Surfaces

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Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Blackwell, 1990)

Marc Redfield

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BOOK REVIEW
NICHOLAS ROYLE: *TELEPATHY AND LITERATURE*

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Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Blackwell, 1990).

"If only one accustoms oneself to the idea of telepathy," Freud wrote in 1932, "one can accomplish a great deal with it."[1] As in numerous other instances, Freud's prediction has acquired new force in the wake of its reinterpretation by such critics as Jacques Derrida and Maria Torok:[2] there is, indeed, a sense in which modernity can be figured as a telepathic predicament. As Nicholas Royle notes in his recent study, "telepathy" is a comparatively recent word: the OED lists it as a coinage by one Frederic Myers in 1882, ventured in order to "cover all cases of impression received at a distance without the normal operation of the recognized sense organs."[3] The term emerges within a context of nineteenth-century spiritualism, and marks an eccentric loop in the more mainstream post-Enlightenment discourse of sympathy. Consequently, it registers the site of numerous communications: between high culture and an emergent "popular" culture; between the occult and nineteenth-century science (particularly, of course, the liminal "science" of psychoanalysis); between Gothic literary traditions and the culturally charged languages of ethics, epistemology and politics that, from Shaftesbury to George Eliot (and in many respects to the present day), have been organized under the rubric of sympathy or the "sympathetic imagination." When one takes into account the fact that telepathy is, furthermore, a figure *of* communication -- of the communication of feeling or "felt" meaning (*pathos*) over distance (*tele*) -- it becomes easy to appreciate the term's critical potential.

Telepathy communicates a fantasy of unmediated communication, and at the same time records, in its very name, an irreducible distance within self-presence. It promises an escape from the technology of the signifier, but in doing so imports *techne* into the heart of pathos. For whose pathos is it, once tele-pathy has begun? And how would one ever even know whether it has begun or not? The question, thus posed, possesses far more than merely occult or psychological interest. Among the many intriguing texts recalled and meditated upon by Nicholas Royle, one might cite here Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's remarks on Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895): for Le Bon, claims Borch-Jacobsen, the "unconscious...is indissolubly nonsubjectal and 'social', to the extent that he never designates anything but immediate communication with others...prior to any consciousness of self, and thus also prior to any consciousness of others. Taken to the extreme, it is thought transmission, telepathy...."[4] And in a footnote Borch-Jacobsen adduces, as another striking instance of such a "dream of direct communication," the comment by Freud that I cited earlier:

If only one accustoms oneself to the idea of telepathy, one can accomplish a great deal with it -- for the time being, it is true, only in imagination. It is a familiar fact that we do not know how the common purpose comes about in the great insect communities: possibly it is done by means of a direct psychical transference of this kind. One is led to the suspicion that this is the original, archaic method of communication between individuals and that in the course of phylogenetic evolution it has been replaced by the better method of giving information with the help of signals which are picked up by the sense organs. But the older method might have persisted in the background and still be able to put itself into effect under certain conditions -- for instance, in passionately excited mobs.

At the telepathic interface, the trope of the unconscious overlaps with that of the crowd. Much could be said about the historical and thematic density of this passage; here it will suffice to note that Freud, writing in 1932, is necessarily sketching an ambivalent figure of the "passionately excited mob." The crowd embodies a dream of direct communication, but one ready to metamorphose into the fascistic nightmare to the extent that the impossibility of its realization can inspire violent denegation. The insect-fantasy (which I mean to discuss in slightly more detail a little later) forwards this ambivalence of the crowd under the sign of mechanical, non-human technicity. Crowd-consciousness infects identity with an exteriority that is at once social, historical, and -- Freud's phylogenetic speculations suggest -- potentially inhuman. As a figure of excessive communicability, telepathy inscribes psychology (and ultimately psychoanalysis) within the thought of the *technical community*, opening a fantasy of presence onto a pre-subjective, ineradicably social, and technically displaced *Dasein*. Telepathy, in other words, allegorizes a dimension of the political that both genrates and destabilizes ideologies of the *polis*; in a certain sense, telepathy is the radically fictional, *literary* dimension of the political, always available for recuperation as national aestheticism, as "la fiction du

politique," in Lacoue-Labarthe's phrase, but also always in flight from the totalizations it makes possible.[5] Thus conceived, telepathy is yet another name for the catastrophe of modernity.

