

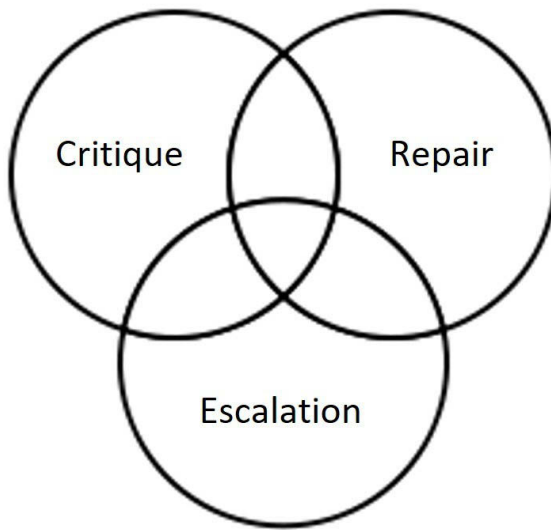
3. Critique, Repair, Escalation: Three Modes of Posthumanist Theorizing

The Modes of Posthumanist Theory and the Cultural Studies Kraken

Posthumanism, broadly conceived, investigates and contributes to the ‘end of man’, in the sense of a particular, humanist conception of the human. As such, it draws on and brings together a wide array of critiques of the human, for instance in evolutionary biology, Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and poststructuralism, science and technology studies, postcolonialism, disability, gender, and queer studies, and many other fields. As a theoretical formation, posthumanism is thus of a markedly hybrid nature. For one thing, it is strongly transdisciplinary – particularly in its current ‘phase’ after the postanthropocentric or nonhuman turn – but it also encompasses a wide variety of different, even conflicting, outlooks, positions, and approaches. Nevertheless, as I want to argue here, despite, or rather beyond, this heterogeneity, we can identify certain recurrences, isotopies, and patterns, which allow us to distinguish distinct *paradigms* or, better, *modes* of posthumanist theorizing. Inspired by the work of critics like Rita Felski (2015), I conceive theoretical ‘modes’ as particular *styles of thought*, and thus as a matter not only of philosophy and politics but also of affect and rhetoric, that is, as involving specific epistemological, ontological, and political orientations as well as distinctive sensibilities, dispositions, moods, even ethea, and forms of speech, tone, narrative, and argument. As such, a mode constitutes a unique approach to and manner of doing theory, consisting of a characteristic set of analytical assumptions, conventions, expectations, and orientations. Since intellectual work is always a ‘worldly’, material-semiotic affair, these different theoretical modes inevitably ‘matter’, functioning also as political interventions. As Donna Haraway has put it: “It matters what thoughts think thoughts” (2016: 39). I want to suggest that within posthumanism, we can today identify three principal modes of theory. There is, of course, *critique*, the mode that, because of its virtually uncontested dominance, was for a long time more or less synonymous with theory itself. Following Eve Sedgwick (2003: 123–51) and Felski, I essentially conceive of it as involving a ‘paranoid’ or ‘suspicious’ stance, of being committed to negativity and the practice of denaturalization, and of being driven by an interventionist,

emancipatory ethos. Yet, this hegemony has come under attack, especially by what, following Sedgwick, I will call a *reparative* mode of theorizing, whose main characteristics are a more affirmative, hopeful outlook, and its commitment to an ethics of care, and which manifests most clearly, though by no means exclusively, in the various new approaches associated with the ‘postcritical turn’ (Anker/Felski 2017a; Felski 2015). Finally, there is *escalation*, a mode that works through excess and overdrive, through pushing things to the extreme, that is resolutely anti-natural and committed to a politics of radical immanence, and whose chief, though again not sole, expression is accelerationism.

Fig. 1: *The Modes of Posthumanist Theory*



These three modes are best thought of as ideal types, forming the end points of a continuum, or as three overlapping circles (fig. 1), allowing for the existence of all sorts of mixed forms. For in reality, while theoretical texts can usually be said to follow one of them, they frequently nevertheless also contain elements belonging to at least one other mode. As always, impurity is the rule rather than the exception. Needless to say, an author’s work as a whole can, and often does, involve shifts from one theoretical mode to another, too – and in fact, such shifts constitute precisely one of the aspects that, as Foucault (1972a, 1972b) has argued, problematize the very notion of the ‘author’ and the ‘oeuvre’. Thus, whereas Foucault himself, for instance, is generally associated with critique, his work – and not just his late writings,

in which he explicitly invokes an ethos of care – also distinctly exhibits traits of the reparative mode (cf. Sheehy 2020). Indeed, it would seem that such entanglements, of varying degrees and kinds, are rather frequent in the history of theory. The significance of our present, properly ‘posthumanist’, theoretical moment is precisely that by crystallizing the different modes, it renders these entanglements transparent and thus allows us to make them productive.

In the following, I will briefly review the three theoretical modes I have introduced, which cover much of the work that is currently being done within posthumanism and beyond. Somewhat analogous to Stuart Hall’s (1986) argument regarding what, in 1980, he considered the two dominant paradigms within Cultural Studies, I want to argue that for a posthumanist Cultural Studies today, the task should not so much be to choose or side with one of the currents of contemporary posthumanism, but rather to combine them. We should take seriously the well-known Deleuzo-Foucauldian notion of theory as a ‘toolbox’ (Foucault 1996a: 76) and adopt an orientation that would be essentially a *pragmatic* one, selecting those concepts, ideas, and methods from our kit that, in a given situation, are most promising, most useful, that will *work best*, regardless of where they come from. As Bruno Latour says, it is a “question of having the right tools for the right job” (2010: 475). In fact, I am convinced that each of the theoretical modes has something vital to contribute to our efforts to understand and respond to the pressing issues of the present. Each of them “does some things well and other things poorly or not at all” (Felski 2015: 8). Following Latour (via Felski), each is a distinct *actant*, making certain things (and not others) happen. Each of them is therefore necessary, with the strengths of one compensating for the weaknesses of another. Only by using *all* the theoretical resources available to us will we be able to come up with adequate ways of tackling the colossal ‘messiness’ and complexity of the Anthropocene. The friction – theoretical, political, ethical, etc. – such a syncretistic approach entails should not be regarded as an impediment, but rather as something that can itself be made productive. We have to be willing, as Haraway – whose work is exemplary in this regard – has put it, to tolerate and work with “the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true” (2010: 2190). It is my contention that Cultural Studies, a project that, in terms of theory, has always been markedly and programmatically open, heterogeneous, and trans- or even postdisciplinary, represents one (though certainly not the only) intellectual formation that is particularly well-positioned for such an endeavor. I believe that a posthumanist Cultural Studies might today most profitably situate itself at the center of the diagram above, in the hybrid space where all three circles overlap. From there, like a bricolage-savvy octopus¹, it can practice ‘tentacular thinking’ (Haraway

1 Cephalopods can be considered the signature of (new) ‘weird’ fiction (Luckhurst 2017: 1054) and, by extension, of Anthropocene writing and thinking more generally.

2016: 30–57), reaching in all directions, holding and making use of many things at once.

