

**‘... An Asian Dummy with an Aussie Voice’:
Ventriloquism and Authenticity in
Nam Le’s *The Boat* and Tim Winton’s *The Turning***

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‘Are there imaginable digital computers which would do well in the imitation game?’ asks Alan Turing in his seminal 1950 paper ‘Computing Machinery and Intelligence’ (442). The game is one in which a judge must determine the identity of hidden interlocutors. Turing’s argument suggests that if a computer were to offer responses that are indistinguishable from human responses then artificial intelligence would be achieved. On the one hand, this sets a clear goal or standard for computing machinery to one day reach. But it also seems to reduce intelligence itself to a set of phenomenological circumstances that can be mimicked. Is the appearance of intelligence intelligence? In two particular stories in his first book *The Boat*, Nam Le appears to fashion himself as a kind of *literary* artificial intelligence, a fiction machine calibrated for its own version of Alan Turing’s famous test. In ‘Meeting Elise’ Le channels Philip Roth, offering a story about a sexually libertine, ageing Jewish artist who lives in New York City and is afflicted by hemorrhoids and the likelihood of colo-rectal cancer. In ‘Halflead Bay’ Le writes about a teenage football player, dealing with girls and family tensions, finally standing up to the bully in an Australian coastal town. Peter Craven remarks that Le’s story ‘Halflead Bay’ ‘sounds, not least in its blood and guts lien and smell of salt spray and fear, like Tim Winton territory’ (70). However, it is clear that the Winton comparison runs far deeper than this. As Emmett Stinson says, Le’s story is a ‘note-perfect imitation.’ Elsewhere I have called Le ‘the perfect counterfeiter of the Australian vernacular, the lyrebird mimicking Winton, acting as a cheeky counterweight to any view of an authentic Australian identity built upon birthplace or background’ (Brown 571). This essay explores Le’s ‘Australian’ mimicry, by considering some specific parallels between Winton’s *The Turning* and Le’s ‘Halflead Bay’ and thinking about how the peculiarities of ventriloquism and citation (in Ken Gelder’s sense in his 2010 article ‘Proximate Reading’) might offer a richer explanation of what could be at stake here.

It is understandable that Australian readers see the general Wintonesque mode in Le’s story: that budding adolescent male sexuality accompanied by a vernacular voice which takes its imaginative cues from a familiar battery of images that exist in small towns on the edges of the continent. The similarities are evident from the opening sentences of ‘Halflead Bay’ and *The Turning*. Here is Le:

It was shaping up to be a good summer for Jamie. Exams were over. School was out in a couple of weeks—the holidays stretching before him, wide and flat and blue. (94)

And here is Winton:

After five years of high school the final November arrives and leaves as suddenly as a spring storm. Exams. Graduation. Huge beach parties. (1)

Not only are these two openings populated with the same events and locations (exams, school holidays, coastal Australia), but both attempt the same economy of voice, the same short sentences punctuated by a poetic comparison that draws in natural phenomena. Indeed, if participants in something like a literary version of the Turing test produced both these openings, my contention is that it would be extremely difficult to pick the author. Furthermore, throughout ‘Halflead Bay’ Le shadows Winton, placing his own footprints into those familiar tracks that Winton has left behind. For example, when Le pairs Jamie the star footballer with Alison Fisher the netballer in a sexually charged relationship that inevitably leads to violence, he is following Tim Winton’s mutually destructive pairing of Peter Dyson (a school’s star footballer) and Fay Keenan (captain of the hockey team) in ‘Small Mercies’¹. Fay ‘had a cockiness, an impulsive brio that was exciting’ (81) Winton writes. He could easily be describing Alison in Le’s story who pursues Jamie in the schoolyard, visits him at the jetty wearing her Goal Attack netball jersey, and invites him to Slogger Tom’s party.

