



Foreword

In the Introduction to his study *What Is Posthumanism?*, Cary Wolfe noted the confusion that surrounded the term, whose Google search “generates different and even irreconcilable definitions.”¹ At the time, the term “posthumanism” had been in use for more than a decade, at first tentatively, but eventually coming to encompass a constellation of meanings and viewpoints ranging from intimations of an apocalypse of the “human” to a celebratory sense of triumph over the overcoming of material, political, biological or social limitations, and also, as Wolfe put it, of “the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon.”² Another decade on, posthumanism seems to be here to stay, although the controversy surrounding it rages as fiercely as ever, having now attracted philosophers, scientists, theologians, anthropologists, sociologists, artists, film directors, writers, and literary theorists into a debate that may already have propelled it to the status of a new cultural paradigm. Rooted in the inherent instability of humanism thought itself and its increasingly indefensible definition of the human in opposition, rather than in relation to the animal, the technological and the environmental, posthumanism emerges as an attempt to configure a kind of thought that can also speak to, and of, a future whose unknowability presents itself as far more radical than our most imaginative tools can conceive of. It is the kind of future already contained in what Jean-François Lyotard described as “postmodern melancholia:” the state of thought that avoids the traps of humanism by refusing eschatology and therefore lacking finality, engendered by the awareness that “man is not the center of the world, he is not the first (but the last) among creatures, he is not the master of discourse.”³ Posthumanism is founded in the impossibility to tell its own story and in the attempt to find a language that would make it possible by transcending old binary categories such as human/nonhuman, discursive/physical, organic/inorganic, etc. The studies included in this volume participate in the configuration of a new kind of posthuman thought, by exploring the connections between the human as incessant arrival (never to be stabilized, but always negotiated), and its material, and cultural contexts.

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NOTES

1. Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. xi.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
3. Jean-François Lyotard, “A Postmodern Fable,” in *Postmodern Fables*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 101.