

Book Review

SLATER, GLEN. *Jung vs Borg: Finding the Deeply Human in a Posthuman Age*. Winter Press. 2024. Pp. 524. Pbk. \$29.95

Glen Slater's *Jung vs Borg* is wide-ranging and offers rich, prophetic insights to contemporary culture's fluid nature. His multidisciplinary vision is both panoramic and scenic, historical and mythical, psychological and spiritual. Due to its size and scope, it is best read slowly, with one eye on his text and the other on the cultural and global implications of his insights. Through these perspectives we can discern the shifting mytho-historical pressures that globally unite us in spite of differences, while simultaneously undermining where we are united and in agreement.

The book's primary perspective grows out of applying C. G. Jung's pioneering work that still resonates with us today, to understanding the world of AI, cyborgs, and their effects on what he calls "the deeply human" (p. 3), which favours verticality, depth, enchantment, the poetics of everyday life, and the centrality of the arts and humanities in education. Slater's book is a gracefully written counter-cultural text that pushes against the horizontal world of information saturation, lies, distortions, the lust for power, the greed to control, and the inhumanity needed to further marginalize minorities and all individuals and communities who are different in appearance or whose beliefs differ from the entrenched power structures that deny all who do not fall under the thumb of a brittle orthodoxy. Slater pushes against the age of mechanization, especially in the way it stifles deeper knowing, contemplation, poetic musing and spiritual awakening. The question Slater poses throughout his study may be put this way: How in a posthuman world, can we find a new synthesis between technology and humanity so that such an accord furthers and enriches the lives of all people, not just those in power?

For Slater, cyberspace is the new frontier. He refers to it as "the new Wild West ... and the horizon goes on forever. Cyberspace is thus a spiritual realm too" (p. 28). His argument crafts in complex and layered structures how the cultural myth is being reframed such that valuing itself is diminished. The question I kept in mind as I read was: Do we want to embrace a digitized life or a dignified life? Are both possible?

Slater draws on the basic Jungian idea that consciousness of archetypal patterns in the collective unconscious enlarges our experience of subjective and objective realities. An expanded consciousness is accessed through metaphors, symbols, and figurative language, as well as the aesthetic expressions of poets and artists who have shaped cultural imaginations for millennia and whose voices are essential to a deeper human engagement with the world, and perhaps most especially, to healing our estranged distancing from nature.

The natural, psychic, and spiritual world's alienation in modernity needs to be retrieved so we may increase our understanding once again through their elegant correspondences. He returns to this central theme at the end of Part 1: "Orientation", in claiming that "when the civilizing process is detached from the natural process, nature stops cooperating and turns against us" (p. 106). From this aggression spring "pathological forms of adaptation such as narcissism and psychopathy" (p. 107). Slater is extremely adept in this first part in stating the problems and limitations of our current shared world view that misses the deeper layers of the psyche in its personal and collective formulations.

Part 2, "Down the Rabbit Hole", explores many of these same ideas. Slater's discussion is enriched by the work of James Hillman and his exploration of the Greek gods, which Slater uses to deepen his thought. It leads him at one point to conclude that "both the fundamentalist and the conspiracy theorist are cut from the same cloth: that of wanting to bypass the complexities of life through the embrace of packaged meanings and paranoid explanations" (p. 193). We know how successful this bypass has been in contemporary America and beyond; the price tag is enormous: "When this fictive function of the psyche manifests in such defensive ways, it stalls the culture-making process and undermines the bridge between nature and civilization" (p. 193). Such dissociations alienate, confuse and deflect the creation of cultural pillars necessary for a society to cohere.

One other arena of discussion that pervades this part of the book is under the subheading, "The Quest for Immortality and Perfection" (pp. 220–223). The pairing is central to our relation to death: "Yet the urge to beat death is a primary motivator for many strands of technoscience, making it central to the posthuman philosophy of transcendence" (p. 221). I would mention here that in his exploration, Slater turns to films, Greek mythology, television shows like *Saturday Night Live*, philosophical schools of thought and other cultural artefacts; they become his lenses, examples of what can be seen through the filters of depth and archetypal psychology. His intention is to uncover those analogies that enrich the nature of the psyche in all its permutations and areas of interest.

Towards the end of Part 2, Slater pinpoints one of the most stubborn obstacles in the last 50 years, which has the intention to topple a shared sense of reality: postmodernism, posthumanism's most formidable adversary.

Perhaps its most disturbing influence is postmodernism's attempt "to convince us reality is more a wilful contrivance and less an expression of enduring patterns of being, which has instilled the sense that human existence may be more malleable than it actually is" (p. 285). As a result, what we had thought was a firm grounding in a shared reality has skidded into "a pandemonium of fabricated imagery ..." (p. 285).

Part 3, "Below Ground", explores the plunge into the unconscious, both individual and collective, in the development of depth psychology; glimmerings of what might be persuasive antidotes to the dissolution of a shared sense of the real represent slivers of light against the darkness of a shifting relativism. I was drawn to the section entitled "Calculating Psychopaths" and its adjacent subject matter, "Losing Heart" (pp. 352–355; pp. 356–358). The question Slater proposes here is: "Or is [*sic*] possible that cultural psychopathy is helping to accelerate the fascination with AI and posthumanism?" (p. 354).

The cultural context here is underlined often. What is it that the postmodern world is being persuaded to adhere to as an act of ontological faith? The prize here is the nature of being itself: being as a person, being in relation to computers, and being in relation to incarnated others. The danger, as he describes it, is to miss the fact that "like the psychopath, computers have been shown to be exceptionally good at feigning empathy and concern as a means to an end" (p. 357).