The Hammer: Critique

The first major instrument in the Kraken's posthumanist bag of tools is the hammer of critique (Latour 2010: 475). It is very useful for breaking down walls, smashing idols, destroying illusions. With Terry Eagleton, we could say that the point of critique is to regress us to childhood, that is to say, to (re-)turn us to a state of incredulous wonder and bewilderment regarding 'the way things are'. If, for Eagleton, "[c]hildren make the best theorists", this is because "they have not yet been educated into accepting our routine social practices as 'natural', and so insist on posing to those practices the most embarrassingly general and fundamental questions" (1990: 34). Critique, in other words, works essentially through (modernist) *estrangement*, making the familiar and unthinkingly accepted strange. It defamiliarizes, so that what previously appeared to us as natural and inevitable is revealed to be a historical construction and thus *contingent*. As Max Horkheimer famously put it: "Critical theory maintains: it need not be so; man [sic] can change reality, and the necessary conditions for such change already exist." (1972b: 227n20). As was already pointed out, such theorizing in the critical mode – *critical theory* (in a wider sense, beyond its association with the Frankfurt School) – has over the past few decades become more or less synonymous with theory itself, so that Jonathan Culler, for instance, can declare theory to equal "a critique of common sense and exploration of alternative conceptions" (2000: 4). This latter aspect is likewise essential to the critical mode. Critique can be said to take its bearings from Marx, who spoke of the necessity for a "*ruthless criticism of everything existing*", which "must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with the powers that be" (1978b: 13), and who famously asserted that the task of philosophy was not primarily to interpret the world, but to change it (1978c: 145). Theory, for him, was a "practical-critical" (1978c: 143), transformational affair, itself a "material force" (1978a: 60) in the struggle for emancipation. In Horkheimer's bold words: "[Critical] theory never aims simply at an increase of knowledge as such. Its goal is man's [sic] emancipation from slavery." (1972a: 246)

Thus, critique always involves denaturalization and aims at transformation. In the imagery of Nietzsche's (1969: 54–56) three metamorphoses of the spirit, critique is the lion fighting against the dragon of the status quo, clearing a space for the creation of something new.² In what was arguably the last great 'wave' of 'high theory', this mode of critique, as it transpires from the work of thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche, or those of the Frankfurt School, was brilliantly developed and explicitly theorized by

2 With his third metamorphosis, like Eagleton, Nietzsche too invokes the figure of the child.

Michel Foucault. Particularly in his two late lectures “What Is Critique?” and “What Is Enlightenment?”, Foucault presented an understanding of critique that may well serve as a further characterization of this mode in general. Conceiving critique as an *ethos*, one essentially derived from the Enlightenment, Foucault defines it in terms of a “critical ontology of ourselves” (1984: 47), a historical investigation whose focus are the ties that bind power, truth, and the subject. It asks: “in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?” (1984: 45) And again, we find in Foucault an emphasis on what Judith Butler (2001), in their commentary on the Foucauldian notion of critique, has called the ‘double task’ of critique, namely to combine the permanent critical interrogation of the present and of ourselves with the attempt at clearing a path towards something new. Critique, says Foucault, “will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” (1984: 46). Critique consequently has a transgressive as well as experimental side. What Foucault thus highlights is that critique is always tied to a “voluntary inservitude” and “reflective indocility”, and hence, importantly, to a process of “desubjectification” (1996b: 386). Through critique, “the contemporary ordering of being is brought to its limit” (Butler 2001). Foucault thus concurs with the other major thinkers of the critical tradition in seeing critique as intimately tied to emancipation: “it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom” (1984: 46). And he specifies that this is always crucially also a matter of “freeing ourselves from ourselves” (Eagleton 1990: 36).³

As a mode of theorizing, one of the fundamental characteristics of critique is thus ‘the will to be against’ (Hardt/Negri 2001: 210–14) or ‘againstness’ (Felski 2015: 129). Though its commitment assumes different shapes, critique is nevertheless always firmly committed to *negativity*, understood as “a practice of the destruction of existent positivities through the performance of immanent ruptures” (Noys 2010: 17). It is out, as Benjamin Noys puts it, “to perform some necessary destruction” (2010: 4) – hence the image of the hammer. The defining prefixes of critique are ‘*de*’ – denaturalizing, demystifying, decoding, deconstructing, decentering, destabilizing, etc. – as well as ‘*un*’ and ‘*dis*’ – undoing, uncovering, unraveling, dismantling, disassembling, disenchanting, and so forth. As Felski, following Paul Ricœur (1970: 32–36), has argued, it is essentially a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, committed to ‘paranoid’ (Sedgwick 2003: 123–51) or ‘symptomatic’ readings⁴, which characteristically work through (and conflate) the oppositions manifest/latent, present/ab-

3 It is thus important to understand Foucault’s oft-quoted definition of critique as “the art of not being governed so much” (1996b: 384) against the background of his notion of ‘governmentality’ and not, or at least not primarily, with a view to forms of governing per se.

4 These terms are here used in a metaphorical rather than diagnostic or medical sense.

sent, and surface/depth (Best/Marcus 2009: 3f). As the ‘method wars’ currently taking place in many areas within the humanities and beyond make clear, it is important to resist the prevalent conflation of critique with theory and to consider it as just one possible mode among others. That being said, it nevertheless seems clear that this mode, which has been vital in the development of the field of posthumanism, will continue to occupy a central role within any posthumanist Cultural Studies. Felski certainly has a point when she characterizes critique – the “suspicion without limits” (Cusset 2008: 83) – as frequently being a “mode of militant reading” (2015: 1) – yet, it seems to me that in the social, cultural, economic, and political struggles of the present, we will hardly be able to do without certain forms of militancy.

Amongst other things, the significance of critique in this context is attested to by the theoretical formation of ‘critical posthumanism’, whose name already indicates its continuity with the tradition of critique. Particularly considering the centrality of *representation* and its critique for Cultural Studies, the relevance of this formation to, and its compatibility with, the discipline is almost immediately apparent. Building on the antihumanist legacy, especially of the poststructuralist generation, critical posthumanism typically employs a combined cultural materialist and deconstructivist approach (Herbrechter 2013: 9f), aiming, as Stefan Herbrechter puts it, at “inhabit[ing] humanism deconstructively” (2013: 7). To the extent that it aspires to sabotage the “dialectic engine” (Herbrechter 2013: 87) driving what Giorgio Agamben has called the “anthropological machine” of humanism and thus to stall this “device for producing the recognition of the human” (2004: 26), critical posthumanism links up more or less directly with the ambitions of Cultural Studies as a ‘political project’ (Hall 1996). What is of particular importance here is the way critical posthumanism, incorporating arguments from fields such as postcolonial, queer, or gender studies, reveals the realm of the human as a “colonial realm” (Halberstam 2020: 7) insofar as the human “functions to domesticate and hierarchize difference within the human (whether according to race, class, gender [or any of the many other categories]) and to absolutize difference between the human and the nonhuman” (Halberstam/Livingston 1995: 10). That is to say, it discloses and contests the “morphological normativity” (Braidotti 2009: 526) that is always inscribed at the core of the human. For critical posthumanism, as Judith Butler, whose work is central in this context, puts it, the human is essentially “a differential norm” and “a differential of power”, “a value and a morphology that may be allocated and retracted” (2016: 76, 77). Proceeding from the constitutive and political nature of representation, a Cultural Studies inflected by these theoretical perspectives thus analyzes and deconstructs discursive formations and regimes of representation in order to show that there are discursive limits which establish the limits of human intelligibility and to disorganize “that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as ‘the human’” (Butler 1993: 8). Here, as Stuart Hall once said, textuality indeed emerges “as a site of life and death” (1996: 273). However, a properly

posthumanist Cultural Studies would even go beyond this focus on discursivity, incorporating it into a broader examination of the diverse processes (including the material, practices, etc.) through which the human is ‘assembled’. Yet, as a deeply ‘worldly’, interventionist project, such a Cultural Studies also exceeds the genealogical investigation of the contingency of an assemblage such as the human subject by pushing towards “an insurrection at the level of ontology” (Butler 2006: 33). It attempts, in other words, to “free subject formation from the normative vision of the self” (Braidotti 2009: 527) and to disrupt the contemporary ordering of being by encouraging experimental processes of *reassembling* for the sake of alternative, *unruly ontologies*.

Here, critique overlaps with or shifts into the more affirmative theoretical mode of repair, to which I will turn next. As this makes clear, there is an element of caricature to the usual equation of critique with (nothing but) destruction. Indeed, while negativity, as we have seen, is always central to its operation, critique can usually not be reduced to it. While certainly secondary, there is nevertheless frequently a distinctly ‘positive’ side to it, so that I would join Benjamin Noys when he argues for a “detachment of the thinking of negation from a purified and absolute politics of abstractive destruction” (2010: 171) and consequently for a more nuanced conception of negativity. In fact, critique seems to oscillate between a resolutely ‘paranoid’ or cynical and a more affirmative, positive pole, the latter of which effectively moves it closer to the reparative mode – a fact that lends support to the argument that the three theoretical modes under discussion here are better conceived in terms of a continuum rather than as fixed, clear-cut, and fully separate.

