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## Reality in the Margins, Pseudo-Reality in the Main Frame: The Posthuman in Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts*<sup>1</sup>

I contend that, at its core, Stephen Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* is an allegory of reading that illustrates how composite realities exist in the increasingly electronically-dominated world of posthumanism. Hall succinctly identifies how words act upon readers intellectually and psychologically. Readers take the written words from the page and turn them into actual people, places, things, and events within their minds, bringing their own past narratives to create their versions of the text's pseudoreality. However, the text's main character, Eric, is disabled by his repeated episodes of complete amnesia – his reality is constantly being erased and rewritten, just like computer memory, leaving Eric with no past narrative to inform his present and future. Hall, very much aware of the conflict between reality and pseudoreality, conflates the worlds of written and digital text, and of human and computer memory in ways that both celebrate their coexistence and warn of one's potential to eliminate the other. Thus, the allegory of reading exemplifies the potential destruction of reading and the end of electronic posthumanism. As digital text and the mainframe threaten to destroy the act of reading in the twenty-first century, the death of the reader looms large.

Keywords: posthumanism; pseudoreality; British fiction

In his 2007 novel *The Raw Shark Texts*, Steven Hall combines, in parallel, two pressing questions of the digital age: the death of print and the (terrifying) loss of the human. At its core, the novel is a self-referential allegory of reading in which Hall, echoing Reader-Response Theory, succinctly identifies how words act upon readers intellectually and psychologically. Stated another way, the act of reading makes the page come to life as an imagined world: the fictive reality. The fictive reality is enhanced by what the reader brings to the text, their experiential memories and personalities. However, the novel's protagonist Eric Sanderson,<sup>2</sup> whose fugue state has erased his memory eleven times, has no past, no experience, no socialized personality traits. Initially, he has no memories or narratives through which to contextualize his existence. Intermingled with the fictive reality that Eric inhabits and starts to understand, mainly through textual interpretation, is a pervasive fictive pseudo-reality. This pseudo-reality, in the form of digital communication technologies, the World Wide Web, and humanoid computer constructions, is the logical extrapolation of the development of artificial intelligence (AI) and biotechnology in the twenty-first century. Hall suggests that, inevitably, experimentation with human evolution will create a disembodied electronic consciousness – a being without a human essence. Bridging the gap between these

<sup>1</sup> A portion of this paper was presented at "Margins: Rhetoric and Place in the Digital Now Conference" at Clemson University, Clemson SC, February 2016.

<sup>2</sup> "Eric" will be used throughout this paper to denote this specific incarnation of Eric Sanderson, the protagonist of the narrative present.

realities is Scout, whose human consciousness has been permanently altered through invasion by the humanoid Ward-thing. Scout represents the increasingly blurry line of posthuman existence – the interface between natural and artificial “human.”<sup>3</sup> Paralleling this fusion of the fictive reality and pseudo-reality, Hall mingles the worlds of written and digital text, and of human and computer memory (the storing and the erasing thereof) in ways that both celebrate their coexistence and warn of the potential of one to eliminate the other. I argue, therefore, that Hall’s allegory exemplifies the potential destruction of reading and print, and of electronic erasure of human consciousness as AI technology advances. The accumulation and storage of human memory, empowered by language, is safe only in the text’s so-called “un-spaces,” the marginalized, abandoned, forgotten places. But mainframe computer space, the electronic superhighway, and its underlying digital language stand ready to destroy print text, the writer, and the reader, just as they threaten to destroy humanity in the novel, envisioning the emergence of disembodied electronic consciousness in the form of self-aware artificial intelligence in reality.