Nicholas Royle's *Telepathy and Literature* pursues these and related issues from the vantage of literary criticism -- a discourse Royle also clearly wishes to question and displace. He is not out to provide new "interpretations" or "contextualizations" of traditional texts, wishing instead to forward the far more ambitious claim that "literature is a discursive formation," one that solicits the thought of telepathy: "Difficult to imagine a theory of fiction, a theory of the novel, without a theory of telepathy" (pp. 13, 17). Royle is echoing a memorable sentence of Derrida's ("Difficult to imagine a theory of what they still call the unconscious without a theory of telepathy")[6]; though *Telepathy and Literature* culls strategies and keywords from various critical approaches, it is primarily indebted to Derrida and to Abraham and Torok for its gestural vocabulary. The Foucauldian proposal to posit and analyze a "discursive formation" emerges and submerges without leaving lasting effects in the book. The few definitions of this "discursive formation" that Royle offers direct attention less toward genealogies of power or archeologies of knowledge in Foucault's sense than toward the kinds of uncanny dislocations associated with poststructural analyses. "[E]ngaged as the letter and the telephonic, literature would be, among other things, the addressing of oneself and the impossibility of giving the name" (25).

The terms "literature" and "telepathy" are allowed to drift considerably, but are anchored by a Derridean insight that Royle invokes more than once : "the fact that 'one cannot say of the addressee that s/he exists before the letter'" (Royle 15). The letter, as Derrida thematizes it in "Telepathy" and *The Post Card*, can be said to constitute its addressee as addressee -- as a subject within language -- in its arrival. This performative gesture, however, is inherently unstable, since the letter's arrival can occur only within the possibility of its failing to arrive, and its personalizing address can only occur within a general structure of iterability. The letter can thus be said to "predict" and "personify" its addressee, *and* to do so blindly or anonymously. Royle, plausibly enough, maps this problematic onto literary space per se: the "telepathic structure" thus becomes "the thought of the literary text as reading-machine, as reading-effect, that is as always in advance including, foreseeing, its addressee...without knowing where it is going, who is speaking or who is listening, and at what distance" (26). Telepathy or second sight is in essence a "metaphor for reading" (96). At various points Royle will also relate this pre-dictive, performative structure of reading to the cryptonymic vocabulary of Abraham and Torok: to the pun and the play of the signifier within the proper name, and to the corresponding "haunting" of the subject by alien, encrypted affects and identities.

The strengths of this approach complement those of the literary tradition Royle engages. His choice of authors and texts may appear eclectic at first

glance: the book begins with a reading of *Emma* and moves on in orderly chronological fashion for awhile, with chapters on Brontè, George Eliot, and Woolf; one is then ambushed by chapters on Coleridge and Wordsworth, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Raymond Chandler's *The Little Sister*. Presumably Royle plotted this course in an effort to resist being received as a contributor to Victorian studies: if so, he succeeded only at the price of partly obscuring the real shape of his enterprise. As I suggested at the outset of this review, Royle's topic is implicated in the question of modernity, of what used to be called the "post-Romantic predicament." And indeed, upon inspection the chapter on *Antony and Cleopatra* turns out to be interested mainly in reading and displacing the Romantic construction of "Shakespeare" as the embodiment of negative capability ["Following Hazlitt we are drawn to the irresistible hypothesis: Shakespeare *is* telepathy" (158)]. More specifically, Royle's text is drawing inspiration from the Victorian high Gothic tradition, and his most successful chapters are those on the authors in this tradition who most rigorously prefigure and disfigure psychoanalysis: Emily Brontè and George Eliot. It is a tribute to the value of Royle's work that one can describe it as "foreseen" by these texts, which occasionally even explicitly thematize telepathy in the process of elaborating and disarticulating Romantic ideologies of sympathy, imagination, and desire. This literary tradition, so frequently (and absurdly) identified as that of "realism," draws its most profound inspiration from its encounters with the uncanny: with those charged, Gothic moments when the domestic turns *unheimlich*.

