

The Prosthetic God: Memory, Mortality, and the Posthuman Condition in the Death Note

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author develops a posthumanist reading of the manga Death Note, claiming that the series works as an important literary-visual commentary on the instability of the human subject. It puts forward three primary arguments that question the traditional techno-centrism of the posthumanist theory. The first argument sees Death Note as a supernatural prosthesis and the Shinigami Ryuk as a non-human agent, the relationship between which form a network of distributed agency that functions within the plane of the magical. Second, this paper theorizes the strategic memory loss of Light Yagami as an instance of so-called "prosthetic amnesia", performing an analysis on his self-reprogramming as an example of so-called prosthetic identity in which the self is shown to be an externalized, programmable entity. It lastly juxtaposes the existential boredom of its main character, the defiantly immortal Ryuk (a gerontological commentary on the fantasy of eternal life) with the "gerontophobia" of the mortal Light, whose divine ambitions in the god-like powers of the devil are marked as a violent escape of mortality. Through its discussion of these overlapping themes, the paper shows how a well-known graphic narrative might be used as a crucial thought experiment in the diffusion of posthumanist theory beyond the machine to consider perennial questions of agency, identity, and mortality

Keywords Posthumanism, Prosthetic Amnesia, Existential Ennui, Manga, Distributed Agency

INTRODUCTION

Since its release, Takeshi Obata and Tsugumi Ohba manga Death Note has been considered an unusually captivating piece of pop culture, which uses its supernatural setting to address contemporary fears. The story of a genius student, Light Yagami, having gained a power of a god to eliminate people has been marked as a text addressing the issue of how to create order and justice in a place where the authorities have been lost (Gardner, 2017, p. 201). It is this fundamental struggle that has resulted in a series that has become a rich object of philosophical discussion with a large and varied corpus of scholarly analysis far outstripping the norm in terms of manga studies.

The rich storyline of the series has been seen as a breeding field of a multitude of interpretative approaches. Its political and legal aspects have received attention by many scholars who interpret it as an allegory that occurred after 9/11. Malin (2009) states that Death Note is a melodramatic speculation about the global terror problem and the proper reprisals of the state and non-state to it, and the dispute between Light and L can be viewed as the issue of security vs. freedom (p. 23). Then there are those who have gone into the psychological and moral frameworks that shape the story. Field (2021) examines this unjust justice of the main character, citing the psychological need to make the world crime-free so that he would be a god as seen in the character of Light Yagami as an example of narcissistic fantasy (p. 156). Respectively, Kerketā (2021) discusses the show in the context of the creation philosophy to question the problematic relationship between humans and God (p. 80). As even the study of reception and fandom has been subjected to it, scholars such as Lee (2011), have considered that fans willingly engage in what may be described as the process of negotiating the characters and their actions and their moral complexities in their own creative compositions (p. 317).

However varied they are, these penetrating studies are united by a certain theoretical orientation: they all maintain the sure ground of the human, the central and stable locus of agency, meaning and morality. When studying the politics of states, psychology of human beings, moral decisions, or fanatical interpretations, the human subject is handled as the agent of actions and as the final object of investigations. This critical consensus does not however take into account what is probably most radical in a series, the manner in which the central object, which is not human, the Death Note itself, essentially

destabilizes the human who uses it, moving him out of a discrete agent to one part of a larger, non-human mechanism. Another important gap is therefore created, because the available frameworks are actually incapable of analysing the very reconfiguration of the human that the story is setting up.

The present paper argues that a posthumanist framework is the only framework that can fill this gap. As a critical discourse posthumanism itself directly contradicts the notion of the autonomous liberal subject on which historical analysis usually relies. During its formative stage, it was this problem which was mostly conceptualized in terms of technology and N. Katherine Hayles (1999) famously characterized the posthuman as a pattern of information that was seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines (p. 2). Though this has engendered sustained emphasis on cybernetics, other theories that have passed more recently have suggested to broaden this perspective. As an example, Jane Bennett (2010) introduces a notion of a vibrancy of matter, that the agency, or the thing-power, does not belong only to living beings or complex technologies but is unified throughout the continuum of material objects (p. xvi). This theoretical shift enables the scholars to consider the agential potential of non-technological artifacts which, however, are capable of acting as powerful actors, such as a supernatural notebook.