### **Reality in the Margins: The Essence of Human**

Let us first disentangle the fictive reality from the electronic, digitalized pseudo-reality, and examine the marginalization of the human reality in the novel. Eric’s desperate search for self-identity and his ability to survive illuminate the connections between human memory, consciousness, and identity that the electronic Ward-thing threatens to destroy. Reacting to the uberspatiality of the World Wide Web and all things electronic increasingly pervading/invading twenty-first century life, Hall displaces human communications (mainly, although not exclusively, represented in the novel by print text) to the margins. Thus, Eric’s survival as an autonomous human being is correlated to the physical spaces that are beyond the reach of the Ward-thing. Daniel Lea asserts that “the integrity of the individual as autonomous, self-determined agent is tied to a pattern of harmonious being-in-the-world” (464), yet it is the very “being-in-the-world” that threatens Eric’s existence. Eric constantly faces the threat of being swallowed by a conceptual shark made up of, and fed by, human language – a literalized manifestation of elimination, by assimilation, of the human. Consequently, the only places that provide physical safety for Eric are the un-spaces, sites that have been abandoned by civilization, and are, therefore, at a distance from the omnipotent consciousness of the Ward-thing and potentially inaccessible to electronic communication streams.

With its entrance behind the shelving in a book store, the tunnel of un-space that Eric and Scout enter exists at the intersections of author, novel, and reader, the fictive reality itself being, for the reader, an un-space, a nonexistent place. The novel’s un-spaces are physical storage places for textual materials (from post-it notes to telephone books), literary memory, and allusions to other fictions. The un-spaces have become the bomb shelters of human experience, perspective, and imagination in the fight against extermination. Despite his lack of any developed analytical abilities, Eric realizes the importance of printed text in connecting humanity through time, space, and individuality. He explains,

Books of fact provide solid channels of information in many directions. Library books are best because they also link the book itself to every previous reader and any application of the text. Fiction books also generate illusionary flows of people and events and things that have never been, or maybe have only half-been . . . The result is a labyrinth. (Hall 68)

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<sup>3</sup> In scholarly discourses, the posthuman is variously conceptualized. Here, Hall’s representation of the posthuman in the novel exists within the liminal space between human essence and computerized artificial intelligence.

Indeed, the un-spaces that he and Scout navigate are as labyrinthine as human memory (in contrast to highly-organized digital memory), mapped only in double-coded linguistic and visual fragmented messages left behind by Eric the First.<sup>4</sup> This paper-lined tunnel “with its myriad human voices attached to all types of non-electronically written communications, has the potential to re-establish the human aspects of memory” (Guenther), to go beyond the stories that words can describe but not imitate. What Eric needs are nodes of connection between people, their lives, and meaning – that is, the things that are the essence of humanity. Furthermore, the un-spaces are pseudo-realistic constructions of Eric’s blocked memory that hold the key to his past and to his redemption from his (misplaced) guilt over the death of his girlfriend, Clio. Such an understanding of his own history has the potential to allow Eric to survive the digital threat in pseudo-reality, and either to recover from or fully embrace his psychological break with reality. In an epiphanic moment, he realizes that, although he has no access to his memory other than the fragmentary texts left by Eric the First, still the Ward-thing, Scout, Dr. Fidorous (the retired professor who battles hyperspace with words and attempts to save Eric and Scout), Mr. Nobody (a chemical approximation of “human” constructed by the Ward-thing), and, to some extent, the insatiable conceptual shark (literally constructed of words), know everything about him. He reveals, “[A]ll this time when I thought I was going crazy . . . they knew about me” (Hall 163). He does not realize that they know all about him because they are creations of his own subconscious, fractured pieces of his own mind that somehow fit together.

The dismay Eric feels for the reducing of “human” into a data set reflects the human requirement of contextuality to decipher every aspect of reality. Stories, memories, and human consciousness require a frame of reference, a context within which to ascribe meaning. As an experimental work, the novel – which includes a postcard, a photographic movie still, a flip-book, and some 36 un-chapters<sup>5</sup> – presents a fictive reality that itself is overdetermined by fictional references to film and literature. In short, to human experience expressed artistically, with almost no reality left. Thus, the novel exists within a composite of fictional cultural Others, signifying the consciousness of many individuals preserved as narrative data. The list of referential works is large and diverse, including disparate representations of fictive realities, from the post-apocalyptic world of James Cameron’s *The Terminator* (in which humanity ultimately wins its fight for survival against machines) to the fantastical world of MGM’s Technicolor *The Wizard of Oz* (in which self-awareness is key to reality). The representation of the novel’s fictive reality, therefore, largely depends on the readers’ personal experiences as well as their familiarity with a host of pre-existing fictional realities and worlds. The readers have the potential to know and attribute meaning to Eric’s reality each time an allusion is recognized and added to the database of codified meaning within the text. The text, therefore, has its own cultural memory upon which the reader can draw. Hall relies on these references, for, as Katherine N. Hayles and James J. Pullizzi write, “[c]ontext . . . consist[s] of embedded, heterarchical and interacting networks that mutually influence one another through recursive feedback loops . . . and therefore imply structure” (134). The very structure of the novel, then, depends on these feedback loops, much in the way computers process data to make decisions.

