilling description of the ruins of Marx's "dead labor" in the language of the informatics of domination, while simultaneously advancing beyond Marx in her critical vision of contemporary capitalism, namely, that capitalism in the age of information culture has given rise to truly predatory forms of earth-alienation that can only be effectively resisted by ethically reconciling humans with their biomaterial companions.

Taken together, the writings of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway

constitute the leading exemplars of a new tradition of critical feminism that is all the more intellectually compelling and politically insightful because it stands perfectly poised between past and future, between, that is, its theoretical dialogue with the dark prophets of modernity—Heidegger, Marx, and Nietzsche—and its insistence that the future be thought anew in the language of the contingent, the complex, and the hybrid. In this sense, critical feminism is important not only for the content of its theoretical analysis but as a *form* of thought that captures eloquently and succinctly the key trajectories of the posthuman future. In effect, if the posthuman future promises to be fractured, bifurcated, uncertain, then why not a form of thought that is equal to its posthistorical times, one that understands from within the politics of contingency, the ethics of complexity, and the ontology of the hybrid by translating body drift into a language privileging the relational, the complicated, the partial?

Indeed, if the modern century began with the premonitory visions of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Marx, who, in the strikingly different languages of aphorism, metaphysics, and insurgency, anticipated the greater historical current of the will to technology, that century truly finds both its eclipse and its transcendence in the equally prophetic visions of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway. In this case, early intimations of body drift as a central feature of contemporary social experience are to be found in the thought of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Marx.¹¹ After all, what haunts Marx's critique of political economy is its truly ominous vision of the desiccated bodies of capitalist society: bodies that circulate in the language of exchange-value, inscribed by all the empty signs of political economy, valorized by the predatory logic of the commodity-form, and coded by the regime of capital accumulation. If Marx prophesied bodies fetishized by the commodity-form, continuously mobilized and interpellated by all the signs of propertied accumulation, Heidegger went one step further by throwing off the language of political economy in favor of a radical deconstruction of the

metaphysics of modernity. For Heidegger, the pleasure of subjugation as the constitutive ontology of contemporary subjectivity is based on the fact that production of bodily experience during the contemporary epistēmē is fully entangled in the powerful current of an emergent technological experience. Here body drift is distinguished by an increasingly technical language of ordering, coded as “standing-reserve,” with bodies always maintained in readiness for instant mobilization, reduced to an ethics of “abuse value” and invested by a social psyche marked by the “malice of strife.” With Nietzsche, this gathering current of thought concerning the fate of the body in the modern century finds its philosophical capstone. Here bodies are born in *ressentiment*, taking pleasure in making of themselves “conscience vivisectionists,” transforming bad conscience over their own repressed instincts onto convenient social scapegoats, projecting an aura of slave consciousness toward ruling ascetic priests while all the while assenting to capricious violence against the weak, the powerless, the excluded.

What distinguishes the critical feminism of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway, making of their thought something simultaneously retrospective and projective, is that their inquiries effectively represent the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century counterparts of a tradition of thought formulated in all its passionate intensity and unanswerable enigmas by Marx, Heidegger, and Nietzsche—certainly not in a reductive or reiterative sense, but in the larger meaning of critical intellectual imagination, namely, that in this renewed tradition of critical feminism, the fate of the body first theorized in the differing vocabularies of historical materialism, nihilism, and bad conscience is taken up once more. Literally, the thought of Butler, Hayles, and Haraway begins in the wasteland of modernity, that point where the cultural ravages anticipated by Marx’s dead labor, Heidegger’s completed nihilism, and Nietzsche’s bad conscience finds its most intensified, indeed globalized, experience. What makes the thought of critical feminism truly original and, indeed, of urgent importance is that while Butler, Hayles,

and Haraway fully absorb the dark legacy of their philosophical predecessors, they commonly insist on renewing the gamble of intellectual critique. Not only does their thought, individually and collectively, intensify the gathering darkness by showing in multiple registers—gender, sexuality, primates, computation—the changed order of being that is postmodern, posthuman, and postspecies experience but, in some essential respects, it effectively overturns the political economy of Marx, the metaphysical critique of Heidegger, and the philosophy of Nietzsche.

