DOOMSDAY OR DESIRE:
DO HUMANS DREAM OF ROBOTIC LOVERS?

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By

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Humans and machines connect, but how? This is a question of increasing importance as we rely on technology more and more in our daily lives, and as we strive to create smarter, faster, more *human-like* machines. For example: this text was written using a computer. The computer (a machine, a possession, an object) is used as an extension of human thought, to relay meaning by setting the language into text and type. The keyboard used for typing, the motherboard that stores this information and retrieves it, these wires and electronics follow a human's command. Clearly the human has a connection to this machine; maybe she could not even imagine life without it, without the ability to communicate through keystrokes and text. And the machine has a connection to the human: she is its owner, its "user," the mass of organic material that can access its mechanisms and wiring. Without her this machine would be unable to produce meaning, indeed, it would have no meaning. A human could find an inordinate sense of power in this sort of relationship, especially if she were willing to ignore the extent to which she might not be able to *imagine life without* the machine.

I should ask, then, what defines the bond and the boundaries between the human and the machine? The relationship has evolved beyond the connection of a person to an object. The materialist urge, the need to purchase and possess, is the relation of a subject to an object as something to be obtained; gratification for the subject is found in the desiring of the object and, perhaps, of eventually having it. Certainly there are intense "relationships" between humans and the object of choice,

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but perhaps we should regard this less as a relationship and more as a dialogic, as an exchange between the person and her object. The connection between the two is based in ownership, control, and power. An inanimate object can be admired or even utilized as a tool but it has no will and cannot even "respond" to its owner or manipulator. Even if one imagines it as a relationship, as two objects (one animate, one not) standing *in relationship* to each other, we as humans are interpreting the interaction as such.

Yet even this dialogue is problematized when the object is no longer inanimate but possessing of animation, even giving the illusion of or hinting towards the potential for subjectivity or consciousness. A technologized object, one possessing machinic capabilities, begins to emerge as somehow *different* from other, less animate material objects. From the smallest gizmo to the largest vehicle, a machine responds. Regardless of whether it responds of its own volition or out of its own will, the often unpredictable nature of the machine itself—the mishaps that arise from faulty wiring or the errors that result from inexplicable system crashes—imbues it with a sense of power that a purely inanimate object can never embody. A computer may simply be a very sophisticated tool, one created and controlled by man, but it is, to borrow Donna Haraway's parlance, a *post-cybernetic* machine. It may be mechanical and electrical, just like other machines, but it is a communicative tool with an automatic control system. Whereas a repetitive cotton mill will produce the same results, assuming all gears are in working order, and while even a CD player with a microprocessor will

play a disc when the play button is pressed, neither of these engage communication in the way we expect a computer or robot to do. The occasional malfunction that cannot be predicted or even fixed evokes the sense the ghost in the machine cannot be laid to rest with logical reasoning. Haraway writes,

> Pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the spectre of the ghost in the machine…basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert (152).

The difference between natural and artificial. What if this difference is less than ambiguous? When a machine crosses the border between natural and artificial and appears to have a human body, the distinction between the organism and the machine is almost eradicated. The human has been improved upon and the paranoia of those pre-cybernetic machine operators looms ever greater. Suddenly, the conscious machine, once the ultimate expression of man's desire for automation, becomes an abomination: creepy, a creature deemed unnatural despite a distinct lack of ties to the natural world—the "inhuman" in human form is disturbing and deeply frightening. Are those scared of sentient machines modern-day Luddites, or are there deeper fears at work? Powerful, conscious non-humanoid machines have been represented as threatening. Hal in <u>2001: A Space Odyssey</u> is an immediate example for many, in which the astronauts trapped in space with an artificial intelligence whose

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programming appears to have failed, and who places the completion of the mission as greater importance than the lives of the humans supposedly meant to control the computer. Yet the experience of the doomsday machine in *machine form* is somehow different from that of the machine in *human form*.