Unfortunately for Eric, whose own memory is inaccessible, these intertextual allusions are meaningless. When he first wakes in the apartment, he laments, “[i]t isn’t all coming back to me.

<sup>4</sup> Eric the First, presumably the first amnesiac form of Eric Sanderson, has left behind encrypted clues that lead Eric down the rabbit hole of his own consciousness.

<sup>5</sup> The un-chapters (or “negatives” of the chapters) exist as parts of the novel that are, in fact, separated from the novel physically, and are in undisclosed locations and in unspecified media. Hayles (“Material”) indicates that some of these are located on a web fan forum entitled “The Red Cabinet Forum.” I was denied access to the site.

I don't know any of this at all" (Hall 4). The clues available for the reader's comprehension are not recognizable markers of meaning for Eric. His reality is no more than his immediate presence. He has no recollections upon which to make decisions; he cannot interpret his fictive space, or the other characters in the novel, because contexts are "essential in transforming the noise of the world into the ordered structures necessary for meaning-making" (Hayles and Pullizzi 134). Eric's initial challenge, then, is to create a reality for himself in this fictional space, a reality that extends backward to the past, through the few clues left behind by Eric the First, providing contexts through which he can determine present actions and extrapolate possible futures. Although, as Tanderup contends, the novel "relates to a discourse of associating the book with memory, stability, and continuity in opposition to digital media associated with a loss of memory, identity, materiality, and the body" (3), Eric initially cannot enable his self-construction, because he is seemingly devoid of something essentially human – his brain functioning like the CPU of a new computer. And like a computer, he needs to be programmed by someone other and external, until he achieves self-awareness. But there is something more about Eric than the data that is being put in – the clues left by Eric the First spark a connective process for Eric. He *senses* that the pieces link him and his reality: "there is some kind of flow. A purely conceptual stream with no mass or weight or matter . . . or time . . . a stream flowing directly from my [Eric's? Hall's?] imaginary lake into yours [whose?]" (Hall 55). This is reading. And this is the watershed moment for Hall's excessive intertextuality. As Eric's experiences accumulate and he begins to interpret language and signs, he becomes more human. At the same time, he represents artificial intelligence gaining self-awareness, the very threat away from which he is running.

Ultimately, Eric realizes the failure of representation to express or grasp that which is human. Language, literature, and art cannot keep the human alive any more than an electronic memory device can: "There's no way to really preserve a person when they've gone and that's because whatever you write down it's not the truth, it's just a story. Stories are all we're left with" (Hall 413). When Eric searches the filing cabinet in the apartment, expecting to be able to recreate his past, he looks for "[p]ermanent records in colour print and text proving [his life] had happened" (Hall 53). He is, of course, disappointed when he finds "two hundred and eighteen words" (Hall 55) making up his personal description: a mere character sketch. Julie Panko correctly states that, in the novel, "representation fails in terms of capturing and preserving a record of a subject's physical presence" (278). This is allegorized through Dr. Randle, Eric's psychologist. Randle is a double-literary construction whose existence is buried inside her unread textbook. Her speech, actions, and intentions cannot be interpreted. By compiling information and decoding the signs of the textual fragments he finds (ironically, something a computer algorithm could have done very quickly), Eric eventually comes to an important conclusion about non-human memory storage: although text can store data, it cannot mimic human experience or human personality. Hayles writes, "[w]hen the human nervous system is receiving information through prostheses seamlessly integrated with internal implants, the line between human sensing and the sensing capabilities of intelligent machines becomes blurred" ("Computing" 140), which is the end product of AI, but even in the novel's reality, this is not yet possible. Further, Dr. Fidorous, the literary "mad scientist" living in un-space, creates computer viruses of "[p]hrases, words, alternative spellings, abbreviations, [and] corruptions" (Hall 244) to destabilize the Ward-thing's main frame. But these language viruses are merely markers of changes that naturally occur in living languages, changes that occur despite the standardization of computer language and the stability of language memory in computer word programs (as well as the changes that occur because of the limitations and confines of word programs). This is another failure of human and computer language – it evolves differently than humans do.