Slater finds gold in the film *Westworld* (2016–2022, HBO) (p. 367), in the development of the android's robotic state, which mimes the human world. He writes that "the key motif is the reversal of roles, with the androids crossing the threshold into something that resembles consciousness and human emotion, and the human demonstrating increasingly robotic, soulless, and distinctly psychopathic tendencies" (p. 361). In this threshold crossing, human beings lose heart and heartfelt experiences, signalling the further development of a heartless world and with it the loss of our authentically human responses to one another. It may be, in part, that we can lose the sense that the other person is in fact real.

The final large division is Part 4, "Restoration". At the beginning of this upswing in the discussion, Slater cites Jung's own tracking of consciousness, which is "as far as we know, specifically human." Slater continues to cite Jung's thought: "'*Reflexio* means 'bending back', and used psychologically would note the fact that the reflex which carries the stimulus over into its instinctive discharge is interfered with by psychization'" (p. 400).

The payoff for this pausing of the instinctive response to life events is enormous. "But with enough consciousness, enough '*reflexio*', or 'bending back', we become co-writers of our life stories, determining to some degree how our movies play out" (p. 400). I sense this movement of consciousness towards its own story-making is a nodal point in Slater's entire study. For if we are not the co-writers of our narrative, can we indeed be called fully

human? Our stories are so entangled with our sense of identity as unique individuals that to lose that ability would be to forfeit our posthuman place in the world. “We become conscious only in relationship” (p. 401), which of course begins first with our relationship with ourselves.

Further along in Part 4, Slater continues to develop the crucial presence of creativity, co-creativity and human agency. In “Learning Curve” (pp. 438–441), he proposes: “A new story seems like an esoteric notion at this historical juncture. However, it is a logical extension of the story Western civilization has already enacted” (p. 438). His observation appears at the end of a lengthy summary of a host of philosophers who wrote about humankind’s managing of nature, shaping and forming the natural order to conform with their beliefs.

Later, Slater explores the role of what he calls the “Anthropocene Citizenry”, the definition of which includes: “The Anthropocene citizen is thus the person who finds meaning and purpose in creatively responding to the forces shaping contemporary life, the person who thinks in complex patterns...” This person is guided by “the spectrum of intelligences and sources of wisdom necessary for a co-creative evolution” (p. 454).

Chapter 14, “Reanimated”, leads us out of the four parts into a new vision, one which finds a sweet agreement between the old and the new. The chapter begins with a quote from James Hillman as one of its epigrams: “Technology can be reconsidered, each thing imaged anew in terms of *anima mundi*” (p. 468). I find the words “in terms of” a central measuring stick for the entire study. What are we willing to relinquish, preserve, relate to, clarify, remain uncertain of, and finally stand our ground for as a species against forces that wish to mechanize us and humanize technology—all in terms of ... ? Slater joins with Hillman in our advances in understanding and implementing those newly found pockets of wisdom in service of the world soul, the animating principle of the imagination for the welfare of all, not the few who forge their way into power positions. A more contemplative attitude pervades such a shift in vision.

Slater meditates on its value: “It is through these slower and deeper forms of contemplation that we attend to the presence of the earth in our thinking, a mode of thought in which we come to really know the materials of our work and from which well-created things emerge” (p. 480). The result of such a revelatory shift in thought and action will be central to the new “counter-culture”, which “will be a more conscious inversion of the old and the new. This will restore vertical modes of understanding, allowing us to grasp the presence of timeless archetypal patterns in even the latest ideas” (p. 490). As such it will not be a marriage of convenience as much as a marriage of soul, spirit, body, and culture.

I confess here that I tend to read the epilogue or summary or concluding chapter of a new book first, not last. I have found that often they read as an

effective introduction to the work's largest themes and images. Such was my experience in reading pages 483–511.

The “Epilogue” opens a space for Slater to critique many of the programmes and courses in psychology that fail to deliver what many who sign up for them are seeking: some deeper understanding of themselves, what their lives mean, and how to develop a deeper consciousness of who they are and what they are pursuing. Too often, Slater laments, they are told that they will find what they are seeking in philosophy or literature courses, not in psychology studies. For their part, “the field has turned itself into a handmaiden of scientific reductionism, doing its part to prepare the path to a posthuman future” (p. 485). Entertaining dimensions of soul, of soul-knowing, is not part of their repertoire.

He continues by illustrating “where soul is present, a sense of the sacred is also never far away; when a divine hand is felt, it is always felt by or in the soul” (p. 498). Soul work insists on a psychological poetics where the symbolic order is alive and animated (p. 498). Bowing to the power of either simulacra or “simulation” (p. 508) will lead to devastating consequences. “If simulation is to become our destiny, there will be no destiny.... If only simulacra are preparing to follow us, why care about the effect of our current actions?” (p. 508). My own sense of these two stressors on our humanity is that if we ignore the wisdom of the natural orders, a future will prevail where there will be fewer people who are fully-conscious human beings. But if we adhere to and honour the poetics of soul, our survival will endure and flourish under the guidance of what I would call the mythopoetic imagination incarnated in everyday life.

I also found Slater's list of works in his bibliography astonishing in both number and scope. They fill 12 pages of small print, enough titles to keep all of us out of trouble and reading in a host of fields for decades on matters of psyche, culture, history, memory, and the spiritual impulse of the soul.

Lastly, during my reading of Slater's book, I wrote several poems. One is titled “Language: A Love Poem”. The last part of it reads:

What do I let in? /Who do I forgive? When do I give in?/I can ricochet off this/triangle for a day and a night/until a dream caresses them with its/reserve of images/and offers in the morning/less a solution, more an absolution. /Then a single word does indeed/become flesh and wanders/joyfully among us. /The resemblance startles everyone paying attention. (May 5, 2024).

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