In this thesis, I will explore cultural representations of the machine in human form—androids, replicants, and cyborgs—to understand how the convergence of flesh and technology affects the structure of the dialogic between humans and machines. Will such a machine transform this dialogic into more of what we envision a *relationship* to be, and if so, how is this relationship structured? On a more basic level, how is our interaction with these machines influenced by the relationship between humans and our own physical bodies as *we* inhabit them?

I consider three films and one novel: <u>Blade Runner</u>, directed by Ridley Scott; <u>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</u>, written by Philip K. Dick; <u>A.I.: Artificial Intelligence</u>, directed by Steven Spielberg; and <u>Tetsuo: The Iron Man</u>, directed by Shinya Tsukamoto as representative of texts that center around machines in human form.[i] These films are pulled together first by the symbolic use of human body and its relation to the machine, whether the machine is internal or external. Through the human form, these movies address issues of desire, eroticism, labor, reproduction, and the family. Each of these has significant implications for the central questions of this thesis, and these implications are revealed through theoretically mediated readings of the texts I have chosen. Additionally, the medium of film allows for spectatorial

positioning; the connection of the perspective provided in the film to that of the viewer will be critical in discussing *how* these implications are illustrated.

The second chapter of this thesis provides the basis of the theoretical structure through which I engage these primary texts. In this chapter, I discuss the human body and how it has been defined and conceptualized at various points in history leading to the present. This discussion explores critical dialectics, such as natural/unnatural and private/public, as well as questions surrounding the relation of humans to the natural/material world and considers texts from Karl Marx, Raymond Williams, and Michel Foucault, among others. I also address questions of subjectivity and consciousness as applied to man-made objects, relying on Émile Benvenist and Louis Althusser. The very definition of the word machine, reveals the dialectic inherent in the idea of the machine itself. As representations of the machine strive to distinguish and distance it as the "Other," this dialectic exposes vital links between machines in human form and humans. I argue that these links, along with the human form—the physical nature of humans and how it is involved with ideology, desire, labor, and reproduction—have a profound effect on the structure of the relationship between humans and machines. These issues surrounding the body, whether our own form or a representation of one that is man-made, take the emerging relationship and imbue it with desire and fear.

Chapter III considers readings of select scenes from <u>Blade Runner (The Director's Cut)</u> and the novel that inspired the film, <u>Do Androids Dream of Electric</u>

Sheep? <u>Blade Runner</u> is probably the most familiar of the primary texts, and because it has subtexts that address questions of desire, labor, masculinity, the father, and reproduction, it proves an ideal embarkation point. Chapter IV introduces <u>A.I.: Artificial Intelligence</u>, a commercial Hollywood film that was intended to reach an even bigger mainstream audience than <u>Blade Runner</u>. The representation of the mechanical human in <u>A.I.</u> involves similar issues as <u>Blade Runner</u> but also, because of its narrative, allows for a shift to Jean Baudrillard as a model on which to continue building the human/machine relationship; here I introduce notions of the real and the simulacra, along with physical and emotional illusions. The final chapter concludes the thesis through a reading of the Japanese movie <u>Tetsuo: The Iron Man</u>. Though the movie does not feature an android, or a machine built to have a human body, it does feature a cyborg, one that is, in effect, the android turned inside out, with metal on the outside and human within. <u>Tetsuo</u>, on top of the commercial Western productions, provides an alternative representation of the machine/human conflation, one that blatantly acknowledges the fetishistic, masculinist aspects of technology, and questions how these aspects will be changed by the technology itself. Further, the film is, ultimately, a disturbing visual representation of the culmination of fear and desire discussed throughout this thesis. The fears interwoven as subtext in <u>A.I.</u> and <u>Blade Runner</u> are thrust to the forefront in <u>Tetsuo</u>, and they are as much an answer to the questions of this thesis as they are questions of their own for future research.