Thus, when Eric recites a series of colour names, impersonal words, words unattached to his personality, the shark leaves him. The shark ostensibly tries to consume Eric's memory – and there is no explanation why Eric in particular is targeted. Kiene Brillenburg-Wurth suggests that there is “a felt loss of authorial intention, the inevitable gap between sender and message, message and reader, sender and reader. The shark personifies that gap” (130). As he tries again to escape assimilation, Eric purges the memories he has only just attained, and, using an ancient calligraphy pen, a stylus of artistic and historical textual representation, writes his story “[i]n the air” (Hall 284) – his story has no physical substance. This ostensibly releases Eric's mentally-disabled narrative from its corporeal confinement, a sort of typographical working through the trauma with the un-space as silent analyst. Then, Eric must “drink the concept of the water” (Hall 285), by ingesting pieces of paper upon which the word “water” has been computer-printed. This internalizes the interconnected fragments of memory, language, and experiences with the electronic, placing Eric's body in “the seams between the physical and the conceptual” (Hall 286), the place of the posthuman. However, although Eric accomplishes both tasks, Fidorous dies, Scout disappears, and Eric begins to drown in conceptual water, just as he did when he first awoke in the apartment. The reconstruction of his memory, which is a disembodied narrative of data, has not helped him. His feedback loop has reset just like a computer being rebooted.

### **Pseudo-Reality in the Main Frame: The Threat of Artificial Intelligence**

Despite one's best efforts, the pseudo-reality invading the fictive reality in the novel is not retractable; it is pervasive. It is time, then, to examine its place and purpose in the novel. The pseudo-reality of the novel represents all things electronic, the computer workings created by humans and, for the time being, controlled by humans. But the development of biological/mechanical/computer hybrids anticipates the existence of artificial intelligence developing consciousness and moving beyond human control. Although, as Hayles indicates, computers' “tremendous influence notwithstanding, most of these databases are invisible to the general public, which either does not have access to them or, in best-case scenarios, is able to search them but not to see their internal structures” (“Material” 115), and this inaccessibility results in a collective, if irrational fear, the functioning of human minds and bodies is equally invisible and not understood. Hall proposes that it is the disembodied ubiquity and pervasiveness of computers and electronics, lacking humanity, that initiates fear. William S. Haney explains “telepresence” as the existence “when the mind and body are extended through cyberspace to create an embodied awareness. This extension through cyberspace can also lead to the attenuation of mind and body through which we transcend the intentional boundaries of ordinary identity” (171). Problematically, however, this telepresence has the potential to exist beyond, and without, the human.

As I have discussed, the un-spaces in the novel are those that seem to be beyond the reach of the electronic menace. The remainder of the fictive geography, however, is always susceptible to penetration. The conceptual environment, created by memory fragments, is akin to a computer-simulated environment created by encoded script. In the first attack,

[t]he idea of the floor, the carpet, the concept, feel, shape of the words in my head all broke apart with a splash of sensations and textures and pattern memories and letters and phonetic sounds . . . [It was] just me treading water alone in the middle of this vast and fundamental conceptual form; concept as environment. (Hall 59)

