Necromedia. *By Marcel O'Gorman.* Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 256 pp. ISBN 9780816695713.

At the crux of Marcel O'Gorman's *Necromedia* is an examination of the interrelatedness between technological innovation, human mortality, and what kind of therapeutic approach can be formulated in response to it. The book's core argument emphasizes the need for media theorists to take up the mantle of digital artist in their work as a way to meld theory and practice as a means of social intervention. O'Gorman mirrors this with an alternating chapter format, each odd numbered chapter examining theory and each even number foregrounding a particular work that relates to and follows what he calls *applied media theory*. He even suggests that the reader may read through alternative chapters as another way to read the book in order to transform it into either a digital art book or a media theory book, though this would disregard his struggle to bring together media theory and digital practice. Throughout the book, he also uses a variety of methods of presentation, from academic essays, to autobiographical writings, to the script of a performance art piece. However, a background in the relevant discourse is expected despite the many relatable, anecdotal passages interspersed throughout each chapter.

O'Gorman begins the first chapter, "Theory and Posthumanism," by describing what he calls *necromedia theory*, establishing humans as fundamentally technological creatures, with this technicity being inextricably intertwined with the very notion of being human. He then draws parallels with another fundamental trait of humans— our finitude and our desire to escape it—and positions this in posthumanist theory. He does this by building on Ernest Becker's (1997) multidisciplinary theories of death denial, as found in *The Denial of Death*, and melding them with media theory and contemporary posthumanist philosophy, in the hopes of renewing and extending Becker's relevancy to our present day technoculture. O'Gorman argues that technology is inherently *deadly* due to the relationship it has with humans and our own mortality. He points out the ways in which technology tends toward distracting us from our inevitable deaths, even providing a kind of fake promise of immortality through, for example, improvements in medicine or the digitization of the human mind that promises to free us from our mortal biological envelope. This tendency, and our desire for the furthering of technology, he terms *technoculture*, the current form of cultural hero system. Ultimately, with the development of necromedia, O'Gorman hopes to open the space needed to develop a therapeutic approach to our postmodern existential malaise; O'Gorman postulates his own applied media theory as one such method.

The second chapter, "Border Disorder," marks the first major media work O'Gorman examines, defining the format of the rest of the even-numbered chapters: it is short and descriptive, while putting to work the theoretical intuitions he developed in the first chapter about surveillance, prosthetics, and cross-disciplinary border crossing (Bal, 2002).

The concept of a cultural hero system is explored in more detail in the third chapter, where O'Gorman uses the example of *American Beauty* (1999), a commercial film that, he contends, shows technological betrayal when technology is placed in the centre of our cultural hero system, despite its not being a film primarily concerned with technohorror. In this chapter, O'Gorman puts *American Beauty* on the dissection table and tests Ernest Becker's theories regarding death denial and existential authenticity. Firmly grounding his analysis in contemporary media technologies, he points out the irony embedded in our devotion to technology as a means to stave off our own deaths while also potentially being their cause.

The fourth chapter contains the transcript and brief description of O'Gorman's work *Dreadmill* (2004–2006), with the intention of showing what comes of a media theorist donning the garb of digital artist and producing a work—an example of applied media theory. The work itself is then used as a bridge to examine the concept of antiheroes in the next chapter.

In Chapter 5, O'Gorman expands the discussion to examine other media technologies, such as video games and the internet. The chapter is largely based on the work of Bernard Stiegler (1998), who puts forth that our current technoculture of technoprostheticization leads to suicide of both the self and others. To make his point, O'Gorman uses various cases of suicide and death from the realms of video games and online self-documentation, examining the philosophical undertones of the antihero and hypermediated hero as a response to the crisis in heroism for recognition. While investigating examples of death-by-gaming and school shootings, attention is drawn to understanding the ramifications of our current technoculture as they relate to our youth and their vulnerabilities.

Following this chapter, O'Gorman moves further into the realm of video games, highlighting their use as a buffer against our fear of death (Chapter 6, "Cycle of Dread"). The quest for video games to induce a sense of flow in its players is argued to also be a kind of buffer, one which O'Gorman argues is opposite to the intended state of *being in the zone* where contemplation is possible. Instead, he argues, video games fill the minds of their players with game related activities, thus making immersive video games the antithesis of experiencing existential dread.

In response to this, O'Gorman describes his work *Cycle of Dread* (2009), an experiment that placed the participant in a position of oscillation between existential dread and immersion. He describes this work as an object-to-think-with, to be used to examine the relationship between technological immersion and human finitude.

Chapter 7, titled "Speculative Realism Unchained" and discussing mainly the works of Harman (2002) and Bogost (2012), is centred on a critique of both speculative realism and object-orientated ontology as being technoromantic despite them both unseating the human from the seat of privilege. O'Gorman himself states that this chapter is primarily focused on posthumanist love, while still following themes of death and finitude. In rounding off the chapter, O'Gorman draws on Ian Bogost's (2012) work that explores drawing attention sideways to appreciate the complex relationships between humans and other things. O'Gorman positions his applied media

theory on top of this as a means to intervene in technoculture while also avoiding the pitfalls of the other methods, which, he argues, have fallen into technoromanticism.

The eighth chapter examines O'Gorman's work *Myth of the Steersman* (2010–2013), which concerns the mystery surrounding the death of renowned Canadian artist Tom Thomson. Using a canoe, interactive screens, and various other digital technologies, O'Gorman highlights the important role of the canoe in the mystery of Thomson's death, while also pointing to the primordial gap between the outside world and the skin of a human.

Toward the end of the book, O'Gorman moves away from talking directly about technology and death to speak instead of applied media theory and his work at the Critical Media Lab at the University of Waterloo. The goal of applied media theory, O'Gorman explains, is to solve the issue of relevancy in the humanities by way of melding theory with practice. In arguing for this method, he uses the discourses of object-orientated ontology and speculative realism to establish his view that the digital humanities need to be more embedded in digital art practices. In doing so, he points out that even the outcomes of these practices, which turn out to be broken, are still useful, as they subvert the technoculture of the denial of death and turn it into a reflection of our finitude.

O'Gorman begins Chapter 10 by describing one of the works by the students in the Critical Media Lab in Waterloo. The work attempts to instil a sense of *mortality salience* into heavy technology users in order to examine if in this new state of mind, the participants would more strongly align themselves with the rhetoric of technological progress. He then describes the work *Roach Lab* (2011), another work by a student of the Critical Media Lab. The goal of this work, he explains, is to provide an opportunity to rethink our relationship with the nonhuman and how technology factors into that relationship. Both these works are presented as examples of applied media theory.

The final chapter of *Necromedia*, "From Dust to Data—On Existential Terror and Horror Philosophy," encompasses a thorough exploration of terror and horror, teasing out the fundamental differences between the two; terror being that which taps into our fear regarding our own death and the death of us as a group, and horror being that fear at the breaking down of human ontology. He then uses these two concepts to examine the philosophical ramifications of this difference, with terror providing an intensification of the status of being human and thus some kind of way forward, and horror being the opposite, totally annihilating it and bringing it to a standstill. In closing, O'Gorman reminds us again of the notion that not everything new should automatically be considered progress, and that we must acknowledge our own innate finitude and technicity to move forward. He suggests that the adoption of a more thoughtful discourse is needed in the examination of humans as both technical creatures and mortal beings.

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