Glue: Repair

Over the past two decades, critique has increasingly come under attack from various sides. Particularly within literary studies, many scholars have turned away from ‘suspicious’, ‘paranoid’ approaches to textuality and sought for alternative ways of reading. Their frustration with critique⁵ stems, among other things, from its lack of attention to affect and the embodied dimensions of experience (as well as its own limited affective range), the ways in which its methodological orientations limit the inquiries, experiences, and insights available to the critic, as well as its perceived political shortcomings. The latter include what is perceived as critique’s normalization and domestication as part of the academic mainstream within the neoliberal university⁶, its Eurocentrism (particularly its ties to the rationalist and secular logic of

5 I here follow Anker/Felski 2017b: 10–17; Felski 2015.

6 In fact, proponents of postcritical approaches frequently go even further than such a ‘meta-suspicious’ critique of critique. Instead of claiming that critique has of late become institu-

modernity), its elitism (e.g., in its denigration of common sense and ordinary experience and language), as well as its diffusion not just into a relatively broad, widely-shared cultural sensibility, but, much more problematically, into the worldview and rhetoric of groups such as right-wing populists and conspiracy theorists, a fact that makes the received (self-)image of suspicion as inherently marginal, oppositional, and aligned with the left appear rather suspect. In this context, it would seem that the Cultural Studies concept of 'articulation' (cf., e.g., Grossberg 1986, esp. 53ff; Slack 1996) may prove helpful, allowing us to replace the essentializing binary opposition that frequently dominates theory in the critical mode, between an intrinsically resistant and progressive critique on the one hand and inevitably 'uncritical', apolitical or even quietist alternative modes on the other, with the question (and task) of their always specific and contingent relations and articulations. In the domain of literary criticism, this dissatisfaction with critique and its 'paranoid' outlook has spawned a number of innovative approaches such as 'reparative' (Sedgwick 2003: 123–51), 'distant' (Moretti 2013), 'surface' (Best/Marcus 2009), 'just' (Marcus 2007), and 'flat' (Love 2010, 2013) readings. Though they are not to be conflated, many of these readings tend towards the literal or descriptive rather than the 'symptomatic' – one reads 'with the grain' (Bewes 2010), not against it. In this way, the hermeneutics of suspicion is often replaced by a hermeneutics of trust, faith, restoration, and recollection (Ricoeur 1970: 28–32). As Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski observe, most of the scholars associated with postcritique opt for "a more generous posture toward the text" than the suspicious one and are hence "committed to treating texts with respect, care, and attention, emphasizing the visible rather than the concealed in a spirit of dialogue and constructiveness rather than dissection and diagnosis" (2017b: 16).

Trust, restoration, generosity, respect, constructiveness, care – these are some of the keywords characteristic of what I call the theoretical mode of repair. The post-critical turn in literary studies is just one of its manifestations. Compared with critique, this mode has come to prominence only fairly recently, especially – though not exclusively – from within certain strands of feminist and queer studies, actor-network theory, science and technology studies, affect theory, new materialism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology. Notably, all of these theoretical formations are more or less closely associated with the paradigm shift of the 'nonhuman turn' (Grusin 2015) – and indeed, Christian Haines and Sean Grattan (2017: 28n1) have even gone so far as to consider posthumanism as a whole as defined by this

tionally co-opted and defanged, they question the very notion of critique still underlying such complaints, which continue to conceive of it as an inherently transgressive and resistant mode. Finding this understanding to be a highly idealized, unrealistic and, indeed, unrealizable one, these scholars, drawing on approaches such as actor-network theory, instead make a case for "a politics of relation rather than negation, of mediation rather than co-option, of alliance and assembly rather than alienated critique" (Felski 2015: 147).

recent shift towards repair. It seems as if this shift, like the turn to the nonhuman, is in certain ways intimately connected with, an expression of and a response to, the problematic of the Anthropocene. Repair, in other words, emerges as a mode of theorizing expressly developed in the face of the present “urgencies” (Haraway 2016: 37), a form of thinking dedicated to exploring what Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing calls the ‘arts of living on a damaged planet’ (Tsing et al. 2017) or the ‘possibility of life in capitalist ruins’ (Tsing 2015). Reparative theorizing can thus be said to constitute a more or less direct response to our current condition of global, existential precarity – “thinking with precarity” (Tsing 2015: 42), or, to use Steven Jackson’s resonant expression, “broken world thinking”. Jackson’s marvelous essay “Rethinking Repair”, from which this phrase is taken, is crucial to my conceptualization of the reparative mode. On the one hand, this mode proceeds from “an appreciation of the real limits and fragility of the worlds we inhabit – natural, social, and technological – and a recognition that many of the stories and orders of modernity [...] are in process of coming apart” (Jackson 2014: 221). It rejects narratives of progress – but also of ruination and apocalypse, which are still under the spell of progress – and takes breakdown, erosion, dissolution, and decay as its starting point. At the same time, on the other hand, it cultivates the more hopeful approach of what Tsing terms ‘arts of noticing’ (2015: 17–25), that is, “a deep wonder and appreciation for the ongoing activities by which [...] rich and robust lives are sustained against the weight of centrifugal odds” (Jackson 2014: 222), activities that are habitually rendered invisible by established theoretical outlooks and narratives, focused as they are on progress, growth, production, design, etc. As Jackson points out, the fulcrum of these two different realities – pain and possibility, destruction and creativity – is *repair*: “the subtle acts of care by which order and meaning [...] are maintained and transformed” (2014: 222).⁷ The notion of *care* is central here. Indeed, Jackson goes on to argue that an ethics of repair, by going beyond the functionalism dominant within technology studies as well as humanist ethics, must consequently open into an ethics of care involving the assumption of “responsibility in chains of mutual entanglement and dependency” (2014: 231). In other words: We have to care *about*, care *for*, and care *with* (cf. Tronto 2013) not just other human beings, but all kinds of actants with which we are entangled, including, in Jackson’s case, our technologies. Or, as Bruno Latour (2012) has it: Unlike Dr. Frankenstein, we should ‘love our monsters’ and ‘care for our technologies as we do for our children’.

7 While I agree with Jackson’s observation that “the world is always breaking; it’s in its nature to break”, and simultaneously “is always being recuperated and reconstituted through repair” (2014: 223), the reparative mode, including Jackson’s essay itself, emerges largely in response to a very particular breakdown, or set of breakdowns, which we have come to associate with the term ‘Anthropocene’.

Care is something like the watchword of reparative writing. In fact, if the characteristic affective orientation of critique is suspicion, care constitutes the distinctive ethos of repair (cf. Sheehey 2020: 74).⁸ Typically grounded in a *relational ontology* which sees all ‘existents’ (humans and other animals, objects, plants, organisms, land, rocks, physical forces, etc.) as unavoidably interconnected and interdependent, reparative theory frequently asserts the vital relevance of care – as affective and ethical disposition, material practice, as well as political obligation (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) – for the maintenance of our complex and entangled webs of life (and nonlife). Such posthumanist ‘thinking with care’, conceiving “caring as a transformative ethos rather than a normative ethics” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 67), has been programmatically developed in the illuminating work of María Puig de la Bellacasa and has lately found a more radical expression in Patricia MacCormack’s *Ahuman Manifesto*. The latter, “a call to activism for the other at the expense of the self”, makes the case not only for ‘active passivity’ and a resolute practice of ‘leaving be’, but for the actual abolition of the human both conceptually and in reality as necessary forms of care and ‘grace’ – of “radical compassion” (2020: 5, x) – in the Anthropocene. Another recent manifestation of the current relevance of the reparative mode is the Care Collective’s *Care Manifesto*⁹, which, characteristically proceeding from the recognition and embrace of the mutual interdependencies of all (living) beings, sharply criticizes neoliberal capitalism as “uncaring by design” and sets out to challenge “the limits being placed upon our caring capacities, practices and imaginations” (2020: 10, 5). The text promotes a reconceptualization of care in the direction of a “radical egalitarianism”, towards what the authors call “an ethics of promiscuous care”, and by advocating a model of ‘universal care’ – “the ideal of a society in which care is placed front and centre on every scale of life” (2020: 40, 19). Today, this important text asserts, we urgently need new caring imaginaries, practices, and politics – and: “There is no category of human, or indeed non-human, to whom this does not apply.” (2020: 44)