Eric is sitting in his apartment when the shark attacks him and he falls into the water: none of it is real relative to the fictive space. Furthermore, the shark may represent Eric's traumatic memory from which his mind dissociates, creating the fugue state that repeatedly erases his memory. Thus, Eric

must destroy the shark before the shark destroys him, in parallel with the potentially annihilating forces of electronic memory and digital narrative driven by AI. Furthermore, the invasion of this pseudo-reality is constant. As Eric begins to contextualize his existence from the letters, videotapes, and codes that Eric the First has provided, he also receives a stern warning: “Be very careful with this text. It should be considered ‘live’ at all times” (Hall 71). What does Eric the First mean by “live”? From a literary perspective, text is “live” every time someone reads it; thus, like Schrödinger’s cat, Eric is always both alive and dead for the reader. Likewise, for Eric, Eric the First’s texts live (despite being an unrecognized memory) when he reads them, but it is live (in the present) not lived (in the past). In other words, his former life is for him a narrative rather than first-hand experience. In a more sinister sense, “live” in Eric’s reality means actively being electronically transmitted. Hall writes,

try to visualise all the streams of human interaction. All those linking streams in and between people, through text, pictures, spoken words and TV commentaries, streams through shared memories, casual relations, witnessed events, touching pasts and futures, cause and effect. Try to see the immense latticework of lakes and flowing streams, see the size and awesome complexity of it. (55)

Eric’s thoughts are streaming live, at which point they are out of his control, available to anyone and subject to manipulation and destruction, and the all-assimilating internet is always live and dangerous.

These metaphorical waterways effectively represent the workings of the human brain, but, more importantly for Eric and readers, they also represent the vast connectivity enabled in virtual reality at hyperspeed through the World Wide Web, the ultimate global pseudo-reality that paradoxically threatens the end of print text while requiring encoded language for its very existence. The uberspatiality of the internet places Eric in the realm of the posthuman, which Brillenburg-Wurth defines as “an artificially extended humanity” (119). Indeed, that is what Eric is both seeking and avoiding. As a person absent of, and looking for, memory, Eric seeks to humanize himself through any means available (even though he is already more human than any other character in the novel). Yet he uses forms of artificial humanity to escape in at least two important ways. First, Eric exists only as a secondary personality (or a more distant personality) of Eric the First whose traumatic past has caused his fugue disorder and memory erasure as protection against the memory of his girlfriend Clio’s untimely death. Second, Eric uses “conceptual camouflage” (Hall 66), the assuming of someone else’s personality in the conceptual cyberspace to elude the shark that “feeds on human memories and the intrinsic sense of self” (Hall 64). In Letter 238, Eric the First warns, “[a] well-planned, fully-realized false identity will provide the most versatile day-to-day protection” (Hall 83). Eric the First means physical (and psychological) protection from the conceptual shark, but this disassociation from self provides a secondary degree of separation from the traumatic memory, making Eric’s psychological instability even less likely to resolve itself. These masking behaviours are notoriously prevalent on the World Wide Web in which anyone can become anybody, and in which a computer can simulate human essence. The existence of the conceptual shark also provides a powerful disharmony between textual and physical memory. Eric describes his visual and auditory experience thusly: “I saw it, partly with my eyes, or with my mind’s eye. And partly heard, remembered as sounds and words in shape form. Concepts, ideas, glimpses of other lives or writings or feelings” (Hall 79), just as a reader does. The shark is summoned into action by Eric’s own thoughts through the waterways of communication that flow without Eric’s knowledge or permission.