Royle's attention to the figure of telepathy reinforces these texts' already considerable powers of defamiliarization. As Derrida says of Abraham and Torok (whose vocabulary of crypts, phantoms, etc. derives very much from the Gothic tradition), "A certain foreign body is here working over our household words."[7] Royle works over the household words of Jamesian point-of-view literary criticism, rediscovering the essential strangeness of notions such as "omniscient" narration, narrative "voice," "romantic identification," and, ultimately, "realism." We take for granted, he observes, that most common, fundamental, and extravagant of fictional devices, the narrator's consciousness of other consciousnesses. "[T]he telepathic," Royle insists, "founds the very possibility of character, characterization, etc." (17); it also disrupts the fictions of identity it generates. The august *Middlemarch* narrator returns to us, in the wake of Royle's analysis, as a barrage of questions: "Who or what -- we may reasonably ask -- us this male-female-author-metafictional character-narrator phantasmagoric collage of narratorial positions? It is this monstrosity, this narrator-madness, which both supports and simultaneously silences 'George Eliot' speaking 'in her own voice'" (89).

There are various subsidiary benefits to be had as a result of this gesture; in the case of George Eliot, for instance, Royle's argument provides a long overdue corrective to the recent critical habit of discovering undeconstructable humanist bedrock in Eliot's attention to the proleptic (i.e., "imaginative") structure of the scientific hypothesis. Overall, though,

Royle's book tends to privilege formalizable problems of narrative structure, with the result that, like many ambitious studies, it can be accused of promising more than it performs. The title of the closing chapter, "Raymond Chandler Telephoning Home," for instance, might lead one to hope that an oft-implied but not yet discussed intersection among literature, telepathy, and technology is about to be explored; instead one finds that Royle's interest in Chandler mostly takes the form of meditating, once again, the formal paradoxes of "omniscience" in detective fiction. Though the chapter provides numerous provocative formulae ("No metaphor without a telephone, then"; "Linked up through a kind of intertextual exchange, literary texts would be telephone calls" [166, 179]), it fails to analyze the question of technology it invokes (here, the question of the "telephone"), with the result that its most far-reaching claims remain trapped on the level of the aperçu. The problem is a recurrent one. Royle will cast off startling and frequently intriguing observations: an image in a Woolf text, for instance, will suggest itself as "a peculiar embodiment of the relations between the First World War and spiritualism, between war and telepathy"; then, in the next sentence, the vast spaces momentarily opened will contract to more ordinary literary-critical dimensions, and the discussion will proceed as a meditation on the uncannier aspects of literary influence -- here, Pater's on Woolf (119). For a reading of tele-technology and its philosophical and literary switchboards one must go to the work of Avital Ronell or Laurence Rickles (or, indeed, to that of Derrida himself). *Telepathy and Literature*, despite its occasionally avant-garde look and its frequent radical claims, is in many ways a traditional book. Its most salient preoccupation is that of literary criticism since Aristotle: narrative and its paradoxes. And its most decisive gestures occur within the context of a post-Romantic, and particularly Anglo-American, tradition of figuring narrative as an affair of "voice" and "point of view." One will be disappointed with this book's imaginative disruption of such massively influential received ideas only if one has allowed Royle's ambitious -- and genuinely provocative -- unpacking of "telepathy" to direct one's expectations.

It must be said, though, that *Telepathy and Literature* pays twice for its ambition, and in opposite ways: if Royle's far-reaching and wide-ranging insights frequently remain frustratingly undeveloped, they also tend to deflect attention from topics that this book could have, and perhaps should have, explored with a more minute lens. I spoke earlier of the heterogenous look of the table of contents; the book is arguably poorly served by its deliberate eclecticism, not because it belongs on the shelves of Victorian studies, but because its subversive potential might have been greater if its focus had been narrower. Royle's favored literary form, as mentioned, is the novel, and above all the nineteenth-century novel; he might have done well to have offered more explicit and extensive reflections on the intersections between the question of telepathy and that of genre. The role of Gothic literary forms and figures could certainly bear discussion in this context, as noted earlier. And many if not all of the authors and texts Royle has chosen to discuss would have had much to offer a more patient eye. In what follows I offer, by way of example, a few relatively obscure passages by George Eliott.[8]