The present paper argues that a posthumanist framework is uniquely suited to fill this gap. As a critical discourse, posthumanism directly challenges the humanist notion of the autonomous, liberal subject. While this challenge was initially framed through cybernetics, with N. Katherine Hayles (1999) defining the posthuman through its articulation with intelligent machines (p. 2), the field has since evolved to address the human's relationship with a much broader spectrum of non-human forces. This more recent wave of posthumanism is less concerned with the utopian or dystopian futures of technology and more focused on dismantling the philosophical legacy of humanism itself. As Cary Wolfe (2010) argues, critical posthumanism opposes the fantasy of "transhumanism," the simple 'upgrading' of the human, and instead insists on a rigorous "critique of the foundational assumptions of humanism" (p. xv), questioning the very stability of the human as a discrete category of being.

This theoretical expansion requires moving beyond a preoccupation with the machine and towards what Rosi Braidotti (2013) terms a "post-anthropocentric" turn, which critically examines the assumed superiority of the human species (p. 12). For Braidotti, this involves embracing a vitalist materialism that recognizes agency in matter itself, a force she calls *zōē*, or "generative life," which flows through all entities, whether they are organic, geologic, or, as this paper contends, supernatural (p. 60). This network of human and non-human actors is not a static collection but a dynamic process of mutual creation. Donna Haraway (2016) provides the crucial concept of "sympoiesis," or "making-with," arguing that "nothing makes itself... Sympoiesis is a word for worlding-with, in company" (p. 58). This idea of co-creation perfectly describes the Death Note assemblage, where the entity known as 'Kira' is not Light Yagami acting alone, but is symposietically produced through his entanglement with the notebook and Ryuk. This destabilizes not only human agency but also human identity, which becomes, as Stefan Herbrechter (2013) puts it, an effect of "the decentring of the human in relation to its technological and other 'prosthetic' extensions" (p. 3). By defining these extensions beyond technology, these thinkers provide the critical tools to analyse the Death Note as a supernatural prosthesis and a powerful experiment in posthuman becoming.

Through such enlarged notion of posthumanism, this paper will interpret Death Note as an essential thought experiment whose object is a non-technological, human-object assemblage. First, it suggests that the Death Note is a supernatural prosthesis and the Shinigami Ryuk is a non-human actor, and when they come into relation with Light, they form a network of distributed agency that resists the technocentric penchants of posthumanism. Second, it suggests that the manipulative use of the memory by Light Yagami is a form of so-called "prosthetic amnesia," which signifies the model of prosthetic identity in which the self is an exteriorizable, programmable being. Lastly, the paper juxtaposes the immortal boredom of the Shinigami Ryuk and gerontophobic ambitions of godhood on the part of Light and interprets this contrast as censure of the delusion of immortality and fearful evasion of mortal condition. This analysis will prove eventually that Death Note is a critical cultural text to study the decentring of the human in the world of shared agency that concerns powerful non-human forces

The Supernatural Prosthesis: Breaking the Technocentrism of Posthumanism

Posthumanist theory has thus been established, provided a robust perspective through which to consider the decentring of the human, but its priority has tended to be technological. Death Note offers a corrective too important to ignore since it performs its drama of posthuman transformation against the backdrop of a supernatural, rather than cybernetic, object. In this section, the Death Note is considered as a prosthesis that augments and redefines the agency of Light Yagami, addressing the fact that its agency is not controlled by an autonomous individual but dispersed among the set of human, object, and supernatural agents. By doing so, it questions what Hayles (1999) names the main formulation of posthuman with the use of the so-called intelligent machines (p. 2) and drives the theory to some uneasy plot.

This analysis revolves around the prosthesis concept. In the mind of posthumanist, the notion of a prosthesis goes beyond a prosthetic limb to counter any outside object that is made coextensive with the body and its volitional capabilities, so that the distinction between the self and the tool is flattened (Hayles, 1999, p. 3). The Death Note is an ideal although unorthodox example. It is a will-prosthesis. In the case of the initial victory by a sixteen-year-old Light Yagami, who tests the notebook

on a criminal who has schoolchildren as hostages, he is physically imprisoned in his bedroom which is miles away. There is however a fatal practical influence of his recorded thinking. This strength is confirmed by him killing the biker Shibuimaru, another instance where his own inner judgment is thrust violently in the sphere of the street (Ohba & Obata, 2005a, Vol. 1, Ch. 1). Light is still in his room and his operation is not confined and the reach of his agency is now colossal since it all depends on the list of names and faces he can access. The notebook transforms into a part of his mental and moral identity, it is such an effective tool that a man and the subject of his work become one unit: Kira.