Hall takes identity and self a step further in the novel in the construction of Mycroft Ward, whose name is both a pun on Microsoft Word (the computer program that enables textual

creation) and an allusion to Sherlock Holmes' smarter brother, who may be a powerful operative in the British government ("Mycroft Holmes") in another fictive reality. In his effort to achieve immortality, "Ward succeeded in reproducing a very rough draft of his personality on paper. Then . . . [he] successfully imprinted this personality onto another person" (Hall 200). Note that this assuming of another body as a memory storage device is quite different from Eric's camouflage in which he merely mimics another person to hide himself. Eventually, the recipient of Ward's personality "decide[s] one body [is] simply not enough to guarantee his survival" (Hall 202) and so implants the personality onto a second body. Despite Ward's best efforts to attain immortality for his consciousness, the human body always dies. Subsequently, therefore, electronic memory storage enables a reliable, reproducible personality that becomes "a huge online database of self with dozens of permanently connected node bodies protecting against system damage and outside attack . . . with standardizing downloads and information-gathering uploads" (Hall 204), its disembodiment staving off physical decay – as long as there is electricity. Available to over 600 bodies, the system attains two years of human experience (that is, coded data) every day. Peter Boxall suggests that science and technology, used in this way, "allow the human to exert a kind of control, in both time and space" (129) in the posthuman age, but warns that the digital "does not overcome the peculiar inadequacy that is native to the human, but exacerbates it" (Boxall 129). This is where Ward's failure lies.

As Ward's consciousness accumulates data in cyberspace, the human, Ward, is diluted to the point of being lost. Thus, Eric refers to the construction as the "Ward-thing" (Hall 204). Just as narrative cannot reconstruct what "human" is, the Ward-thing can only replicate and store memory, not human essence – it is no closer to sustaining Mycroft Ward than a printed text could. However, as Hayles writes,

transformability, autonomous mobility, and automation – here take the ominous form of a posthuman "thing" that needs only to find a way to render the standardizing process more efficient in order to expand without limit, . . . Ward in this sense becomes the ultimate transcendental signified . . . At that terminal point, there is no need for stories, their function having been replaced by uploading and downloading standardized data. ("Material" 118)

The Ward-thing, enabled by cyberspace movement and accessibility,<sup>6</sup> is trying to gain what Haney describes as consciousness, "the innate capacity for the experience of true Being" (6). A pseudo-human existing as a computer memory system that can interface with living humans – the ultimate form of artificial intelligence – is not quite a human physically or metaphysically. In part, this is because, as Boxall explains, "the experience of being dissolves in to the manufactured image" (139). This dehumanization of memory, narrative, and thought is reminiscent of Cyberdine Systems computer in *The Terminator* gaining self-awareness and deciding on complete human elimination, and the Borg collective of *Star Trek* franchise that assimilates humanoids into its singular self-consciousness. The Ward-thing is a terrifying prophecy of the potential of real digital human simulation.

Because the Ward-thing has no physical existence, it creates the semblance of one to interact (or, to use computer jargon, to interface) with Eric. Mr. Nobody presents itself to Eric as a real human, but the entity called Mr. Nobody, who "wasn't really human any more, just the idea of one" (Hall 178), is merely the idea of human being, as close to replicating human as a computer can accomplish. As Mr. Nobody tries to convince Eric that they are both already dead – that is, that they

<sup>6</sup> Consider, as Hayles does, that artificially-intelligent computers do not have to perceive and interact with space the same way humans do ("Computing" 133).

are both digitally-supported posthumans with a shared electronic consciousness – his synthetic corporeality begins to decay. As Brillenburg-Wurth indicates, there is a “transformative impact of modern communication and recording technologies on the human body and human embodiment” (119) – something inherently human changes or is lost. The Ward-thing “can remake a person out of chemical stuffing and wires” (Hall 145) – this is what Mr. Nobody is – but the creation is not a human being. Fortunately, this posthuman construction, by assimilating Eric’s personal characteristics, is mistaken for Eric by the shark who attacks and consumes him, as Eric protects himself using the conceptual camouflage technique. The shark feeds on the memory data that Mr. Nobody knows about Eric but cannot discern lived experience from the experience gathered from computer uploading; it cannot discern between a human and the idea of one. And therein lies the rub: autonomous beingness has not yet emerged through computer software.