Royle's chapter on Eliot focuses, understandably, on *Daniel Deronda* and on Eliot's strange and, these days, frequently discussed short novella, *The Lifted Veil*. Both texts are preoccupied with forms of extrasensory perception and with questions of narrative origins and endings: *The Lifted Veil* is in fact the story of a clairvoyant telepath named Latimer, who is also the text's first-person narrator, and who thus provides the occasion for complex paradoxes of narrative, desire, knowledge, and identity. In Royle's thoroughly persuasive analysis, this bizarre text comes to exemplify the ambitions and dilemmas that lie more or less successfully concealed in Eliot's more mainstream fiction -- above all, perhaps, in *Middlemarch*, that most canonical and seemingly most unflappable of Victorian novels. But Royle finds points of communication among all these texts; and one agent of telepathic infection, in fact, turns out to be the trope of the insect community that we encountered earlier in Freud's "Dreams and Occultism." Royle writes:

Let us suggest in passing the need for an entomology of literature. The texts of George Eliot would furnish excellent breeding-grounds. When George Eliot refers to insects it is invariably in what we would call a telepathic atmosphere. This is true even if the purpose of entomological allusions seems to be a denial of "telepathy." Thus, for example, in *Daniel Deronda*, the reference to adults, such as Mr Gascoigne, "who were running their eyes over the Guardian or the Clerical Gazette, and regarded the trivialities of the young ones with scarcely more interpretation than they gave to the action of lively ants" (p. 97). Or, toward the end, the reference to the idea that, without "creators and feeders" like Mordecai, life would dwindle and shrivel into the narrow tenacity of insects, unshaken by thoughts beyond the reaches of their antennae" (p. 749). However strong the denials may seem, there is an evident interest throughout Eliot's work in what is described in *Middlemarch* as "the possible histories of creatures that converse compendiously with their antennae, and for aught we know may hold reformed parliaments" (M, p. 843).

(Royle, p. 107)

Royle is right, but his presentation does little justice to the strength of his case. He would not have needed half-apologetically to list unpersuasive examples from *Daniel Deronda* if he had cast a wider net. Telepathic insects and their first cousins, telepathy machines, figure repeatedly, and quite symptomatically, in George Eliot's oeuvre. They first surface in two relatively inconspicuous rhetorical eddies in review essays written on the eve of her novelistic career. In "Women in France" (1854), Eliot reflects on the changes mass literacy has brought to the conditions of literary production. Conversation, the salon, and individual influence have yielded to the anonymity of print: to the incessant labor of reading printed texts, and the

possibility of being read by them: "It is no longer the coterie which acts on literature, but literature which acts on the coterie."[9] Eliot's text continues:

In fact, the evident tendency of things to contract personal communication within the narrowest limits makes us tremble lest some further development of electric telegraph should reduce us to a society of mutes, or to a sort of insects, communicating by ingenious antennae of our own invention.[10]

This is the kind of passage that helps us understand the force of Royle's claim that telepathy and technology are radically inextricable. Both render with a similar ambivalence the power that is "language." It is, indeed, the desire to master language and technology as instrumental expressions of the human ("communicating by ingenious antennae of our own invention") that generates the fantasy of a mutilation of the human by language and technology. The technical supplement of tele-communication inhabits language, and thus the domain of the "human," from the beginning, as the alien, inscriptive violence that opens the possibility of form.

The more one insists on the humanity of language, the more urgently a certain technological fantasy will present itself. Two years after "Women in France," in the middle of a high-powered and affirmative discussion of tradition and language in "The Natural History of German Life," Eliot is moved to warn an imagined reader of the evils of "a patent de-odorized and non resonant language, which effects the purpose of communication as perfectly and rapidly as algebraic signs":

With the anomalies and inconveniences of historical language, you will have parted with its music and its passion . . . and the next step in simplification will be the invention of a talking watch, which will achieve the utmost facility and dispatch in the communication of ideas by a graduated adjustment of ticks, to be represented in writing by a corresponding arrangement of dots. A melancholy "language of the future"! (Pinney 287-88)

Here the Gothic possibilities of mutilation and prosthetic supplementation remain unactualized, but the specifically linguistic nature of the threat attains sharper focus. Since Eliot's notion of "historical language" is ultimately an instrumental notion of language as the tool of human self-expression and self-production, her account inevitably veers toward a nightmare of linguistic efficiency; and here the machine, the "talking watch," explicitly relays the power of formalization.