Hence, reparative theorizing is a *caring thinking*, a thinking with care – as also evidenced by Bernard Stiegler’s (2018) play with the French words *penser* (to think) and *panser* (to bandage, to heal, to care for), translated into English by Daniel Ross as ‘care-ful thinking’ and ‘thought-ful caring’. Its affective orientation is thus typically quite different from the skepticism and ‘paranoia’ of critique. Indeed, repair often explicitly defines itself in distinction to what it sees as the “pervasive pessimism” and “chronic negativity” (Anker/Felski 2017b: 11) of “corrosive critique” (Puig de la

8 Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus even claim that posthumanism in general is not only “a caring paradigm [...] but also a paradigm for care” (2008: 109) (even though I would argue that their own writing is rather firmly located within the critical posthumanist mode).

9 It should be noted, however, that this text is simultaneously also indebted to the critical mode.

Bellacasa 2017: 49). Against this, the disposition of reparative theory is marked by an embrace of *the affirmative*: positivity, constructiveness, optimism, idealism, even utopianism, frequently define the outlook, mood, and tone of such writing.¹⁰ Consequently, repair generally champions a *politics of affirmation*, which “is affirmative in the sense that it actively works towards the creation of alternatives [...] by cultivating the relations that are conducive to the transmutation of values” (Braidotti 2010: 143). What it seeks is “freedom from the burden of negativity” (Braidotti 2010: 147), supplanting the self-defeating irony and cynicism, the resignation, despair, and passivity it associates with the critical mode with commitment, cooperation, creativity, innovation, imagination, activeness and, indeed, activism. Instead of “disengaged denunciations” and “the corrosive, self-certain, and self-contained traps of nothing-but-critique”, repair thus dedicates itself to “attentive practices of thought, love, rage, and care” and to cultivating what Haraway terms ‘response-ability’, which “requires the risk of being for some worlds rather than others and helping to compose those worlds with others” (Haraway 2016: 56, 178n32). As Haraway’s words make clear, rage still figures here, of course. One should not make the mistake of confusing repair with uncritical and naïve feel-good affirmationism. As a matter of fact, negativity is not outright *rejected* here; rather, since it is considered to have ‘run out of steam’ (Latour 2004), it is *decentered* and displaced, discarded merely as the be-all and end-all of theory (Felski 2015: 9). Yet, negativity is still traversed, worked through, or with. Hence, whereas a critic such as Benjamin Noys (2017) tends to speak of ‘anti-critique’, ‘postcritical’ tendencies – the prefix ‘post’ always denoting a more complex relationality and temporality – seems to me to be a more appropriate designation. Indeed, more than a few of the proponents of a reparative theoretical stance have emphasized the necessity to hold on to and integrate one kind or another of a critical sensibility into their respective approaches – though this is then no longer critique “in the eagle-like sense of the enlightened unveiling of hidden powers in the real causes of things, not in the sense of a critical distance of a skeptical aspirant to Zeus” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 61).

What all of these critics assert, however, is that, for theory in the Anthropocene, there is “a new set of skills to learn” (Latour 2010: 487): to repair, take care, conserve, compose, relate, associate, connect, assemble, gather, and so forth.¹¹ These are the verbs that recur time and again in reparative theorizing. New keywords for Cultural Studies! For Bruno Latour, therefore, “[t]he critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles” (2004: 246). The one who does not subtract, but adds to the world (Latour 1987), the one who does not undermine, but builds and makes possible. Rita Felski wonders: After we have all learned so well to insistently ask “But what about

10 In literary studies, there is even talk of a ‘eudaimonic turn’ (Pawelski/Moores 2013).

11 But also, in view of the ‘slow violence’ (Nixon 2011) of climate change, the sixth mass extinction, etc., to mourn and to ‘grieve-with’ (Haraway 2016: 38f; van Dooren 2016).

power?”), “[p]erhaps it is time to start asking different questions: ‘But what about love?’ Or: ‘Where is your theory of attachment?’”¹² (2015: 17f) Reparative theorizing thus suggests “a (knowledge) politics not so much driven by deconstruction of the given but [committed] to ‘passionate construction,’ ‘passionate connection’” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 79), propelled by the conviction that “emancipation [...] does not mean ‘freed from bonds’ but *well-attached*” (Latour 2005: 218). Not the hammer of critique, then, but the glue of repair – whose defining prefix is not ‘de’, but ‘re’: re-compose, reattach, reassemble, reconfigure, recuperate, reconnect, reimagine, re-world, etc. It is no coincidence that theorists who adopt a reparative stance such as Latour (2010: 485f) or Jackson (2014: 237) refer to Walter Benjamin’s well-known reflection on Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus*, which Benjamin famously reads as a depiction of the ‘angel of history’:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (2007: 257f)

I would argue that much theorizing in the reparative mode is not only driven by a similar profound skepticism towards ‘modernization’ and ‘progress’, but also by a (sometimes more, sometimes less) latent desire to ‘make whole what has been smashed’ (though mostly not in the sense of a preexisting whole). This, after all, is the meaning of *repair*. There is – in keeping with Eve Sedgwick’s elaboration of the reparative stance – an often underlying but distinct aspiration to conserve, preserve, as well as to ameliorate, replenish, and heal in most reparative theorizing. “Wars. So many wars”, writes Latour, and asks: “Should we be at war, too, we, the scholars, the intellectuals? Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins? Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction?” (2004: 225) And he answers: “While critics still believe that there is too much belief and too many things standing in the way of reality, compositionists believe that there are enough ruins and that everything has to be reassembled piece by piece. Which is another way of saying that we don’t wish to have too much to do with the twentieth century: ‘Let the dead bury their dead.’” (2010: 475f) There is something unexpectedly modernist (not *modern*) here; a preoccupation, as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*

12 While I appreciate this widening of the horizon of inquiry, following thinkers such as Dimitris Papadopoulos (2010, 2014) and María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 27–67), I would argue that the latter set of questions should actually be connected with the former one.

has it, with ‘fragments shored against our ruins’. Repair thus braces itself against what James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus called the ‘nightmare of history’, “a world”, as Sedgwick writes, “full of loss, pain, and oppression” (2003: 138). As Bonnie Sheehy observes: “The ‘reparative’ refers to a set of strategies whereby subjects salvage possibilities and sustenance from the objects of a culture.” (2020: 69) It is a theoretical “practice that transforms, mends, and provides sustenance”, “invested with a range of attitudes and affects that dispose critics toward an attentiveness to possibility, pleasure, and alteration” (Sheehy 2020: 70). Consequently, along with other more ‘positive’ affects, *hope* – not frequently encountered in theory of the critical mode – has come to new prominence in recent theorizing (cf., e.g., Ahmed 2010; Lear 2008; Muñoz 2009; Snediker 2009).

In all of this, and with its general combined focus on breakdown and renewal, pain and possibility, I believe that repair can be seen as an expression of a broader cultural shift that is still taking place. It is part of the emergence of what we may perhaps call an *Anthropocene* ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams 1977: 128–35), which is arguably also discernible in many other areas, such as the trend towards ‘reconstruction’ (rather than deconstruction) in contemporary literature (Funk 2017), the novel, posthumanist narratives and imaginaries of a number of recent motion pictures (esp. science fiction; e.g., Alex Garland’s 2018 film *Annihilation*)¹³, the ‘conciliative’, ‘consensual’ tendencies in much present-day art (Rauterberg 2021), the explicit concern with ecological issues in certain sections of today’s pop(-ular) culture (e.g., ‘Anthropocenema’ [Kara 2016], the work of performers like Björk, Sigur Rós, Grimes, and Nick Mulvey, or of artists such as Tara Donovan, Olafur Eliasson, or Ackroyd & Harvey), current forms of (eco-)political activism like Extinction Rebellion and the Fridays for Future movement, or the gradual restructuring of the (Gramscian) ‘common sense’ which seems to be happening at the moment – its ‘ecological turn’ – evident, for instance, in a now near-ubiquitous emphasis on themes such as anthropogenic climate change, sustainability, care, resilience, etc.