### Reality and Pseudo-Reality: The Liminality of Hall’s Posthuman

The intermediary between Eric and the Ward-thing is his guide, Scout, who may be the un-space reconstruction of the deceased Clio. Scout is at the threshold of humanity and artificial intelligence, having been partially comingled with the Ward-thing. She explains, “[h]e’s ninety-nine parts something malfunctional and horrible, and one part me” (Hall 195), and she has part of it in her. Haney defines posthumanism as “human-technology symbiosis” (2), but symbiosis implies a working-together, a mutually-beneficial synthesis. In the novel, the posthuman construction, the Ward-thing, which began as a technologically-viable solution to the physical decay of the human body, has become a technological genocide. If the Ward-thing could catch Scout, it would completely assimilate her in its march toward its Borg-like global, unified consciousness as another source of data, eliminating her human essence. The one part of the Ward-thing inside Scout threatens to annihilate the other ninety-nine parts that are Scout, if she is, in fact, real herself and telling Eric the truth. However, because she has a physical and mental connection with the Ward-thing, Scout convinces Eric that the Ward-thing is susceptible to human control. In keeping with the novel’s perspective on reading, Scout concludes that to kill a conceptual threat, one must use language and text effectively. Thus, she creates letter bombs to throw at the shark:

Basically, a firework taped up with old type-writer key arms and printing block letters. You can use anything solid with printed language. . . . The explosion sends metal letters – all their associations, histories, everything – blasting out in all directions to scramble the flow the shark is swimming in. (Hall 166)

In effect, Scout is using memory stored in the mechanics of textual production to destroy a creature that seeks to eliminate personal memory – layer upon layer upon layer upon layer of memory. However, these bombs are as ineffective as those thrown by Kyle Reese at the Terminator, who is as determined to kill Sarah Conner as the shark is to kill Eric. Just as Reese’s bombs are not powerful enough to destroy the Terminator’s central processing unit, the fragments in the word bombs are merely irrelevant printed fragments that cannot break the connection between the shark and Eric’s stream of consciousness, leaving Eric to decipher the fictive reality and pseudo-reality by himself.

Within the un-spaces, Eric is finally able to access his memories *in toto*, and understand why his own memory storage device, his mind, keeps resetting to zero: to protect him from the trauma of Clio’s death. And it is in the un-space that Eric realizes that Clio can only be restored as a posthuman reenactment in the pseudo-reality of a postcard image of Naxos, Greece. The appearance of the newspaper clipping announcing the discovery of Eric Sanderson’s body may indicate that the un-spaces are the gap between life and death, but the postcard addressed to Dr. Randle claiming

Eric is alive and well somewhere complicates the reader's understanding of the novel's fictional reality and its position on human and posthuman existence and being. But Eric's journey to this realization provides Hall a format within which he "explores what it would mean to transport a (post)human subjectivity into a database, at the same time that it enacts the performative power of imaginative fiction conveyed through written language" (Hayles "Material" 115). In showing what it is to be beyond human (the novel emphasizes a failed attempt at creating such an existence), Hall comments on the effect that such an entity would have on the human: "a severe threat to the principles of freedom of will, responsibility for actions, and the self-governing of humanity" (Petes 162). What Eric and presumably twenty-first century readers fear is the successful creation of such an entity. Hayles states,

[f]or the scientists and researchers whose work I interrogated, this initial dichotomy [between materiality and information] played out as the belief that information captures all that was essential about the organism – hence . . . speculation that it will soon be possible to download human consciousness into a computer. ("Afterword" 136)

The reader is left with the fragments of the novel, the un-chapters (should they be found), and their interpretations of the excessive allusions to reconstruct the remaining parts of Eric's memory, those which he has chosen not to pursue along with the reader, as he seems to suspend himself in his other pseudo-reality in Naxos without his corporeality. This is what we, as readers do. We set aside our lives and its bits and pieces and allow ourselves to be in suspended animation in a world we cocreate with authors and the characters on the page to escape. Hall challenges the reader to consider the fuzzy intersection of reality and pseudo-reality both in the novel and beyond it as artificial intelligence increasingly infringes on the human. The coexistence and potential reciprocal destruction of human and digital memory in the novel are enacted in the marginal, textually-dependent un-spaces, the sites in which Eric the First's protective personae collapse onto themselves in an ambiguous and perplexing ending.

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