It is true that, for all their philosophical resonance and narrative possibilities, both this expository hiccough and its equivalent in "Women in France" lack memorable rhetorical intensity. But two decades later, after the novels, in one of Eliot's last texts, the telepathy machine was to make another, this time truly remarkable appearance. Near the end of the penultimate chapter of Impressions of *Theophrastus Such*, "Shadows of the Coming Race", a final surge of energy illuminates George Eliot's prose. The chapter, which alludes in its title to a science fiction story by Bulwer-Lytton, develops a Butleresque, pseudo-Darwinian proposal that machines might one day supplant humanity by evolving "conditions of self-supply, self-repair, and reproduction." Able to "reproduce itself by some process of fission or budding," technology attains the self-sufficiency of *physis* with parodic literalness.[11] The topic is a rather incongruous one for George Eliot, as the narrator's sourly mock-serious tone for the most part confirms -- but at the fantasy's climax that tone shades into language of extraordinary intensity.

Who -- if our consciousness is, as I have been given to understand, a mere stumbling of our organisms on their way to unconscious perfection - -- who shall say that those fittest existences will not be found along the track of what we call inorganic combinations, which will carry on the most elaborate processes as mutely and painlessly as we are now told that the minerals are metamorphosing themselves continually in the dark laboratory of the earth's crust? Thus this planet may be filled with beings who will be blind and deaf as the inmost rock, yet will execute changes as delicate and complicated as those of human language and all the intricate web of what we call its effects, without sensitive impression, without sensitive impulse: there may be, let us say, mute orations, mute rhapsodies, mute discussions, and no consciousness there even to enjoy the silence. (*TS* 254-55)

The prose of *Theophrastus Such* is generally unmemorable, but this passage deserves to be ranked with those resonant moments of epistemological grappling that trouble the major turns of *Middlemarch* or *Daniel Deronda*. Here, as when Dorothea tries to internalize the alien codes of Rome, we are hearing what Neil Hertz calls the "rhythm of the sublime."[12] Even more remarkably, the anaphoric pulse of sublime language is attained by way of nothing less than the figure of "human language" itself. Something strange and plural, first called "processes," then "changes," is likened first to geological metamorphosis, then, far more insistently, to language and its "effects," to language as simultaneously trope and performance -- the substitution of such technical terms would be entirely in the spirit of this passage. It is not often that we would want to compare the stylistic registers of George Eliot and Paul de Man, but one can hear in Eliot's list of "mute" literary forms the ring of other thrillingly bleak phrases: de Man's use of the same adjective in "Autobiography as De-Facement," for instance, or of a similar darkly sublime enumeration of negated literary genres at the close of "Anthropomorphism and Trope."[13] These correspondences are not determinably motivable, but to say this is also to say that they are not

determinately accidental. Like the "machine" de Man borrows from Rousseau's *Fourth Reverie* to characterize "the deconstruction of the figural dimension," which "is a process that takes place independently of any desire; as such it is not unconscious but mechanical...like a grammar" (*AR* 298), the thematics of mut(e)ilation and the tonality of the sublime compose, for these texts, in a post-Romantic idiom, a thematization of language's performative power. The theme can only be stated in misleadingly affective, sublime formulations; but it can nonetheless be read. The most extraordinary representations barely suffice as Eliot's text seeks words for the ungovernable strangeness of words. Here the telepathy machine has become sheer "tele," devoid of "pathos," an impossible trope-machine cut off from the phenomenal world but possessed of "effects" nonetheless. These uncannily neutral "processes" and "changes" are at once objectless and -- since the machines lack all consciousness -- subjectless: they describe the pure formality of tropological substitution considered apart from all meaning or intention. Radically a-referential and thus irreducibly random in their formalized perfection, the machines might be said to act upon the world with the total efficacity of a total technology, were it not for the loss of sense suffered by any notion of "action" in this scenario. The machines "execute changes" that are indeed to be interpreted as linguistic "effects"; but in the absence of agent and object this effectivity becomes an incoherent catechresis, legible only when we impute to it the meaning it disallows. However necessary it may be to conclude that "language" "acts," one cannot claim to have said anything meaningful in saying so -- except by mistake.