Both Winton’s Jamie and Le’s Peter are given similar traits—talented yet hesitant—which characterise their style of football, and contain wider implications for each story. According to his father, Jamie ‘doesn’t go in hard. For the fifty-fifties’ (148) and his ironic nickname is ‘Loose ball Jamie’ (97). Jamie’s failure to euthanise a seagull he accidentally reels in on a fishing trip haunts him, symbolising a sense of paralysis that finally drives Jamie to confront Alison’s boyfriend Dory in a misplaced act of masculine aggression in the story’s final scene (154ff). Winton’s protagonist Dyson is similarly painted as a high school footballer whose ability is not matched by his commitment: ‘Even in football he was talented but weak-willed’ (81). In Winton’s story, Dyson seems to be held in the grip of a series of ‘safe’ choices: his love for his ‘dependable’ wife Sophie (89), the abortion he and Fay obtained and kept secret (98), and his final refusal to commit to Fay when she asks to stay the night to avoid a drug relapse (99). It is striking, not only that Nam Le’s imitation of Tim Winton includes a recreation of Winton’s focus on football and teenage relationships, but that Le uses a series of very similar details to conjure up Winton’s anxious ‘Australian’ masculinity frozen by its own power, simultaneously preoccupied with potential and impotence.

If Jamie finds his proto-identity in Peter Dyson, then the ‘bully’ Dory Townsend is also a representation of the figure of Boner McPharlin who appears on the margins of *The Turning* before assuming the stage in ‘Boner McPharlin’s Moll.’ In Le’s story, Dory is a menacing combination of brutishness and quietness, ‘That huge, mean body—the man’s face on top of it. He’d been held back a couple of years’ (107). In Winton’s work, Boner McPharlin is described as ‘the solitary rough country boy that country towns produce, or perhaps require. The sullen, smouldering kid at the back of the class’ (252). Here Winton is already offering Boner as a type or legend, a character who carries his own town myth with him even as he is presented. This myth is also used by Le in his creation of Dory, who has a similar relationship with the township itself. Le writes, ‘There was an element of community ritual in remembering all the things Dory was known or suspected to have done . . . He was only twenty but he stood in as the town’s hard man’ (109). Even the names of the two bullies seem to provide clues about their iconic status as signifiers of the socially excluded underbelly of a rural community. ‘Townsend’ and ‘McPharlin’ (far land) both hint at spaces that are outside the limits of a township, spaces which undercut the settled and centred version of rural civility. Indeed, both Dory and Boner live in rudimentary dwellings on the outskirts of civilisation, with only one older male relative. These domestic arrangements are meant to emphasise their hypermasculinity, their lack of privilege and their uneasy existence on the edges of town. Here is Le describing Jamie’s approach to Dory’s house:

He came to the shack in the middle of a muddy clearing. A man sat out front on a steel trap doing ropework. He was surrounded by other traps and old nets, dried and sun-stiffened in the shapes of their failure. It must have been Dory's uncle. He didn't look up. (156)

Here is Winton's narrator Jacquie, describing her first visit to Boner's place:

A peppermint thicket obscured the house from the road. It was a weatherboard place set a long way back in the paddocks, surrounded by sheets of tin and lumber and ruined machinery. I saw a rooster but no dogs. I knew I had the right farm because I recognized the vehicles.

As I approached, an old man came out onto the sagging verandah in a singlet. He stood on the top step and scowled when I greeted him. (275)

Once more the similarities are evident even in the details. Here we see a fishing shack and a dilapidated farm, both surrounded by objects (old nets, ruined machinery) that symbolise masculine failure and the edges of poverty. In both locations an older male exudes unfriendliness, rejecting interaction ('he didn't look up'; 'scowled when I greeted him'). In both cases the reader is meant to begin to sympathise with the bully at this point. The distressed home, the prominence of failed masculinity, the lack of female presence are all meant to offer circumstantial and familial details which lift each character out of their role as brutish, one-dimensional dispensers of violence.

It does appear that one of Winton's goals in 'Boner McPharlin's Moll' is to show that Boner has become a symbol or scapegoat who cannot possibly hold all the evil that is ascribed to him across the other stories in the volume. The reader comes to see that the fear of masculine violence in Angelus is real, but it is ultimately misplaced when applied to Boner. The cracks in the town of Angelus, the outbursts of masculine violence often come from within: for example, from Max the domestic abuser and rapist in the caravan park who once tried to bury his brother alive as a joke; or the corrupt police officers who drive Bob Lang to alcoholism and who later break both Boner's legs to intimidate him into keeping his silence during a royal commission. Boner is therefore the necessary sacrifice which the town needs ('requires' as Winton puts it) to maintain its own respectability, its own distance from evil. In 'Halflead Bay' Le works a similar angle with the figure of Dory. By the end of the story, he is still a brute meting out punishment, but there are hints that Dory knows that he is playing a set character in a small town drama. 'Just stay down,' he whispers to Jamie in a moment of mercy as they fight over Alison (159). At this point Dory also indicates that he knows that Alison has orchestrated the entire conflict. There is a sense of pathos and performance here, as the bully steps into a role that has been prepared for him in advance. Le, therefore, follows Winton in portraying the strange nobility of his bully. Both Boner and Dory knowingly bear a reputation for masculine violence, even when they are aware of the arbitrary nature of this designation.