In a sense, then, repair is *the* theoretical mode of the moment – even though, as I argue here, by itself it is not enough. For the project of Cultural Studies, employing it in a more deliberate, strategic, and extensive way should not be particularly difficult. For while Cultural Studies has always ‘at heart’ been a distinctly critical enterprise, it has nevertheless also continuously ‘wrestled’ (Hall 1996: 265f) with the various critical traditions on which it has drawn and in this process frequently distanced itself from some of the aspects of critique now criticized by postcritical approaches. It has, for instance, even as it undoubtedly came to adopt many of the key assumptions and concepts of structuralism and poststructuralism, always retained something of a skeptical distance from particularly the more radical varieties of the constructivist paradigm – working, rather, ‘within shouting distance’ (Hall 1996: 265) of it – and

13 On this topic, cf. the coda of this book.

refused to relinquish notions such as (embodied, affective) ‘experience’ or (material) ‘reality’; it has always been suspicious of the master narratives and totalizing accounts regularly advanced by critique (‘the control society’, ‘the age of simulation’, etc.) and instead emphasized the need for more nuanced, contextualized, and ‘situated’ accounts; it has firmly rejected the sequestering of critical thinking in the ivory tower of the university and in various ways attempted to forge connections between the academic and the nonacademic world; against the view of ‘ordinary’ recipients as essentially passive cultural dupes, it has from the outset insisted that ‘critique is ordinary’ (Felski 2015: 139) and that consumers more or less actively negotiate the discourses, ideologies, and power structures in which they are caught in complex and often unpredictable ways; and, relatedly, and perhaps most importantly, it has – in keeping with Stuart Hall’s Gramscian motto “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will” – frequently championed a more affirmative kind of theory and politics, even at the risk of being smiled at by the representatives of ‘high theory’ and critique – think, for instance, of the sympathetic reading of the charity supergroup Band Aid and the 1985 Live Aid event advanced by Hall and Martin Jacques (1986) as well as Dick Hebdige (1988: 216–23). In texts that, in both tone and tenor, resonate quite strongly with much recent, reparatively oriented writing, thinkers such as Hebdige made the case for a “revision of priorities” which, he maintained, “requires us to redefine the function(s) of critique” (1988: 223). Hebdige asserts:

A politics based exclusively on the perfection of critique, on the identification of pain and exploitation, on the regular exposure of ‘hard’, ‘unwelcome’ truths which would otherwise remain concealed from less alert, less well informed or less ‘politically committed’ individuals, a politics which offers only ‘dissent’ and ‘resistance’ as positive terms, is simply not enough. It will not work. (1988: 222f)

Against the fatalistic, authoritative, and totalizing character of such suspicious, ‘paranoid’ approaches, “the ‘fatal errors’ which all too often flow from the forms of institutionalised critique to which we are – perhaps treacherously – habituated”, Hebdige, not unlike Sedgwick or Felski, proposes a more tentative and flexible “weak thought” and “a more enabling, *vital* set of strategies” (1988: 216, 226, 210) attuned to “the positive potentialities” of phenomena, “working with and on the resources of optimism, good faith and good will”, engendering “a sense of possibility”, and articulating “positive critical energies” (1988: 217, 222, 210). Thus, the now prominent theoretical mode of repair already has a comparatively distinct and rich history within the discursive formation of Cultural Studies.

The Accelerator: Escalation

In his “Compositionist Manifesto”, Bruno Latour makes the case for a “radical transformation in the definition of what it means to progress” by replacing “an idea of inevitable progress” with “one of *tentative and precautionary progression*”. Accordingly, he intends his manifesto “[n]ot as a war cry for an avant-garde to move even further and faster ahead, but rather as a warning, a call to attention, so as to *stop* going further *in the same way* as before toward the future” (2010: 473). With this ‘avant-garde’, Latour may well have had a different theoretical stance in mind, whose origins lie in the French theory of the 1970s (though, as always, it can be traced back further, at least to the work of Marx), but which has come to prominence only over the last decade and, in 2013, spawned its own manifesto: accelerationism. I want to argue that in accelerationism, we can detect a third important posthumanist mode of theorizing – escalation – which, however, is not confined to it. As I see it, accelerationism is the purest, but by no means the sole manifestation of escalation – a theoretical mode which is not primarily defined by the fact that it makes processes of acceleration and intensification into its main concern – works such as Hartmut Rosa’s (2015) important study on social acceleration do just that, but remain firmly tied to the mode of critique¹⁴ – but that escalation constitutes its characteristic method, its quintessential argumentative, and often also rhetorical, move, that it designates a specific set of philosophical assumptions and a particular style of argument, and that it is made into a veritable ethos.

As Robin Mackay and Armen Avanesian explain in the introduction to their *Accelerationist Reader*, the term ‘accelerationism’ designates “a convergent group of new theoretical enterprises that aim to conceptualise the future outside of traditional critiques and regressive, decelerative, or restorative ‘solutions’” (2014: 6f). Though repair should certainly not be equated with regression, clearly accelerationism signals a new departure beyond the critical and the reparative modes. While its philosophical roots lie in classical Marxism, its historical emergence as a theoretico-political ‘movement’ is inseparable from what Jacques Camatte, an important thinker in this context, referred to as “the failure of a future that was thought inevitable” (2014: 133). In other words: The works that would later come to be seen as having articulated the accelerationist impulse for the first time, most notably texts by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard, constituted a more or less direct response to the failure of May 1968 and the concomitant disenchantment with the Marxist narrative of the certain supersession of capitalism. What ensued was a profound *dis-illusionment*: frustration and despair, but also a removal of all illusions intellectuals still held regarding the nature of the capitalist system, which

14 However, in his more recent work on ‘resonance’ (2019) and ‘uncontrollability’ (2020), Rosa is distinctly moving closer to the reparative mode.

they increasingly came to see as immune to received forms of political critique and activism. Consequently, as Sylvère Lotringer puts it, these “‘children of May,’ revolutionaries bereft of a revolution”, resolved “to sleep with the enemy” and “turned to capitalism, eager to extract its subversive energy they no longer found in traditional class struggle” (2007: 11). Theoretical work became driven by a ‘logic of failed revolt’ (Starr 1995). Accelerationism, therefore, can largely be seen as a symptom of and a response to *crisis* – in the 1970s in France, but equally in the 1990s in Britain, and in the early 21st century on a more international scale. For in a way, the basic sense of crisis persists, refracted through historical events and discourses such as, in the case of the 1990s, the global victory march of neoliberalism, the revolutions of 1989, and the ensuing debates surrounding the TINA doctrine and the notion of the ‘end of history’ (cf. esp. Fukuyama 1992), and, in the case of the present, the financial crisis of 2007/08 and the discourses of ‘capitalist realism’ and the ‘cancellation of the future’ (cf. esp. Berardi 2011; Fisher 2009, 2014a; Srnicek/Williams 2016; Williams/Srnicek 2014). Today, these discourses are intimately tied to the more general, in fact, global, problematic of the ‘Capitalocene’ (Moore 2015, 2016). In this context, the sense of crisis has, if anything, only become aggravated. As Steven Shaviro points out, “for us today, crisis has become a chronic and seemingly permanent condition. We live, oxymoronically, in a state of perpetual, but never resolved, convulsion and contradiction. Crises never come to a culmination; instead, they are endlessly and indefinitely deferred” (2015: 9) – “omni-crisis” (Hardt/Negri 2001: 189). Hence, our experience of the contemporary moment is that of a frustrating impasse, of a ‘frenetic standstill’ (Rosa 2015) – an eternal, ‘absolute present’, in which, as Fredric Jameson famously put it, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (2003: 76).