CHAPTER II: THE BODY, THE SELF

In God's Image

As I posited in the opening of the previous chapter, the machine with a human

body has the capacity to blur the distinction between the organic and machinic bodies

so much that the distinction is virtually erased. Referring back to Donna Haraway's

quote, what is it that crosses "the difference between natural and artificial" (152)? The

human form, specifically the *human body*, is at the nexus of the difference as well as

the resulting ambiguity. The intermingling of the machine and the human in a manner

that seems to demolish the (perhaps imagined) barriers between them evokes a set of

fears apparently ignored in man's quest for utopian automation. The human body

represents, in the tangible, physical form, much of what serves to distinguish man from

the natural world, a separation created by and necessary to man if he is to understand

his place in the world. Though Rodney A. Brooks argues compellingly that technology

and syntax are, in fact, what separate animals and humans, for the purposes of this

work, we must look at the natural world *as a whole*, not simply animals (3). However,

as Brooks does in his <u>Flesh and Machines</u>, we can begin with animals; they are

certainly have a place in the "order of things," a place that has historically been behind

and beneath man.

The tradition of man in a separate order from the animal kingdom has existed

for millennia, and can be traced through various mythologies and religious doctrines.

The Prometheus legend of Greek mythology, for example, tells the story of the two

titan brothers who were selected by the gods to create man.

> Here some god - it is not known which - gave his good offices in
> arranging and disposing the earth…The air being cleared, the stars
> began to appear, fishes took possession of the sea, birds of the air, and
> four-footed beasts of the land…
> But a nobler animal was wanted, and Man was made.
> Prometheus took some of this earth, and kneading it up with water,
> made man in the image of the gods. He gave him an upright stature, so
> that while all other animals turn their faces downward, and look to the
> earth, he raises his to heaven, and gazes on the stars.
> …But when man came to be provided for, who was to be
> superior to all other animals, Epimetheus…had nothing left to bestow
> upon him…Prometheus…brought down fire to man…It enabled him to
> make weapons wherewith to subdue them; tools with which to cultivate
> the earth…and to coin money, the means of trade and commerce
> ("Pandora and Prometheus").

Man's physical design—his face turned towards the heavens—and his gifts not only

distinguish him from the lesser animals, they make him more god-like as well. The

myth allows for man to be crafted of materials still imbued with divine spark, and man

is allowed to keep the fire stolen by Prometheus while Prometheus himself is punished

for all eternity; this myth grants man his special status. His place as master, above

animals and above nature, is given to him by the gods.

Christian doctrine, as in the King James Version of the Bible, involves this

notion as well:

> Genesis 1:26 So God created man in his own image, in the image of
> God created he him; male and female created he them.

> Genesis 1: 27 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be
> fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have

dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over
every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

While arguments have been made that the idea of man made in God's "image" does

not reflect a physical likeness but rather the idea that man possesses emotional and

mental qualities that reflect God's own "divine attributes," either idea places man in a

category separate from and above animals. Distinguishing himself as God-like or made

in the image of this Creator does not, of course, turn man into God's equal. It does,

however, provide him with a narrative to justify his dominion over the lesser creatures

of the world. Man is, in effect, God's middle manager. He places himself as superior to

animals (not to mention women and other men of inferior races or religions), he is able

to harness nature's power, and he has produced a so-called order of things that maps

man as the closest link to heaven above all of "God's creatures." At different points in

history, man has proclaimed himself the master of this world, as granted to him by

God, or at least by the words of God as interpreted by man.

Despite this rhetoric and beliefs, however, there is a difference between

following doctrine and "playing God." Performing the duties set forth by God—much

of which is open to very subjective reasoning and interpretation—is one thing. But

when man begins to stray and partake in activities many believe should be reserved for

God himself, like creating life in an "unnatural" way, man is reminded that he has been

made in God's *image*, and that he *is not God*. These activities are, for the most part,

instances when man tries to maintain dominion over *himself*, specifically his physical

body. Take such issues as abortion, fertility drugs, cloning, and stem-cell research:

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each one is based entirely in the physical human body, and all have incited violent reactions based on religious doctrine. That these all involve the creature uniquely modeled on God helps define the limits within which humans, and man in particular, operate regarding what it *is* to be human and how we define our own physical boundaries. It also provides some of the framework for the relationship between humans and the machines we create *in our image*. As evolved as we are spiritually, intellectually, and physically, are we—even those who do not even participate in any faith—ready to share our God-given place in the universe, or even give it up altogether?