Theophrastus Such is not a text to which one could imagine de Man having much recourse, but, as Royle's work has helped us appreciate, one can never exclude the possibility of telepathy. The possibility , in other words, that these machines are always already second-hand machines, without owners, though this is not to say that anyone borrowing them will not always be accused of plagiarism. Eliot writes a great deal about property and plagiarism in *Theophrastus Such* -- plagiarism is in fact inscribed as the radically undecidable of the text.[14] Apropos of "Shadows of the Coming Race," Eliza Savage wrote to Samuel Butler that "the only bit in the least bit readable [in *Theophrastus Such*] is a crib from *Erewhon* -- a most barefaced crib."[15] Butler wrote in turn to his sister of the "compliment" Eliot had paid him in introducing "a certain chapter on machines": "I had the satisfaction that great minds had thought alike -- that was all; but the resemblance is so close that there can be no doubt where she drew it from."[16] Eliot's biographer, Gordon Haight, suggests that "the idea had probably been discussed with friends like Spencer while Lewes was writing the section on 'Animal Automatism' in *Problems*."[17] We are not likely to learn more about how this particular airborne germ blew into George Eliot's mind. It is, however, (nearly) indisputable that her title alludes to the text that Butler himself had been suspected of plagiarizing; he had gone to some pains in the preface to the second edition of *Erewhon* to prove that his novel had been written before "the first advertisement of [Bulwer Lytton's] 'The Coming Race' appeared."[18] This ballooning question of plagiarism, within and without *Theophrastus Such*, enacts and figures what Derrida has called the operations of a "parergonal supplement."[19] One can never know for

sure whether the coterie has plagiarized literature or whether literature has plagiarized the coterie. When Latimer, in *The Lifted Veil*, pirates his brother's words and completes a sentence for him ("as if it were something we had both learned by rote") -- or indeed, pirates words from a future "self" so as to tell a story -- telepathy may well appear the most mechanical of excuses; but without it no sympathy, and no text, would be possible. The force of Nicholas Royle's book may be measured by the fact that, though he could probably have put much of the above material to good use, he cannot be accused of having simply overlooked it; indeed, he can rather be said to have foreseen it.

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[1]Sigmund Freud, "Dreams and Occultism," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 22 of *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey et al, 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966-74), p. 55. Cited in Royle, p. 181 n. 8. Freud's principal other reflections on telepathy may be found in "Psychoanalysis and Telepathy" (1941 [1921]), *SE* 18: 177-93; and "Dreams and Telepathy" (1925 [1921]), ibid., 197-220.

[2]See Jacques Derrida, "Telepathy," trans. Nicholas Royle, in *Oxford Literary Review*, 10 (1988), 3-41; and Maria Torok, "Afterword: What is Occult in Occultism? Between Sigmund Freud and Sergei Pankeiev Wolf Man," pp. 84-106 in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986).

[3]Frederic Myers et al, "First Report of the Literary Committee," in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. I, pt. 2 (London: Trübner, 1883), p. 147. Cited by Royle, p. 2.

[4] Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.140, cited by Royle, p.197 n37.

[5]Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La fiction du politique* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1987).

[6]Derrida, "Telepathy," p. 14.

[7]Derrida, "Fors," in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf-Man's Magic Word*, p. xxv. Cited by Royle, p. 31.

[8]The discussion of Eliot that ensues is extracted, with appropriate modification, from a chapter entitled "George Eliot's Telepathy Machine" in my book in progress, *The Violence of Form: Gender, Genre, and Aesthetic Ideology*.

[9]One can render the potential of this somewhat routine account of modernity by recalling Heidegger's representation of the "absolute dependency" of entities within the modern technological predicament: "The forester who measures the felled timber and who to all appearances walks the forest paths in the same way his grandfather did is today ordered [*bestellt*] by the timber industry, whether he knows it or not. He is made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose [*er ist in die Bestellbarkeit von Zellulose bestellt*], which for its part is challenged forth by the need for paper, which is then delivered [*zugestellt*] to newspapers and illustrated magazines. The latter, in their turn, set public opinion to swallowing what is printed, so that a set configuration of opinion becomes available [*bestellbar*] upon demand." Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, p. 299, translation modified. Heidegger's play on *Ge-stell*, *stellen*, *bestellen*, etc. is of course untranslatable: for the original, see *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Tübingen: Verlag Günther Neske Pfullingen, 1954), vol. I, pp. 17-18.

