

THE CODING OF POSTHUMANISM:
MUT(IL)ATION, TRAUMA, AND INFECTION IN
CONTEMPORARY SPECULATIVE FICTION

by

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An Abstract

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In 1532, François Rabelais outlined the ideals of a humanistic education in a letter from Gargantua to Pantagruel. Gargantua's advice epitomizes the ideology of, what will be subsequently named in the nineteenth century, Renaissance Humanism — an ideology that has greatly affected modern human thought and remains relevant to human intellectual and cultural endeavors today. However, this work examines the ideology behind humanism and how it informs the idea of “human” as we begin to move into the era of the posthuman. The posthuman, though the mutilating, traumatizing, and infectious nature of our current technology, has begun to assert its figuration in contemporary cultural texts, like literature, cinema, and music. I argue that as technology catches up with our vision, it will necessarily affect the evolution of the human body. While the ideas of humanism might be outmoded in current intellectual movements, the ideologies of humanism will still supply the foundation of how we conceive ourselves in the near future based on the fact of our current embodiment.

This work looks at various cultural texts and their authors' illustration of how humanity will move into the posthuman, taking with it its conceptions of the human based on biological characteristics, but not letting embodiment limit its articulation. From infectious cyber landscapes to mutilating car crashes, technology reworks the malleable flesh of the human to leave indelible marks on the body and the mind. While initial accidents cause the mind to rethink its position in relation to the body, technology will soon allow not only the full control over the biological body, but a redesign of the physical body into, perhaps, the virtual or non-biological. When the body is rewritten, what happens to the Enlightenment distinctions that make the naturalized seem the measure of all things? When the human body as we have always know it becomes

writable into another form, will our current problematic distinctions based on race, gender, and class be even less-tenable? This work doesn't answer these questions, but merely takes a look at current and evolving human interaction with technology and speculates based on current visions, just what direction "humanity" will take in its increasing relationship with technology.

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