Such fusion of user and object however does not address a model of easy human dominion. Death Note is not a helpless tool, but rather an actant that has its operational logic and limitation. That corresponds to the ideas of Jane Bennett (2010), who presents the principles of so-called “thing-power” arguing that the agency is decentralized in a sensibility of a thing saturated with the “vibrancy of matter,” and things themselves can act, able to cause effects (p. xvi). One of the clearest forms of agency of the Death Note may be stated in the form of its list of inviolable rules. These are not just suggestions otherwise, but the laws that are written and are taking an active part in shaping the events. The first commandment, “The human whose name is written on this note shall die” is an ultimate commandment (Ohba & Obata, 2005a, Vol. 1, Ch. 1). Light does not create this power he finds it out and has to work within its confines. The agency of the notebook also comes out in its so-called default settings; since an official cause of death is not mentioned before 40 seconds, the notebook itself decides; there is a heart attack. It is nothing but a manifestation of non-human agency or the object making a decision without human influence by itself. All the early experiments of light are not those of a master ordering about a tool, but of a discoverer investigating the properties of a strange new actor with whom he now has to work co-operatively.

The notebook is a part of Light’s brain, his soul and morale, a device so powerful that it has provided a combination of the user and the object where they could be perceived as that one functional object: Kira. One of the transformative panels of the first volume (see Figure 1) reveals this fusion of gestures and scenes. Immediately following his moral horror at having killed two people, Obata’s masterful use of chiaroscuro depicts Light’s face half-cast in shadow, his expression shifting from shock to a cold, menacing resolve. The shadow is not merely an absence of light; it is a visual representation of the Death Note’s dark power overwriting his previous moral framework. The accompanying text—“THIS WORLD IS ROTTEN. ROTTEN PEOPLE SHOULD BE KILLED OFF TO CLEANSE THIS WORLD”—is the verbal articulation of the new ideology enabled by the prosthesis.



Figure 1 The Visual Birth of the Posthuman Entity, Kira from Death Note (Vol. 1, p. 39), by T. Ohba and T. Obata, 2005a, VIZ Media.

Alt text: A black-and-white manga panel showing a close-up of the character Light Yagami. His face is half-covered in deep shadow, with an intense, menacing expression in his visible eye. A thought bubble on the right reads, "THIS WORLD IS ROTTEN," and another on the left reads, "ROTTEN PEOPLE SHOULD BE KILLED OFF TO CLEANSE THIS WORLD."

The Kira identity is therefore not Light Yagami as an individual agent, but rather, it is the result of a distributed network of agencies. The three major players in this setup are the Light, Death Note and the Shinigami Ryuk. Light is what the human mind, tactful organization and ethical or un-ethical orientation is. The notebook gives the brute force and the hard logic of operation. And Ryuk helps with the original impetus and the daily nuisance. Another important statement that develops the idea about the independent-motivation is the well-known excuse of Ryuk when he says, “I am just bored, that is all” (Ohba & Obata, 2005a, Vol. 1, Ch. 1). He is neither the servant of Light nor does he have any emotional connection, he is just a

mere robber trying to get his only objective fulfilled: entertainment. His denial to co-operate with Light and give up the name of L or act in a manner contrary to the script or the rules proves that the network created by Light did not leave him at much liberty to control his personal network. The will of Light is strong and ever negotiated and limited by the thing-power of the wall notebook and even independent life of the Shinigami. Although a political reading could be used to see the Light-L conflict as the clash between opposing ideologies (Malin, 2009), a posthumanist reading would point out that the power possessed by Light is already a political compromise between several, non-human powers even by the time L comes into the fray.

Takeshi Obata has given a brilliant representation of this tangle of relationships. Panels underline the interdependence of the notebook and Light as the representatives of the symbiotic relationship. Light is frequently depicted crouching at the notebook in the gloomy room, with the pages glowing, conformed, as the only spot of light, the god-like grin tripping out on his face, a visual translation of Light becoming one with the prosthesis. The power of the agency of the notebook is expressed by the stark gothic English language writing of the rules pages as something totally alien to the Japanese dialogue that seem almost a biblical unalterable law that has fallen into the human world. Moreover, the visual design of Ryuk, his horrendous semi-human appearance, his creepy smiles, and his ever-present, ethereal close to invisibility that he stalks Light. It is a strong metaphor of distributed network. He is ubiquitous, an ever-present part of the assemblage, something that the reader bears in mind because it serves to remind them that the power that Light wields is a loaned one and that he is not entirely alone in what he does.