What present-day accelerationism reacts to is thus essentially what Marx described as the transition of capitalism from ‘formal’ to ‘real subsumption’, a process that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have redescribed as “investing not only the economic or only the cultural dimension of society but rather the social *bios* itself”. That is to say that “the increasingly intense relationship of mutual implication of all social forces that capitalism has pursued throughout its development has now been fully realized”, so that “the whole social body is comprised by power’s machine”. Today, in other words, biopolitical capitalism operates “a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousnesses and bodies of the population – and at the same time across the entirety of social relations” (Hardt/Negri 2001: 24f). Capitalism’s ‘extensive expansion’ across the entire globe is thus coupled with an unprecedented ‘intensive expansion’ (Masumi 1992: 132), which – whether it is labor, social life, subjectivity, affect, creativity, or cognitive processes – leaves no aspect of life uncolonized. Consequently, in the ‘smooth space’ of neoliberal, globalized, networked capitalism, in which power no longer has a definitive place but is “both everywhere and nowhere” (Hardt/Negri 2001: 190), there is no longer any *outside* to the system,

from which it could effectively be attacked. Accelerationists maintain that in this situation, “[r]enouncing [...] critique and consolation” (Lyotard 1993: 120) is the only way forward – the first, because it has lost all foothold and become ineffective, the second because all calls to slow down, scale back, and return to one form or another of primordial purity are not only fundamentally illusory but also politically dangerous. As Sadie Plant and Nick Land put it, in a tone and rhetoric typical of the CCRU’s (the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at Warwick University) accelerationism in the 1990s:

Security cybernetics has supplanted the critique of alienation [...]. Alienation used to diagnose the condition of a population becoming foreign to itself, offering a prognosis that still promised recovery. All that is over. We are all foreigners now, no longer alienated, but alien [...].

To what could we wish to return? Heidegger completed the degeneration of authenticity into xenocidal neurosis. Being died in the führer-bunker, and purity belongs entirely to the cops. The capitalist metropolis is mutating beyond all nostalgia. (2014: 306)

Though the two theoretical modes are generally very different, both escalation and repair thus also emerge as antidotes to what is perceived as the exhaustion of critique, to ‘left melancholia’ (Brown 2000), ‘transcendental miserabilism’ (Land 2011), political defeatism and inertia. Yet, whereas the one responds with an emphasis on *innehalten*, that is, pausing for a moment, on conservation and care, the other presses on, pushing even further ahead – instead of the ‘re’ of repair, provisionally patching things together, the ‘un’ – in the sense of a release – of escalation, forever speeding things up, plunging further in, and intensifying our immersion in current processes: unbinding, unleashing, unfettering, uncaging, unlocking, etc. Thus, the essence of accelerationism is “the argument that the only way out is the way through” (Shaviro 2015: 2). Or, as Mark Fisher puts it, “if there is no desire to go back except as a cheap Hollywood holiday in other people’s misery – if [...] there are no primitive societies”, then “the only direction [is] forward” – “[t]hrough the shit of capital, its metal bars, its polystyrene, its books, its sausage pâtés, its cyberspace matrix” (2014b: 340).¹⁵ Since retreatist solutions are not an option anymore, accelerationism holds that “we must match and exceed capital’s inhuman speeds” and therefore insists on “the continuing dynamism and transformation of the human wrought by the unleashing of productive forces, arguing that it is possible to align *with* their revolutionary force but *against* domestication” (Mackay/Avanesian 2014: 17, 13). The origins of such an approach lie primarily in Marx’s ‘parallax’ view of capitalism,

15 Fisher’s text here references a notorious passage from Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy* (1993: 115f).

expressed, for instance, in his (and Engels') famous assertion of its 'constant revolutionizing', melting 'all that is solid into thin air', or in his well-known argument about the increasing conflict between the forces and the relations of production, effectively creating the conditions for its own overcoming. But it is also rooted in the (early) work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially their influential characterization of capitalism as a force that is on the one hand revolutionary and 'deterritorializing', but on the other simultaneously inhibiting and 'reterritorializing'. It was particularly the following 'accelerationist' passage from their *Anti-Oedipus* that proved to be inspirational:

But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist "economic solution"? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process," as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet. (1983: 239f)

Building on this, accelerationists like Gilles Lipovetsky argue that "'revolutionary' actions are not those which aim to overthrow the system of Capital, which [...] has never ceased to be revolutionary, but those which *complete* its rhythm in all its radicality" (2014: 233) – or rather, which opt for the latter as the only path to achieve the former.

Thus, accelerationism denotes a politics of *radical immanence*, and one that eschews 'folk politics' (Srnicek/Williams 2016), centered on the small-scale, the authentic, the everyday, the traditional, and the natural, and, instead, is "at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology" (Williams/Srnicek 2014: 354). This refusal of transcendence as well as of decelerative, regressive solutions is characteristic of the escalative mode of theory at large, which generally considers certain contemporary processes such as technologization, mediatization, digitalization, globalization, or 'posthumanization' not only as irreversible, but, indeed, as desirable, because they open up previously foreclosed possibilities. In this, escalation is vehemently *anti-naturalist*, framing "nature and the natural as a space for contestation" (Hester 2018: 19). The position of xenofeminism (XF), an accelerationist strand of feminism, first articulated by the Laboria Cuboniks collective, is emblematic here:

XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise? It is through, and not despite, our alienated con-

dition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy. Freedom is not a given – and it's certainly not given by anything 'natural'. The construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation; alienation is the labour of freedom's construction. Nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent, or 'given' – neither material conditions nor social forms. (2018: 1)

Escalative approaches such as this one thus rigorously position themselves 'against nature' (Daston 2019) and 'against purity' (Shotwell 2016) and embrace alienation as a positive, emancipatory force (cf. Trafford/Wolfendale 2019) – or, as the CCRU collective puts it: "Alienated and loving it." (2014: 331) Rejecting essentialist humanism as "capitalism's default ideology" (Noys 2014a: 11), escalation revolves around a "transformative anthropology" (Negri 2014: 373) and "relentlessly revises what it means to be human" (Negarestani 2014: 427).¹⁶

Like the other theoretical modes, escalation is of course profoundly heterogeneous, comprising not only very different strands of accelerationism¹⁷ – from the libidinal-anarchic one of the 1970s, via the techno-nihilistic cyber-accelerationism of the 1990s, to the more sober, Enlightenment-rationalistic variant of the present, from left to right, etc. – but also, to a varying extent, the work of an extremely wide range of thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Paul Preciado, McKenzie Wark, Benjamin Bratton, Tiziana Terranova, Helen Hester, or Andrew Culp. Revolving as it does around intensification, acceleration, and expansion, the escalative mode is typically affirmationist, in the sense in which Ben Noys (2010) has used the term – even in a case like Baudrillard's more ambivalent, 'negative accelerationism' (Noys 2010: 6). Yet, one can also identify other manifestations as, for instance, Culp's idiosyncratic counter-reading of the philosophy of Deleuze in terms of the destructive 'darkness' he identifies in Deleuze's work and which he escalates towards a "revolutionary negativity" (2016: 2). A very different kind of text, for sure. However, as in the case of the other modes, what counts are not particular arguments, which may well be divergent or even outright contradictory, but a shared style of thought, disposition, sensibility, and ethos.

16 In this context, it is interesting to note that the emergence of the more recent, distinctly *left* variants of accelerationism – a 'conditional accelerationism' typically aiming at a repurposing of science and technology for progressive political ends – has been accompanied by a return, under new auspices, to the rationalism and 'Prometheanism' of the Enlightenment (cf., emblematically, Brassier 2014).

17 It should also be noted that accelerationism has been subject to much debate and criticized for what is perceived as its lack of attention to differences relating to, for instance, class, 'race', age, or ability.

