



**Exits to the Posthuman Future.** By Arthur Kroker. Wiley, Toronto, ON, 2014, pp. 224. 9780745671635.

In *Exits to the Posthuman Future* (2014), Arthur Kroker deploys a mutant strain of Marshall McLuhan's (McLuhan and McLuhan 1988) medium theory to paint a dark picture of high-technology capitalist societies. At its most dire points this book appears to be an affirmation of Friedrich Nietzsche (1964) and Jean Baudrillard's (1994) theses that God is dead and meaning is impossible. Advanced technology is the primary cause of this condition, which is the posthuman era. Kroker contends that previous conceptions of the posthuman were misguidedly optimistic and that the posthuman must be grasped as a state of total indeterminacy in which a literally living technology dominates human agency. Yet, there is a tension. Throughout the text there are moments of tangible hope for a traditionally humanistic future and, perplexingly, the book closes with an explicit call to recover the social and ethical values lost in the ravages of capitalism. In the end, it is hard to say what this book is intended to do. Kroker's dark posthumanist prognosis stands starkly juxtaposed with his latent humanism.

Arthur Kroker is a postmodernist Canadian theorist who has been studying the intersections of technology and culture since the mid-1980s. This new book consists of several essays comprised of original material and new versions of previously presented material. It is wide-ranging in topic, roving from drone warfare to Obama's political rhetoric to media theory.

In a high-speed and prolix style that recalls William Gibson's cyberpunk fiction and the work of McLuhan and Paul Virilio, Kroker sets out a way of thinking about contemporary high-technological society that follows the McLuhanian insistence on the constant and unavoidable influence of media on humans—but inverts it. The theoretical linchpin of this text is the “dark tetrad” (p. 25), Kroker's inversion of McLuhan's four laws of media. McLuhan asserted that all media have four effects on individuals and societies: to enhance something, to obsolesce something, to retrieve something that was previously obsolesced, and to intensify something to the point of its reversal (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988). Kroker presents another side to the tetrad, which he describes, following Jacques Derrida (2006), as “hauntological” (p. 193). The dark tetrad describes disappearance instead of enhancement, substitution instead of obsolescence, abandonment instead of retrieval, and stasis instead of reversal (Kroker, 2014). These four functions describe the actions of media from a non-anthropomorphic standpoint. This dehumanization of McLuhan is necessary, Kroker asserts, because a fundamental feature of the posthuman era is that technology has “in the most literal sense ... now come alive” (p. 28).

Yet Kroker's main interest here is not the autonomous artificial intelligences of transhumanist speculation, nor is it the academic posthumanisms of Katherine Hayles (2008) or Donna Haraway (2000). Kroker's posthuman age is “that historical moment when the power of technology turns back on itself, effectively undermining traditional

concepts such as subjectivity, privacy, and bounded consciousness in order to render all things truly uncertain and unknowable” (p. 7). It is a “dystopian phase of information technology” in which “the informatics of domination has appropriated the resistance spirit of the borderlands” (p. 96). Kroker argues that the permeable human/machine boundaries of Hayles and Harraway have been superseded by all-encompassing machinic control. Kroker’s posthuman is thus a dark time for beings that still think of themselves as human.

It is also a dark time because it is quite literally haunted. Kroker holds that: “the essence of the posthuman axiomatic inheres in the fact that technology now eagerly seeks out that which was previously marginalized as simultaneously ways of mobilizing itself as it effectively recodes every aspect of social and nonsocial existence” (p. 6). This is the hauntological aspect of media: that which was previously marginalized is resurrected by technologies to serve as their contents and reasons for being with no logic discernable to humans. The result is the bewildering posthuman era, which Kroker adumbrates using the concepts of acceleration, drift, and crash. Acceleration will be familiar to readers of other postmodernist technology theorists, such as Virilio, and needs little elaboration. Crash depicts the collision between accelerated technologies and traditional human qualities.

Drift is Kroker’s most compelling contribution to thinking the posthuman. Drift describes the perturbations of a society no longer directed by human intention, but by myriad, incremental, and unpredictable mutations in the codes that underlie molar reality. Code drift “is the spectral destiny of the story of technology,” (p. 50) but it is also “nothing new,” (p. 52) in that human evolution is a history of sampling errors. The posthuman era is described as one of “drift culture” in that the randomness and non-teleological nature of the molecular realm takes over the molar. The dark tetrad is thus to be understood as a schematic of how code drift rearranges the world without intention or consciousness. Code drift converts humans to “data flesh” that “fully absorbs the primary modernist disavowal—the sense of the absurd in all the great referentials—as its key conditions of possibility” (p. 53). Drift culture is the technological proof of existentialism.

Kroker is quite brief on suggesting how we ought to proceed with social life in the drifting absurdity of the posthuman era. He devotes only a four-page epilogue to the question of what is to be done now. Not surprisingly, given the existentialist tone of the work, he advocates an aesthetic comportment toward the posthuman. Specifically, he endorses an aesthetics based on Jean-François Lyotard’s (2011) notion of the “figural” or adiscursive gestalt—presumably adapting it to grasp the adiscursivity of ubiquitous code: “Art of this (posthuman) order recodes the question of aesthetics by the creation of a mode of perception that fully opens to the discontinuous, the fragmentary, the uncertain, the reversal” (Kroker 2014, p. 197). This call for extreme openness evokes Nietzsche’s Dionysian mode of being, in which destruction and creation possess equal valence, but Kroker quickly qualifies this, asserting that since:

the posthuman condition has revealed decadence ... as the basic ontology of late capitalism, the point of a figural art that would “harden, worsen, accelerate decadence” would be precisely the reverse, that is to say, it would

draw into a greater visibility those intangible, but very real, impulses to social solidarity and ethical probity that haunt the order of the real. (p. 198)

This foray into the supposedly posthuman ends with a call for the reinstatement of the most humanistic of principles. The idea seems to be that the novel form of living in the posthuman era is analogous to the collective yearnings of the “spirit of ’68.”

*Exits to the Posthuman Future* is an enjoyable read and is full of interesting technological tidbits as well as a striking conceptualization of the posthuman as a bleak media-saturated drift culture. However, by refusing to embrace this dark situation it ends up repeating the hopeful vision of a technological human future that it claims to have transcended. It offers us a compelling way to think the posthuman, but leaves its full ramifications unexplored.

## References

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