This is the condition that Heidegger calls *Bestand*: a general economy of dependence that unleashes enormous powers of instrumentality. The object (*Gegenstand*) no longer properly exists, having become a textual instance that refers itself elsewhere. It is, to be sure, no accident that both Eliot and Heidegger have recourse to images of the technology of writing: as Derrida's work has so forcefully shown, writing, in the Western tradition, has always been the exemplary example of (the danger of) *techne*. Or, differently put, the humanist scapegoating of technology is coextensive with the more vast and complex subordination of writing within "Western" logocentrism. Derrrida's work has elaborated such relations over the past quarter century: see, for a representative early and late text, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), and "La main de Heidegger" in *Psyché*, pp. 415-51.

[10]In Thomas Pinney, ed., *The Essays of George Eliot* (London: Oxford UP, 1963), p. 90.

[11]George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, n.d.), pp. 250, 253. Page numbers, prefixed by *TS*, are given in parentheses in the text. Heidegger's inflection of the contrast between *techne* and *physis* is worth recalling: *techne* involves an efficient cause -- the artist or artisan -- whereas that which is *physis* is "*poiesis* in the highest sense" because it "has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself (*en heautoi*)" ("The Question Concerning Technology," p. 293). On the exemplarity of the

"example" of the flower in philosophy, see Jacques Derrida, "La mythologie blanche," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), pp. 247-324.

[12]Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

[13]Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 80-81, 262.

[14]*Theophrastus Such* is overall a far more troubled text than we have been able to indicate here; criticism has systematically ignored it, preferring to close off Eliot's career with the grander difficulties of *Daniel Deronda*. Like "The Lifted Veil," *Theophrastus Such* is a *jeu de melancolie* that a monumentalizing reception must repress or marginalize. But of all those texts by Eliot that one reads so rarely and reluctantly, *Theophrastus Such* is possibly the least welcome: it lacks the lurid Gothicism that has made "The Lifted Veil" recuperable; it lacks the narrative interest of "Brother Jacob," or the thematic importance of the poetry. One is rather presented with the spectacle of an author turning from her last and most courageously experimental novel to an atavistic genre and a tonality at once bitter and ponderous. Eliot touches most of the generic stops of the Theophrastan character sketch as we know it from La Bruyère and Addison and Steele: a didactic concern for decorum; a survey of the petty faults of an urban bourgeois class; a wide-ranging overview of society spun around the castigation of exemplary, allegorically-named "characters." In Eliot's hands these generic directives assemble a world saturated with conversation, writing, and publishing: nearly every chapter of *Theophrastus Such* concerns authorship, injury, and the dangerously volatile circulation of intellectual property. Like most studies of Eliot, the present review now swerves away from this text; but this might be a good place to recall the etymology of "character": one who inscribes a mark or inflicts a wound (*charassein*); the die used to stamp an impression on a coin blank; the impression itself, and, finally and figuratively, a human being's physical appearance. According to Warren Anderson, editor and translator of *Theophrastus: The Character Sketches* (Kent State University Press, 1970), *character*, at least until Aristotle, meant only external appearance rather than inward individuality -- a sense retained in Theophrastus's interest in the "type." We also note with pleasure that the European revival of the Theophrastan character-sketch can be traced to the publication in 1592 of an edition of the Greek text, with Latin translation and extensive commentary, by Isaac Casaubon.

[15]Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill, eds., *Letters Between Samuel Butler and Miss E. M. A. Savage (1871-1885)* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 210.

[16]Daniel F. Howard, ed., *The Correspondence of Samuel Butler with His Sister May* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 86.

[17]Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 522.

[18]"'Erewhon' was finished with the exception of the last twenty pages and a sentence or two inserted from time to time here and there throughout the book, before the first advertisement of 'The Coming Race' appeared . . . . [B]eing in an out of the way part of Italy, [I] never saw a single review of 'The Coming Race', nor a copy of the work. On my return, I purposely avoided looking into it until I had sent back my last revises to the printer." Samuel Butler, *Erewhon: or, Over the Range*, ed. Hans-Peter Breuer and Daniel F. Howard (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1981), p. 41. *The Coming Race* had been published anonymously late in 1871, but was know to be by Bulwer Lytton; *Erewhon* was also published anonymously, and its initial success, as Butler suspected, was mostly due to its being taken as a sequel to *The Coming Race*. When the *Athenaeum* of 25 May, 1872, revealed Butler's authorship, sales dropped ninety percent.

[19]Jacques Derrida, *La carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), p. 291.