Thus, in *Death Note*, the human-notebook-Shinigami assemblage can be seen as a strong blueprint to a non-technological posthumanism. The prosthesis changes the agency of Light, but this outsourcing of control has dramatic repercussions how Light feels about himself on the inside. This radical instability of identity that is induced by the power of memory that the notebook can control establishes a condition of what one can term as a prosthetic amnesia to which I turn now.

Prosthetic Amnesia and the Reprogrammable Self

As the reconfiguration of the agency of Light Yagami as illustrated in the *Death Note*, is just a foreshadowing of a deeper transformation into the posthuman by the externalization and manipulation of memory and identity itself. The deactivation of his own memories by Light as a thought experiment is what drives the series into the most convoluted thought experiment of them all with a portrayal of selfhood that is not self-stripping or unified but malleable, modular and downright scary. This part examines this procedure through the ideas of 'prosthetic amnesia,' a voluntary, specialized, and changeable forgetting, and the idea of a contingent identity, a self that is switched on and off as a result of its interaction with a non-human thing. It is a jump forward beyond metaphor, an ominous, supernatural argumentative study that turns into a case for modern theories of externalized memory.

Prosthetic amnesia has to be separated with clinical pathology, it is not character of the mind derailment but characteristic of prosthesis. In the newly digital age where total recall is the new normal, new studies are finding reason to doubt the virtue of forgetting claiming that selective oblivion is essential to cognitive or even to social well-being (Mayer-Schonenberger, 2009, p. 13). Light Yagami has made a kink out of this virtue and turns it into his weapon. This is the basis of his plan to temporarily surrender the *Death Note* to L to show him that he is innocent: there exists a rule according to which, after 490 days, the owner of *Death Note* who loses or has stolen will forget everything about the notebook (Ohba & Obata, 2005b, Vol. 4, Ch. 34). This process enables a certain, strategic willing amnesia. The experience of being Kira in no way involves being all geared up in a memory that cannot be forgotten about as this is a set of data accompanied by ownership. It turns into his feature not a bug, and this tool is used, to manipulate with his hunters but rather his own mind. This externalization of memory into an object aligns with recent posthumanist arguments that memory is no longer confined to the brain but is "part of a wider mediatic process of the 're-origination of all origins'" (Kember & Zylinska, 2012, p. 119). Light's memories are not lost; they are simply offloaded, held in escrow by the notebook.

The gruesome effectiveness of the system is established at the climax of the arc. Once, after Light has touched the notebook (see Figure 2), memory of his identity is not reintegrated with tenderness but reinstated with violence. The art of Obata depicts this as being a high speed data transfer and the display of the transfer is shown as a full page panel with a totally changed subject. The innocent and resolute boy of the earlier pages does not exist anymore, it is substituted with a cold, demonic entity that simply says to him internally, "JUST AS PLANNED". This whiplash in imagery between amnesiacs persona and Kira persona that has been restored to him is the clinching argument in support of programmable non-vital persona. Losing his memory and personality was not the case; it just was re-installed in the prosthesis when reconnected.



Figure 2 The Re-installation of the Prosthetic Identity From Death Note (Vol. 7, Ch. 53), by T. Ohba and T. Obata, 2006, VIZ Media.

Alt text: A manga panel showing a close-up of Light Yagami holding the open Death Note. He wears a headset with a microphone and has a cold, triumphant smirk with narrowed eyes. The text "JUST AS PLANNED." is written in large letters on the left side of the panel.

The Yotsuba arc gives the exact case study of this prosthetic identity. During his amnesia, Light Yagami is back to his normal days before he became Kira. He is arrogant, brilliant, and highly driven, but carries the intense moral sense that puts him right at the opposite side of the scale to the ideology of Kira. In the instance when L suggests that he could be Kira, Light is actually shocked and rages off saying, "I would never dare do something so stupid to mess up people to build a new world" (Ohba & Obata, 2005b, Vol. 5, Ch. 42). He now makes the most useful ally of L and his brains are now fully focused towards capturing the killer he used to be. This time proves that the Kira personality is not an evil that is innately possessed but a different personality all together and depends on the interface between the human and prosthesis. The story is also compelling with one of the advanced theories in the philosophy of mind described by the idea of the extended mind which claims that mental functions are not always confined to the confines of the skull and thus can be integrated with external items (Clark & Chalmers, 1998). This has been further elaborated in recent scholarship, which points at the idea of a complex, mutual influence between brain, body and world in which external tools are actively transforming internal states (Sutton et al., 2010, p. 524). The Death Note is one of those tools; and in combination with Light, the identity of Kira appears.