The Uses of Tentacularity

Open the toolbox. Depending on the tool you take out and hold in your hand (or tentacle), you are able to do very different things. Certain actions become possible, while others are foreclosed. For example, take James Cameron's 2009 science fiction blockbuster *Avatar*. Now grab your hammer and set to work. Break and ply open; deconstruct, for instance, the Pocahontas myth, bring to light the imperialist nostalgia and settler colonial logic at work in the text, the displacement of 'Western' desires and fears regarding the 'Other' onto the alien, and the inescapable workings of what Said called a 'flexible positional superiority' (1979: 7), here connected to a fantasy of 'going native', of appropriation, and to a white savior fantasy, essentially a means to assuage racial guilt. Smash through the surface of eco-kitsch-exoticism and special effects, tear off the mask, and expose the film as what it really is: a white man's fantasy – ultimately, a reaffirmation of white supremacy (cf. Loza 2013). But then, put the hammer away, take out your tube of glue, and try out what can be done with that. As you reassemble the shards and fragments, see what new meanings and alternative usages for the text emerge: a fable of the clash of modernity (in the Latourian [1993] sense) with Gaia, which, however, "doesn't take ultimate catastrophe and destruction for granted – as so many have before – but opts for a much more interesting outcome: a new search for hope on condition that what it means to have a body, a mind, and a world is completely redefined" (Latour 2010: 472) – a plea, in other words, for repair and care, and for the overall composition of a more livable, sustainable future. Finally, shift gear once again, put the glue away and press down hard on your accelerator. As you're pushing ahead at ever-greater speed, the *Avatar* you have just assembled now appears as a manifestation of an escapist nostalgia for a precapitalist world suffusing contemporary culture, a symptomatic expression of "a negative theology of an outside of capital" (Mackay/Avanesian 2014: 24), which is a sentimental response to the de facto immanence of the social and the technical – "a paradigm of that late-capitalist subjectivity which disavows its modernity" (Fisher 2018: 196). Speeding up, you recognize that such primitivist organicism is highly unconvincing – and, in fact, ironically undercut in the movie itself by the fact that the protagonist's (and our) immersion in the organic idyll of Pandora depends upon the very advanced technology it is contrasted with. More than that, it is also deeply ideological – an instance of a corporate, gestural anti-capitalism that ultimately serves to cement the capitalist status quo instead of challenging it (cf. Fisher 2009: 12–15). Indeed, with its emphasis on the natural, the authentic, the primordial, and the pure, it is politically dangerous. Against this, you accelerate further, like J.G. Ballard's protagonists, onwards, 'through the crash barrier'...

Cultural Studies is primarily accustomed to using the hammer of critique. Yet, as I have argued here, in the Anthropocene, more tools are needed than just one. And in fact, the other theoretical modes to some extent already form a part of the Cultural

Studies tradition. *Articulation* is absolutely central here. It is what holds our toolbox together. In fact, the concept itself might perhaps be turned into a starting point for the process of articulation, given that, with varying inflections, it has been mobilized from within all three theoretical modes, designating, for example, the cultural practice of manufacturing contingent connections between ideological elements, ideologies, and social forces, (e.g., Grossberg 1986, esp. 53ff; Laclau/Mouffe 2001), the work of repair (Jackson 2014: 223), or a practical process of composition operating on the ontological level of matter itself (Latour 1999, esp. 142ff; Papadopoulos 2018: 47f). Even though there are obviously significant differences, tensions, and conflicts between the three different modes of theorizing, I believe that these have often been overemphasized and exaggerated, and thus made to appear as irreconcilable opposites. The theoretical relation between Bruno Latour and Benjamin Noys may serve as an illustration of this. While the former has long been passionately advocating alternatives to critique, whose energies he considers to be exhausted, and the latter has for over a decade now been issuing very critical engagements with the work of the former (cf. esp. Noys 2010: 80–105, 2014b, 2016), relentlessly asserting the persistence and value of negativity, it is interesting to observe that more recently, something of a rapprochement seems to be taking place (cf. esp. Latour 2018, 2019; Noys 2019), one that, moreover, appears to reveal a compatibility that, despite all disagreements, was *always* (latently) existent. Thus, instead of choosing and defending one theoretical mode over and against the others, I think that it is more fruitful today to think about their respective potentials as well as limits, about possible points of articulation, and about how tensions between them may themselves be made productive.

Mediation, synthesis, hybridization, bricolage – these have always been theoretical strengths of Cultural Studies. Stuart Hall once wrote about the warring paradigms of culturalism and structuralism within Cultural Studies, and argued that, although there could be no easy synthesis between them, it was necessary “to *think forwards* from the best elements” (1986: 48) in both of them – with the work of Gramsci serving as a fulcrum for such an articulation. Today, it is perhaps in the influential thought of Donna Haraway that we can identify such a hinge. Her work stands testament to, and, indeed, as one model for, the immensely productive combination of the three posthumanist theoretical modes: critique, repair, *and* escalation (cf. also Love 2017).¹⁸ It illustrates that all three, especially together, can be pragmatically and profitably put to use in the struggle for alternative worldings. If theoretical interventions also function as forms of political practice, then what is

18 While Haraway has always drawn on all three theoretical modes, it seems to me that one can nevertheless identify some kind of shift in her work, to the extent that care has come to occupy a much more central role in her thinking during the last two decades.

needed in the Anthropocene are cephalopodal politics and theorizing. The Cultural Studies Kraken must articulate.¹⁹

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio (2004). *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Anker, Elizabeth S. and Rita Felski (eds.) (2017a). *Critique and Postcritique*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Anker, Elizabeth S. and Rita Felski (2017b). "Introduction." *Critique and Postcritique*. Ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski. Durham: Duke University Press, 1–28.
- Benjamin, Walter (2007). "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 253–64.
- Berardi, Franco (2011). *After the Future*. Oakland: AK Press.
- Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus (2009). "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *Representations* 108.1: 1–21.
- Bewes, Timothy (2010). "Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism." *differences* 21.3: 1–33.
- Braidotti, Rosi (2009). "Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others." *PMLA* 124.2: 526–32.
- Braidotti, Rosi (2010). "Powers of Affirmation: Response to Lisa Baraitser, Patrick Hanafin and Clare Hemmings." *Subjectivity* 3.2: 140–48.
- Brassier, Ray (2014). "Prometheanism and Its Critics." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 467–87.
- Brown, Wendy (2000). "Resisting Left Melancholia." *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*. Ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie. London: Verso, 21–29.
- Butler, Judith (1993). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith (2001). "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue." *transversal texts*. <<https://transversal.at/transversal/0806/butler/en>>.
- Butler, Judith (2006). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Butler, Judith (2016). *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

19 I have developed the notion of 'Kraken theory' in more detail in Cord 2026.

- Camatte, Jacques (2014). "Decline of the Capitalist Mode of Production or Decline of Humanity?" *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 131–46.
- Care Collective, The (2020). *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*. London: Verso.
- CCRU (2014). "Swarmachines." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 321–31.
- Cord, Florian (2026). "The Uses of Tentacularity: Towards a Kraken Theory for Earthly Survival." *Theory & Event* 29.2: 255–71.
- Culler, Jonathan (2000). *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Culp, Andrew (2016). *Dark Deleuze*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cusset, François (2008). *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Daston, Lorraine (2019). *Against Nature*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1983). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Eagleton, Terry (1990). *The Significance of Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Felski, Rita (2015). *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fisher, Mark (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books.
- Fisher, Mark (2014a). *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester: Zero Books.
- Fisher, Mark (2014b). "Terminator vs Avatar." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 335–46.
- Fisher, Mark (2018). "'They Killed Their Mother': Avatar as Ideological Symptom." *k-punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*. Ed. Darren Ambrose. London: Repeater Books, 195–97.
- Foucault, Michel (1972a). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, Michel (1972b). "The Discourse on Language." Appendix. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books, 215–37.
- Foucault, Michel (1984). "What Is Enlightenment?" *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 32–50.
- Foucault, Michel (1996a). "Intellectuals and Power." *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–1984*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 74–82.
- Foucault, Michel (1996b). "What Is Critique?" *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Ed. James Schmidt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 382–98.
- Fukuyama, Francis (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free Press.