While this work endeavors to focus on the *human* body and the relationship between *humans* and machines, there is an obvious discrepancy with much of the rhetoric used herein. Notably, in many discussions of religious traditions and the order of things, "man" and "human" are interchangeable; only in recent years has the term "human" truly begun to replace "man" in Western discourse as the universal term. Nevertheless, the use of "man" as a universal term can neither be ignored nor underemphasized, especially in discussions regarding science and technology. David Noble, in his book The Religion of Technology, addresses the difficulty of constructing a discourse surrounding women and technology because of the masculinist tradition of science. He has "tried to account for the gendered construction of science by tracing the ideology and institutions of Western science to their roots in the celibate, misogynist, and homosocial clerical culture of the Latin Church, and to

suggest that the legacy of this lineage persists in today's scientific milieu"(209). Not only is science a historically masculine endeavor, the resulting technologies have themselves been tied to maleness, both in their use and effect. Many technologies designed and destined for women's use have even been tied to this masculine institution and were determined by men.

How the male uses technology and how it may affect the male physical form are two central concerns in this discussion. While the core question of this thesis may be the *human* relationship with machines, we cannot avoid utilizing historical Western notions of what constitutes "human." I argue as well that we must take into account the Enlightenment view of what constitutes the "human"—the universalized masculine. The white male was (and often still is) naturalized as the primary definition of "human." Anthea Callen, remarking on the visual representation of human anatomy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries notes, "The fact that 'human skeleton' refers to a male skeleton is symptomatic of the normative function of the male body in anatomical paradigms"(402). She later writes, "Given its long and unquestioned visual history and hegemony, the male skeleton provided an established norm; it was thus against a male skeletal paradigm that the female skeleton came to be measured – and found wanting"(404). Women were considered physically lesser than in many ways, particularly with regard to the sexual organs; the female form was the body with orifices and the body as vessel. The male body was the original form, in Enlightenment theory as well as in Christian doctrine, where Adam was formed and then Eve, from

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Adam's own body. The original Creation, which is a reversal of reproductive roles *without the use of orifice*, considered alongside the Fall, when the female or secondary being created from man causes the downfall of man, will be instrumental in working toward an understanding of perception toward the machine in human form.

Man and the Material World

The body is involved in every critical dialectic that provides man with his sense of being. Without the body there could have been no connection to the material world; without the material world there could have been no production of use value. Without the body there could have been no division between physicality and textuality, no self, no subjectivity, and no "I" that enables man to "other" the rest of the world. The body both anchors man to the physical world and burdens him with its needs and "natural" ways; without such a body the whole of nature would be alien to us. I argue, therefore, that the machine in human form threatens, and potentially renders obsolete, many crucial dialectics that define the human world.

How is it that we are as yet uncertain about the relationship between humans and machines? Certainly, the word "machine" dates to only the mid-sixteenth century, and the concept of technology is considerably younger than that. But man has long employed the use of tools and technology. The discussion of humans and machines has certainly entered mainstream discourse, but so many questions remain. Onward we press, working to create a "smart" machine and to build one that has emotions, a sense of consciousness, that can speak to us and understand language as we do. Yet all of

these are, in many ways, human characteristics that many hold dear as specifically human. I wonder, for instance, if, as Jacques Lacan tells us, *language is that which produces meaning*, does this imply we wish, somehow, to automate meaning—or that we understand the repercussions of doing so? Do we wish to create a being that truly possesses emotions or one that represents emotions, one whose emotions are merely an illusion? What does it mean to build this sort of machine if, as many have posited, humans themselves are machines, just ones built of so-called "natural" and "organic" materials?