The atrocious effectiveness of the system is demonstrated in the arc culmination. In a helicopter, Light is chained to L to whom the notebook is finally handed to him. As soon as his fingers are on its cover his memories flood back into his mind violently and instantaneously. The art by Takeshi Obata has portrayed this not as a pleasant memory but a sheet-lightening transfer of information: panels of his former transgressions flash before his eyes, which in the space of a moment have translated to moral righteous obsession, or demonic triumph, which is now cold. His inner most words are not a sigh of relief, but a confirmation: "Just as planned: It all takes place in my memory!" (Ohba & Obata, 2005b, Vol. 7, Ch. 53). This is no remembrance but a re-installation. This is achieved by restoring the file called Kira which is held externally in the notebook into the system and replacing the amnesiac personality. When flash gleefully exclaims, "I have won L" (Ohba & Obata, 2005b, Vol. 7, Ch. 53), it is not the mere quantitative victory over his rival; it is the great victory of the man who has managed to hack his soul successfully and demonstrated that he is as programmable as the death scenarios he creates in the notebook.

After all, perhaps the most posthuman act of all in the series is done by Light when he manipulates the consciousness of his own mind. It establishes the self as contingent and programmable not a stable and coherent entity, but existing in a nexus of its own material and informational surroundings. Death Note is not merely a prosthesis that makes his agency extend into the world, it is one that enables him to offload his identity, store it and reinstall whenever wanted. When the very foundations

of selfhood (memory and identity) turn out to be this weak and prone to an external manipulation, it makes a confrontation with the nature of human existence inevitable. That sets the final philosophical confrontation of the series in the high contrast: the panic-stricken, insane struggle of a mortal to escape his finitude and the slow tedium of death that hangs upon an immortal.

Existential Ennui and Gerontophobia: The Two Faces of (Im)mortality

Having revealed how the Death Note prosthesis enables exteriorization of agency, programming of identity, the analysis comes down to the most basic level of the human condition: mortality. Above all, the only certain thing in the view of Death Note is that death is the only reality that cannot be changed, should the self be as weak and accidental as Death Note makes it sound. To push the whole of the posthuman investigation to a higher, philosophical level, the series gives us a clash between two opposite answers to this reality. This contradiction finds representation through the relationship between the immortal Shinigami and Ryuk and hyper-mortal human of Light Yagami. Ryuk finds himself contending with crippling boredom, eternal boredom that is also a very potent critique of the desire to live forever, and in which Light finds himself battling with this messianic desire to become god-like leading to a violent, pathological hatred of the finitude of the human lifecycle that the story reveals to be: gerontophobia.

The character of Ryuk is a walking, apple eating thought experiment on the irrationality of endless existence. His only reason to involve himself with the human world is clearly mentioned in the first chapter: "The thing is, I was bored" (Ohba & Obata, 2005a, Vol. 1, Ch. 1). It is not a casual grumbling but a psychological, self-existent state. This state is exactly what is claimed by the philosopher Bernard Williams (1973) that an infinite life would result in a life of unbearing tedium after being deprived of the projects and desires that give a finite life its form. Such a reading finds support in more recent work on the role of boredom. According to Andreas Elpidorou (2020), boredom is an aversive motivating state and is not a state of inactivity because its aim is to convey that one is not satisfied with his/her current condition and to drive an agent to the novel stimulating objectives (p. 31). This is exactly what Ryuk's dropping of the notebook is, a desperate goal-directed behaviour and his act was inception to come out of stasis in the Shinigami Realm. His fascination with apples, a mundane, earthly, and perishable pleasure, further highlights his condition. For a being who has everything and forever, the only remaining novelty lies in the simple, fleeting sensations of a mortal world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Light Yagami whose whole deal is a desperate attempt to escape humanity that is so boring to Ryuk. We can interpret his ambition as a radicalized version of gerontophobia: not so much a fear of the elderly as a fear of the whole process of aging, decline, feebleness and demise. The fact that Light has kept on and on promising people that he will be the "God of the New World" (Ohba & Obata, 2005a, Vol. 2, Ch. 9) is not just a way of questing power but a cry to eternity. That is so in line with theory of immortality projects by Ernest Becker (1973), according to which human culture is constructed on heroic structures used to contradict the horror of death (p. 27). The final immortality project is the new world of light where Light is its all living and permanent judging. Moreover, his blind fury against L, Mello, and Near is not merely the anger of a criminal against his hunters, rather, it is existential rage of a man whose desire to overcome the condition of finitude has been brought down to a time of cops and robbers again. The fear that death brings as suggested by the philosopher Shelly Kagan (2012) is usually a fear of being denied a chance at more life, of being denied life in general; the answer given to Light is to ensure that they are the ones who never be denied life, by taking matter of that denial into their own hands.