There are many other significant similarities between the two texts. For example, Le co-opts Winton's sacred spaces. Le's 'Halflead Bay' has a symbolic geography of specific places: the jetty, the headland, the school playground, the family home, the beach itself. All these spaces also appear in *The Turning*, collecting similar meanings around them. For example, in a moving scene, Le's protagonist Jamie lies on the jetty, looking between a crack in two timbers, and contemplates the difficulties in his life: 'If he could choose a place—if it could

be all his—this was it’ (109). Here the reader is given a symbol of seeing partially during adolescence, of both focus and escape, of events passing by like currents that can’t be controlled. In Winton’s ‘Small Mercies’ we find Peter Dyson crawling up ‘beneath the supports of the wooden bridge’ to watch the trucks as they rush by (82). He is reenacting an experience from his adolescence, discovered with Fay and sharing it with his own son Ricky. The smaller details pile up too. In Le’s work, Jamie’s father sells his fishing trawler and takes up carpentry from his home workshop after his wife is diagnosed with M.S. In Winton’s book, Peter Dyson becomes handyman during his wife’s depression (a masculine return to craft in a time of crisis). The end of school bonfire descriptions could easily be switched without anyone noticing. One is fueled by ‘furniture, textbooks, beer cans and bottles, even their clothes’ (Le 123). The other contains ‘pine pallets, marri logs, tea chests, driftwood, furniture, milepegs . . . fence posts . . . [and] the school sign itself’ (Winton 281). Even Alison’s accusation that Jamie’s fingers smell of fish (‘It’s you! [. . .] You! You stink of fish’ Le 116) is a recapitulation of Winton’s ‘Cockleshell’ in which Brakey’s courtship of the spear-fishing teenager Agnes Larwood is tied to the smell of fish on his fingers:

Walking home through the last of the peppermints, he brushes hair from his eyes and as he does he smells fish on his fingers, and much later that night, in the last long hour that he lies awake in bed, he sniffs his hand now and then, full of regret . . . (129)

Where do these similarities lead? The sheer weight of reproduced vernacular details, the intricately wound themes of Australian masculinity, the recurring characters, the recreation of sacred, small town spaces: these indicate more than just Le ‘in the key’ of Winton. This is Le taking on a Wintonesque version of the Turing test and winning. Or to put it another way, this is Le the ventriloquist, producing the authentic voice of Winton without those biographical details that cause Winton’s work to be considered an example of Australian ‘regionalism’ (for example, see Ben-Massahel 229–43 or Watzke 26–28). Of course regionalism itself is a label which is accompanied by notions of mimetic authenticity. But authenticity is precisely what is at stake in *The Boat*. This is evident in the book’s opening story (‘Love and Honour and Pity . . .’) where a first person protagonist named Nam Le is trying to write fiction at the Iowa Writer’s Workshop. The Nam Le character baulks at the easy authenticity of ‘ethnic lit’ even though a couple of literary agents robotically encourage him to utilise his ‘*background and life experience*’ in order to position himself as a more marketable writer (9). Such writing advice sets up the geographic ethno-tourism of the stories that follow, framing them as a kind of virtuosic challenge to the requirement for authenticity that is often seen in aphorisms like ‘write what you know.’

Examining ventriloquism as a metaphor for Le’s writing in ‘Halflead Bay’ and *The Boat* actually directs us toward a number of paths that cross in remarkable ways. For instance, Nam Le begins his entertaining 2011 address at Melbourne’s Wheeler Centre (entitled ‘Voices from Elsewhere’) by raising the issue of ventriloquism and recalling an event in Paris, where his Australian accent became the subject of mirth:

I started things off in the usual way, by saying something like ‘Howya goin’?’ and there began a giggling in the audience which slowly grew into widespread laughter. Needless to say I started panicking. I wanted them to laugh, of course, but not before I tried to be funny. As it turned out, to them I was funny. What was funny was that a voice that sounded like mine was coming out of a face that looked like mine. I was an Asian dummy with an Aussie voice [. . .]