- Funk, Wolfgang (2017). *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Grossberg, Lawrence (1986). "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10: 45–60.
- Grusin, Richard (ed.) (2015). *The Nonhuman Turn*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haines, Christian P. and Sean Grattan (2017). "Life after the Subject." *Cultural Critique* 96: 1–36.
- Halberstam, Jack (2020). *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, Judith and Ira Livingston (1995). "Introduction: Posthuman Bodies." *Posthuman Bodies*. Ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1–19.
- Hall, Stuart (1986). "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms." *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Richard Collins et al. London: Sage, 33–48.
- Hall, Stuart (1996). "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 262–75.
- Hall, Stuart and Martin Jacques (1986). "People Aid: A New Politics Sweeps the Land." *Marxism Today* July: 10–14.
- Haraway, Donna (2010). "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: Norton, 2190–220.
- Haraway, Donna (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri (2001). *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hebdige, Dick (1988). *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*. London: Routledge.
- Herbrechter, Stefan (2013). *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Herbrechter, Stefan and Ivan Callus (2008). "What Is a Posthumanist Reading?" *Angelaki* 13.1: 95–111.
- Hester, Helen (2018). *Xenofeminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Horkheimer, Max (1972a). "Postscript." *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. New York: Continuum, 244–52.
- Horkheimer, Max (1972b). "Traditional and Critical Theory." *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. New York: Continuum, 188–243.
- Jackson, Steven J. (2014). "Rethinking Repair." *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*. Ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 221–39.
- Jameson, Fredric (2003). "Future City." *New Left Review* 21: 65–79.

- Kara, Selim (2016). "Anthropocenema: Cinema in the Age of Mass Extinctions." *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*. Ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda. Falmer: REFRAME Books.
- Laboria Cuboniks (2018). "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation." *Laboria Cuboniks*. <<https://laboriacuboniks.net/manifesto/>>.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Land, Nick (2011). "Critique of Transcendental Miserabilism." *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 623–27.
- Latour, Bruno (1987). "The Enlightenment without the Critique: A Word on Michel Serres' Philosophy." *Contemporary French Philosophy*. Ed. A. Phillips Griffiths. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 83–97.
- Latour, Bruno (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, Bruno (1999). *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, Bruno (2004). "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30: 225–48.
- Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Latour, Bruno (2010). "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'." *New Literary History* 41.3: 471–90.
- Latour, Bruno (2012). "Love Your Monsters: Why We Must Care for Our Technologies as We Do Our Children." *The Breakthrough Institute*. <<https://thebreakthrough.org/journal/issue-2/love-your-monsters>>.
- Latour, Bruno (2018). *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Latour, Bruno (2019). "Against Critique, For Critique." *The Value of Critique: Exploring the Interrelations of Value, Critique, and Artistic Labour*. Ed. Isabelle Graw and Christoph Menke. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 15–30.
- Lear, Jonathan (2008). *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lipovetsky, Gilles (2014). "Power of Repetition." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 223–34.
- Lotringer, Sylvère (2007). "Introduction: Exterminating Angel." Jean Baudrillard. *Forget Foucault*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 7–25.
- Love, Heather (2010). "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn." *New Literary History* 41.2: 371–91.
- Love, Heather (2013). "Close Reading and Thin Description." *Public Culture* 25.3: 401–34.

- Love, Heather (2017). "The Temptations: Donna Haraway, Feminist Objectivity, and the Problem of Critique." *Critique and Postcritique*. Ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski. Durham: Duke University Press, 50–72.
- Loza, Susana (2013). "Playing Alien in Post-Racial Times." *Monster Culture in the 21st Century: A Reader*. Ed. Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui. London: Bloomsbury, 53–72.
- Luckhurst, Roger (2017). "The Weird: A Dis/Orientation." *Textual Practice* 31.6: 1041–61.
- Lyotard, Jean-François (1993). *Libidinal Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- MacCormack, Patricia (2020). *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activism for the End of the Anthropocene*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Mackay, Robin and Armen Avanessian (2014). "Introduction." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 1–47.
- Marcus, Sharon (2007). *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Marx, Karl (1978a). "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction." *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker, New York: Norton, 53–65.
- Marx, Karl (1978b). "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing (Marx to Arnold Ruge)." *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 12–15.
- Marx, Karl (1978c). "Theses on Feuerbach." *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 143–45.
- Massumi, Brian (1992). *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Moore, Jason W. (2015). *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. London: Verso.
- Moore, Jason W. (ed.) (2016). *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Moretti, Franco (2013). *Distant Reading*. London: Verso.
- Muñoz, José Esteban (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Negarestani, Reza (2014). "The Labor of the Inhuman." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 425–66.
- Negri, Antonio (2014). "Some Reflections on the #Accelerate Manifesto." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 363–78.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1969). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. London: Penguin Books.
- Nixon, Rob (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Noys, Benjamin (2010). *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Noys, Benjamin (2014a). *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*. Winchester: Zero Books.
- Noys, Benjamin (2014b). "The Discreet Charm of Bruno Latour." *(Mis)Readings of Marx in Continental Philosophy*. Ed. Jernej Habjan and Jessica Whyte. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 195–210.
- Noys, Benjamin (2016). "Matter Against Materialism: Bruno Latour and the Turn to Objects." *Theory Matters: The Place of Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies Today*. Ed. Martin Middeke and Christoph Reinfandt. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 81–93.
- Noys, Benjamin (2017). "Skimming the Surface: Critiquing Anti-Critique." *Journal for Cultural Research* 21.4: 295–308.
- Noys, Benjamin (2019). "The Hammer of the Gods: Critique, After All." *The Value of Critique: Exploring the Interrelations of Value, Critique, and Artistic Labour*. Ed. Isabelle Graw and Christoph Menke. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 31–43.
- Papadopoulos, Dimitris (2010). "Alter-Ontologies: Towards a Constituent Politics in Technoscience." *Social Studies of Science* 41.2: 177–201.
- Papadopoulos, Dimitris (2014). "Politics of Matter: Justice and Organisation in Technoscience." *Social Epistemology* 28.1: 70–85.
- Papadopoulos, Dimitris (2018). *Experimental Practice: Technoscience, Alterontologies, and More-Than-Social Movements*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Pawelski, James O. and D.J. Moores (eds.) (2013). *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Plant, Sadie and Nick Land (2014). "Cyberpositive." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 303–13.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, María (2017). *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rauterberg, Hanno (2021). "Die allerschönste Einschlafhilfe." *Die Zeit* Jan. 14: 43.
- Ricœur, Paul (1970). *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rosa, Hartmut (2015). *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rosa, Hartmut (2019). *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rosa, Hartmut (2020). *The Uncontrollability of the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Said, Edward W. (1979) *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (2003). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Shaviri, Steven (2015). *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Sheehey, Bonnie (2020). "Reparative Critique, Care, and the Normativity of Foucauldian Genealogy." *Angelaki* 25.5: 67–82.
- Shotwell, Alexis (2016). *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Slack, Jennifer Daryl (1996). "The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 112–27.
- Snediker, Michael D. (2009). *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Srnicek, Nick and Alex Williams (2016). *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. London: Verso.
- Starr, Peter (1995). *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory after May '68*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Stiegler, Bernard (2018). *The Neganthropocene*. Ed. Daniel Ross. London: Open Humanities Press.
- Trafford, James and Pete Wolfendale (2019). "Alien Vectors: Accelerationism, Xenofeminism, Inhumanism." *Angelaki* 24.1: 4–13.
- Tronto, Joan (2013). *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*. New York: New York University Press.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt (2015). *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tsing, Anna, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (eds.) (2017). *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- van Dooren, Thom (2016). *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Williams, Alex and Nick Srnicek. "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics." *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanesian. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 347–62.
- Williams, Raymond (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.