This dialectic finds the ultimate, depressing answer in the tragic end of the series. The god complex of Light destroys in a ruined warehouse where he was shot and left in the open. He is turned into a bleeding pitiful being who is desperately asking Ryuk to spare his life by writing the names of his enemies in the notebook pitifully. The art designed by Obata shows him lying on the ground crawling, his face is a mask of fear and shock (see Figure 3). As always, Ryuk plays the observant bystander and withholds his side of the deal on the defunct boy, who is no longer cute to observe. In a very quiet voice he says, "You are neither heaven nor hell. There is no exception to the rule everyone dies, sooner or later . . . It was great until it was over. Some boredom, the two of us murdered it" (Ohba & Obata, 2005b, Vol. 12, Ch. 107). At that, he writes the name of Light Yagami in his Death Note. The stunning irony is a full circle: the man to whom humanity was destroyed through violence is killed in agonizing human fashion, the eternally uncreative but bored immortal is the noncommittal initiator of his downfall.

This dialectic, that ends so devastatingly with the tragic ending of the series, is perfectly shown in the last showdown in the warehouse (see Figure 3). Creating, again, an excellent visual inversion of the visual hierarchy that held the entire series thus far, Obata sets Ryuk as the foremost figure, uniquely positioned in a higher angle and at looking down indifferently. Light, who is treated in godly poses so often, now is portrayed as a small, bleeding, pathetic figure at the floor below, his sight set into the sky in nothing less than terrified horror. This one picture is the literal representation of the absurdity of his venture into immortality (Becker, 1973). His gerontophobia instead of putting him into transcendence has instead brought him to this agonizing smallness. The words of Ryuk, his dialogue, "... YOU'RE FINISHED" (Ohba & Obata, 2005b, Vol. 12, Ch. 107), proves that he is not the role of evil conqueror, but a disconnected spectator whose amusement has its natural end, and so his own problem with eternal boredom is logically solved.



Figure 3 The Failure of the Immortality Project from Death Note (Vol. 12, Ch. 107), by T. Ohba and T. Obata, 2007, VIZ Media.

Alt text: A black-and-white manga panel showing the Shinigami Ryuk perched on a railing, looking down at the wounded Light Yagami on the floor below. Light looks up in terror as Ryuk says, "...YOU LEANED ON ME. YOU'RE FINISHED."

Finally, the relationship between Ryuk and Light is what consequently becomes the most significant philosophical statement of the series. It criticizes the infantile wish to have a perpetual life as well as the sickness of the horror of a short-lived existence. Human life and the stakes and struggles are just a game, which is so awesome to Ryuk because it ends. To Light that closure is an imperfection to be savagely engineered out of existence. The resolution of the manga confirms that the meaning is not attained to create a god-like permanence but created in the constraints that Light had attempted to avoid. The latter remark on death, which is constructed through a deconstruction of the human agency and sense of the self, doubts the ability of Death Note to be a mere straightforward posthumanist narrative.

CONCLUSION

Drawing to a conclusion, Death Note is a dark and deep posthumanist text, a text that attempts to disrupt the conventions of the field through the problematization of the decentring of the human by looking at the decentring of the human in the context of the supernatural. This discussion has shown that the series methodically deconstructs and dispels the idea of the autonomous individual by initially de-throning the agency of the individual into a distributed network of tripartite formed between Light, the notebook and the Shinigami, Ryuk. Moreover, the following up on this, it then exposed identity itself to be a prosthetic construct, in that Light could use memory and personality as Kira in strategic fashion to externalize, delete and re-write like firmware. The story then concludes, at last, with a heavy philosophical reflection upon death, pitting the existential malaise of eternal night.

The relevance of this reading is that it affirms the status of popular media as a very important source of philosophical discussion in the modern times. Death Note turns abstract uncertainty about wavering identities, collective action and the human experience into something primal and immediate, which makes its timeless appeal easy to understand. This line of inquiry can benefit future scholarly research, perhaps through applying a comparable posthumanist approach to such other characters as Misa Amane or to the biopolitics of the new world that Kira creates. In any case, the series is another sharp reminder to remind us that the biggest questions regarding our posthuman future are not necessarily those that maybe contained in the circuits of a machine but those that are written down in a notebook owned by a god of death.

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