And when, after the event, a genial Australian bloke whose beard totally covered his lips, so that when he talked it seemed like his voice arose from a quivering bush, when he came up to me and said, ‘No offense’ (and you gotta love it when strangers lead with ‘No offense’), ‘But when you opened your mouth’ he said, ‘none of us could believe how Australian you sounded.’ When he said this Bruce [Lee] would have kept his cool. ‘When you opened your mouth,’ I said, ‘I can’t even see your mouth!’

At stake here is that authenticity of the body and voice, an audience’s expectation that the two will somehow align and the sense of discomfort some people feel when voice and body appear to be at odds. Later in the address Le notes that ‘People still expect people to come from where it looks like they have come from, and are still surprised when it sounds like they don’t.’ Ventriloquism, however, severs this natural link between voice and body. A voice appears in an unexpected place, emanating from a source that looks incongruous or even impossible. Of course in some ways Le’s Parisian situation strangely parallels the very kind of disjunction between author and voice that occurs in ‘Halflead Bay.’ The bearded man could have just as easily have been a Tim Winton fan, reading Le’s story and looking at the author’s dust jacket photo with disbelief: ‘None of us could believe how Australian you sounded!’ Le’s story is, in a cheeky way, a ventriloquist’s guide to dismantling the rules of ethnic and regional authenticity. Or perhaps, if one were to describe the process of constructing ‘Halflead Bay’ in more elevated terms, it exemplifies what Nam Le calls his ‘job as a writer: to catch, and channel all those voices thrown from elsewhere’ (‘Voices from Elsewhere’).

It is worth noting however, that there are different kinds of ventriloquism on show here, each with a separate relationship to power. On the one hand there is the writer as an Asian dummy with an Aussie voice, disenfranchised and ridiculed. On the other hand there is the writer as the channel or medium, the gifted one who is attuned to metaphysical messages. It is interesting that Le moves from one to the other in his 2011 speech. Moreover, as Steven Connor notes in *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, one can also view ventriloquism in an active sense and a passive sense. There is the speaker, a brilliant person projecting their voice through another object or figure. Then there is the conduit or vessel, who receives a voice that does not properly belong to him/her. Which is Le? From one perspective *The Boat* is an impressive act of ventriloquism, making ‘authentic’ voices appear from thin air and placing them alongside one another. But from another perspective *The Boat* is merely a vessel(!), carrying its cargo of specifically ‘authentic’ stories from different parts of the globe. This ambivalent dialectic perhaps helps to explain why some readers can be uneasy at what Le attempts in the book. For a reader can be dazzled by the virtuosic brilliance of the thrown voice, yet left wondering whether the book itself was just an empty shell filled with a series of showy writing tasks. For example, Michiko Kakutani’s review notes that, ‘Some of Le’s attempts at ventriloquism . . . can feel strained, like creative-writing class exercises in point of view.’ Similarly, Hari Kunzru discerns ‘a kind of empty virtuosity’ in Le’s assiduously researched fictional details.

Yet, as Connor notes in *Dumbstruck*, the act of ventriloquism also exposes a kind of paradox at the heart of the notion of voice. For the auditory voice (or voice event as Conner puts it) is one of the most intimate, most defining things about a person. And yet, this event can only occur when a word is spoken and when one’s voice leaves one’s body. Connor calls this ‘the voice’s split condition, as at once cleaving to and taking leave from myself’ (7). In some ways this is a deconstructive moment, akin to Derrida’s reading of the logos for example (‘what is

reflected is split *in itself* (Derrida 36). Ventriloquism, therefore, makes explicit the gap between voice and body and hence points toward a paradox of self-definition and separation. By thinking of Le's imitative work in 'Halflead Bay' as ventriloquism, then, we can consider the ways that this story exposes the fissures (or as Derrida might have said, the khora or traces) at the heart of Winton's regionalism.² The 'authentic' regional voice both must cleave to and take leave of its region. And if such a voice can be manufactured or counterfeited, if its accent can be perfectly mimicked, then the gap that is already at the heart of regional authenticity is made visible.³