For example, in Butler's thought, the philosophical passion that is Nietzsche—the Nietzsche of the end of history, the end of subjectivity, the end of time, the end of power—finds its moment of completion and renewal. Strikingly postmodern in her reflections, Butler is one with Nietzsche in understanding that power is always a doubled sign, constituted as much by its psychic affirmations as by its necessary disavowals, exclusions, and absences. Indeed, if Butler can stipulate that the ontological formation of subjectivity is inherently "tropological," that is only to reiterate the earlier insight of Nietzsche that power is always a cynical sign, a "perspectival simulacra" that can be so seductive precisely because it is the enduring object of what Butler aptly describes as our "passionate attachment to subjection." In Butler's writings, the postmodern vision that is Nietzsche, this vision of power at the edge of discipline and seduction, finds its most faithful social historian and its most critical undermining. If Butler can write out the contemporary politics of *Precarious Life*, if she can interpret *Antigone's Choice* as the horizon of public ethics today, if she can express so eloquently the forgotten histories of bodies that don't matter in a time of militarism, sacrificial violence, and economic pestilence, that is because Butler has done that which Nietzsche intimated but never fulfilled, namely, she has descended into the logic of signification to discover its perils and possibilities. In this sense, Butler is actually Nietzsche turning back on himself, that point where the logic of the sign, the signs of gender, sexuality,

kinship, and power, seeks out that which has been disavowed, disappropriated, disowned as the once and certain talisman of new hauntologies of the posthuman—this time, though, not hauntologies in the form of a fatal curse but posthuman hauntologies that insist that the bodily memories of the disenfranchised, the dehumanized, the disavowed be translated anew into an inspiring language of political contingency.

In a similar way, if Hayles privileges an exploration of the regime of computation as opposed to Butler's interest in regimes of social intelligibility, that is because Hayles' interest lies not with the signs of the postmodern but with the codes of the posthuman. What is noteworthy about Hayles is that in her work, she explores the full consequences of Heidegger's question of technology. While Heidegger might have claimed that the rising technological reality would be based on a logic of enframing in which processes of technological ordering would be primary, it was left to Katherine Hayles to note that the passage to the posthuman would take place primarily through the ordering logic of the regime of computation. Equally, while Heidegger emphasized the reduction of being in the age of technology to a "standing-reserve" oscillating between boredom and abuse value, he always held to the doubled ethical possibility of technological nihilism, namely, that the greater the danger, the greater the prospect of building, dwelling, thinking. In this sense, Hayles completes Heidegger by taking him at his word, balancing her description of the regime of computation with a special fascination for "tutor texts" that are invariably disruptive, bifurcated, paradoxical, complex. While Heidegger may have cautioned in his "Letter on Humanism" that "homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world,"¹² he also noted that in the face of the gathering storm of homelessness, we must "first learn to exist in the nameless." That, I believe, is the special intellectual vocation of Katherine Hayles. Noteworthy for her fascination with the pleasure of the (scientific) text, indeed driven by a rigorous literary commitment to faithfully record the enframing logic of the power of the

code, Hayles makes of each of her texts an exercise in learning how “to exist in the nameless.” In her thought, what Baudrillard once described as the “terrorism of the code” is effectively countered by an electronic poetics of disruption—technical order is complicated by digital chaos—with the result that complexity itself is revealed to be a way of existing in the nameless.

Curiously, for a thinker whose famous earlier aspiration to be a “cyborg rather than a goddess” has been undermined in favor of being a companion species, Donna Haraway is the one thinker who has not only truly understood Marx’s vision of dead labor but has turned her thought into a sustained exercise in dwelling on the fatal implications of such a dark prophecy. Avowedly a materialist historian, an exponent of a form of bioscientific imagination that remains faithful to the traditional injunction for truth-saying, a thinker who dwells at the borderlines of the primate, the human, the semiotic, the environment, the lasting contribution of Haraway is to have grasped the essential insight that something resembling Marx’s dead labor, or what Hannah Arendt once described as “earth alienation,” is the core logic animating the contemporary technological epistēmē. Always a critical feminist, Haraway’s response to the gathering darkness has been neither to take refuge in a form of political economy that merely recapitulates the technological logic of the modern nor to subordinate her thought to a liberal project of environmental sustainability that serves to reinforce existent patterns of class inequalities and unjust power distributions but rather to do something truly radical and, in that radicality, truly original. The first and best of all the theorists of hybridity, Haraway’s project has been to make of the incommensurable, the impossible, the disavowed, the excluded, the center point of a new metaphysics of experience—certainly not a metaphysics of exclusively human experience, but something hybrid, bio-material-semiotic-human experience, a metaphysics of the unreconciled, the fractured border, the liquid membrane. In Haraway’s thought, there is rehearsed for the first time a way of thinking, and potentially acting, that reflects

on the implications of a future of dead labor, dead culture, dead power, dead species, and dead environments with intellectual intensity, political sincerity, and inspiring theoretical originality. In this new way of thinking, a pathway through and beyond a present of negative being finally makes its appearance, at first tentatively and only faintly, but later with growing confidence in the power of its theoretical analysis, namely, that the future belongs to those dwelling at the borderlines, to those who make of their bio-social-ecological abode the hybrid, the intermediation, the splice.