The necessary play between closeness and remoteness is something that Ken Gelder also sees in Le's work. In 'Proximate Reading: Australian Literature in Transnational Reading Frameworks,' Gelder offers a rhapsody on various manifestations of distance and nearness in transnational reading and writing. 'Proximate reading,' Gelder says,

opens up a number of aspects of reading and literary practice that are to do with the way readers negotiate place, position and what can be called literary sociality (that is, relations between readers, texts and the meanings that bind these relations together), where these things are understood and evaluated in terms of degrees of closeness and/or distance, that is, proximity. (1)

For Gelder, both the ventriloquised and the paratactic nature of *The Boat* are important, precisely because they show the interplay between closeness and remoteness that lends itself beautifully to a 'proximate reading' of the work. Gelder seems to take ventriloquism as a kind of intimacy, following reviewers like Michiko Kakutani from the *New York Times* and Neel Mukherjee in *The Times* who both marvel at Le's intensely realised and inhabited worlds (11). Gelder also notes, however, that the book's paratactic style may hold these stories apart, 'providing a "criss-crossing set of pathways" that may also in fact *not* criss-cross at all' (11). I think Gelder is aware of the ways that these poles can be reversed too, even if it is not always made explicit in his reading. Ventriloquism, as we have seen, exposes a distance (or remoteness) that is always and already between any voice and its speaker. For its part, parataxis allows disparate stories to draw alongside one another in new ways (even if they do not commingle).

Furthermore, Gelder's work on citation further complicates the play between closeness and remoteness in Le's ventriloquising impulse. Citations, Gelder argues, 'are themselves an expression of proximity, of literary sociality, where texts are put into relationships with other texts, just as places are put into relationships with other places, with varying degrees of precision and imprecision' (5). Indeed within 'Proximate Reading' one can see at least three types of citation explained and illustrated. Firstly, there is the kind of citation where a literary text quotes from other works, drawing the authority of those works alongside itself. Gelder reads *The Boat*'s two epigraphs from Auden and Conroy in this manner.⁴ Secondly, there is also a kind of *readerly* practice of citation where a reviewer or reader may make connections with other works, citing them in relation to the work at hand. Gelder sees this in Sophie Gee's reading of Julia Leigh's *Disquiet* which 'recalls Kazuo Ishiguro, Virginia Woolf, the British novelist Edward St Aubyn, and so on' (5). Thirdly, Gelder argues that Australia itself can be figured as 'a literary trope,' becoming 'in one sense merely a matter of citation' (5). On the one hand Australia is like a text that can be cited and 'brought near' to other texts in interesting ways. For example, in Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, Australia is, for the main character's writing process, just one 'code book among many,' like the Bible or Shakespeare (Gelder 3; Coetzee 19). Yet on the other hand Baz Lurhmann's film *Australia* is presented as

‘nothing *other* than citational’ colonised by a variety of other films (*Gone with the Wind*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *The Overlanders*, *Out of Africa*, *Pearl Harbour*) that overlay and inform it (Gelder 6). Hence, these three forms (i.e. textual, readerly, and national) actually offer a complex picture of citation in their continually reversing and reversible vectors of meaning and authority.

What does all of this have to do with ventriloquism? Well there is a sense in which ventriloquism is a distilled and powerful form of citation, one that enacts both proximity to and distance from the mimicked source (as we have seen above). Indeed Gelder does appear to claim ventriloquism as a kind of citation by arguing that as the only Australian story in *The Boat*, ‘Halflead Bay’ ‘becomes just one act of “ventriloquism”, one code book, among a number of others’ (11). Moreover, thinking through Le’s ventriloquism more systematically, it becomes apparent that ‘Halflead Bay’ elegantly draws together the three types of citation which Gelder examines in ‘Proximate Reading’ (i.e. text, reader, and nation). For in terms of the text, Le’s perfect ventriloquism is the ultimate citation. It ‘summons’ Winton and draws him near, not through small epigraphic quotes, but through the mimicking text in its entirety. In terms of the reader, Le’s ventriloquism allows and guides particular citational responses, including those statements by Craven and others who specifically allude to Tim Winton as a point of comparison (Craven 70; O’Reilly 94). Finally, in terms of the nation, Le’s ventriloquism means that he cites Australia through Winton’s regionalism, and through *The Turning* in particular. Implicit within the process is a strong deconstructive statement about authenticity and authority, the voice and the self.⁵

Hence, if we return the Turing test, and to that controversy about whether intelligence can be reduced to a series of responses or a voice, we do so with the complexities of citation and the split ventriloquised voice in mind. And yet the seemingly omnipresent (and often discussed) Marxist/Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek adds a final telling ingredient to this mix. Žižek argues that Alan Turing’s test is not important for its results, but rather because it exposes a rupture in the heart of what it might mean to be a human:

The crucial intervention of the Turing test appears the moment we accept its basic *dispositif*, i.e. the loss of a stable embodiment, the disjunction between actually enacted and represented bodies: an irreducible gap is introduced between the ‘real’ flesh-and-blood body behind the screen and its representation in the symbols that flicker on the computer screen. Such a disjunction is co-substantial with ‘humanity’ itself: the moment a living being starts to speak, the medium of its speech (say, voice) is minimally disembodied . . . In short, one should claim that ‘humanity’ as such ALWAYS-ALREADY WAS ‘posthuman.’ (‘Masturbation, or Sexuality in the Atonal World’)⁶

This formulation gives us a way of connecting some of the lines of the argument so far. What Le’s work shows is that vernacular language *always-already was* post-vernacular, that regional authenticity *always-already was* ‘post-authentic,’ and that cited or citational Australia *always-already was* post-Australian. Therefore Le’s ventriloquised/ventriloquising voice in ‘Halflead Bay’ is something that both exemplifies *and* ruptures those tropes of genuineness that stalk Winton’s work.

In his 2011 Wheeler Centre address, Le relayed two questions that many of us are often asked when our voices don’t match some bearded Australian man’s preconceptions. ‘Where are you from?’ ‘Australia.’ ‘No where are you *really* from?’ In one sense *The Boat* (and in particular

the story ‘Halflead Bay’) is an accented and brilliant deconstruction of this question, showing that slippage at the heart of the nation and the self. And one could argue that as the book traverses (or seems to traverse) the globe, each new continental leap is another moment of ventriloquised authenticity, establishing and undercutting the ‘real’ in ‘really.’ Thus Le replays the bearded man’s question, looping it until it is hollow and wrung out. ‘Where are you *really* from?’ . . . ‘Where are you *really* from?’ . . . ‘Where are you *really* from, when all you do is channel voices from elsewhere?’

NOTES

¹ It is worth pointing out that Winton also has a character named Alison who has a birthmark and who captains the netball team: ‘When she played centre she drew no pity; she was a fearsome thing, a cutthroat player with a temperament to match her face.’ (61)

² Interestingly, Le demonstrates that this splitting can occur within a writer’s ‘own’ voice too. For in *The Boat*’s opening story, ‘Love and Honour . . .’ the narrator Nam Le becomes estranged from words he had written earlier: *The thing is not to write what no one else could have written but to write what only you could have written.* I recently found this fragment in one of my old notebooks. The person who wrote that couldn’t have known what would happen: how time can hold itself against you, how a voice hollows, how words you once loved can wither on the page” (24–25)

Ironically the voice which ‘hollows’ is the same voice which has issued a call to individual authenticity. This ruptured and exposed voice is a key concern in the framing story.

³ As Dixon reminds us, Winton too had to ‘manufacture’ his voice through the creative writing program at the Western Australia Institute of Technology in the 1970s and 1980s (247).

⁴ Note that Le’s use of ‘summons’ in the Frank Conroy epigraph actually picks up another definition of the word ‘citation’ (i.e. ‘a summons; a call, an invocation’ *OED*).

⁵ It is worth pointing out that such citational posturing means that Le’s book runs the risk of becoming trapped in the ‘pure simulation’ of a recurring matrix of citations. Thus the work (to appropriate Gelder’s phrase) becomes ‘nothing *other* than citational’ and may be seen as vacuous, failing to ‘indicate’ anything original at all. This, of course, is Stinson’s charge when he writes that Le’s stories ‘precisely imitate their sources without transcending them.’

⁶ In a weird (but perhaps strangely appropriate) doubling, Žižek here appears to be recycling a section of his 2001 book *On Belief* (43–44). In this earlier incarnation he references Katherine Hayles’s 1999 work *How We Became Posthuman*. Hayles writes something very similar in her prologue:

The important intervention comes not when you try to determine which is the man, the woman, or the machine. Rather, the important intervention comes much earlier, when the test puts you into a cybernetic circuit that splices your will, desire, and perception into a distributed cognitive system in which represented bodies are joined with enacted bodies through mutating and flexible machine interfaces. As you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screens, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become posthuman. (xiv)

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