If we consider the desire to finally produce a machine in human form, or a human-like machine, we must also consider whether this desire, and the desire for machines in general, has been fully explored. How does the desire for a man-made machine, preferably one in human form, relate to the equally powerful fear of the repercussions to humanity this creation may bring? Certainly, the doomsday theorists abound: As Dr. Frankenstein created a monster with little thought to the consequences, so may we. Yet the questions that arise from our quest to produce these machines—I hesitate to use the term "artificial intelligence" because, as I will explore in Chapter IV, the ideas of "artifice" and "real" are more complex than this general term allows—are the stepping stones to the larger, more frightening questions that haunt the cultural productions and representations explored in this thesis. The final question may very well be: Will we create some sort of race, the post-human, which will eventually come to dominate us? Before we are able to answer it, however, we must begin with the

questions that focus on the dialectic of the desire and the fear involved in the creation of this type of machine, both of which become glaringly obvious when we consider the post-human in relation to the human body. Haraway's commentary on the ambiguous division between humans and machines is critical to this discussion, and the distinctions she lists, "natural and artificial, mind and body," must themselves be examined.

Keeping in mind the arguments presented in Chapter I, I return to the idea that machines, particularly computers and robots, seem to be more than just inanimate objects, even though they are "man-made." But what does it mean to be "man-made" or "artificial"? How is this different from anything found in the "natural world"? Even such phrases as "the nature of the machine," used above, are conflicting: can a machine have a nature, or can it be a part of nature? It is tempting to discard the idea of "nature" itself as a social construct and instead rework the connection between organic and mechanical without any preconceived implications. Yet with or without the quotations marks, the concepts of "nature" and "natural/unnatural" maintain an undeniable ideological presence, particularly with respect to the relationships between humans and the world beyond the human body. "Nature" cannot be discarded.

What then is nature? There are various traditions that position nature at odds with humanity in a dialectical opposition, while others describe it as more complementary to human existence. Raymond Williams defines nature in <u>Keywords</u> as such:

Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language. It is relatively easy to distinguish three areas of meaning: (i) the essential quality and character *of* something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not human beings. Yet it is evident that within (ii) and (iii), though the area of reference is broadly clear, precise meanings are variable and at times even opposed (Williams 184).

While (i) is the meaning which allows for such a disjointed statement as "the nature of a machine," it is the interplay between (ii) and (iii) that creates a sort of disconnect within this same statement and within the relationship between humans and machines. It is this disconnect, or moment of disruption and opposition within the conceptualization of the idea of nature, which particularly concerns this discussion.

It is essential to note the distinctness of "human beings." Both (ii) and (iii) in Williams' definition present humans as simultaneously an element of and separate from the material world. That there is an "inherent force" is not the issue, but that this "force" can, at any time, affect *either* the material world *or* human beings, raises the question: In what way is humanity connected to, yet able to distinguish itself from, the natural world?

The locus of this dialectic is the central figure of this work as a whole: The human body. This physical figure, with its uncertain and shifting boundaries, is that which ties man to nature and keeps humanity firmly planted in the material world. Marx, in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 links man and nature through a discussion of labor, or specifically estranged labor. He writes that man relies on the "products of nature" to live and that "[t]he universality of man is in practice

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manifested precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic*

body"(75). This universality rests on two facets, namely that "nature is (1) his direct

means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life-activity.

Nature is man's inorganic body—nature, that is, in so far as it is not itself the human

body"(75). The human body is a part of nature. So much so, in fact, that in many ways

the body *represents* nature, the physical essence of a material world from which

humans evolved and upon which we rely for sustenance, shelter, labor, production,

wealth, and ultimately *value*. Value is produced through another man-made machine:

Capitalism.

More, perhaps, than any other human endeavor, the quest for capital has fueled

the desire for automation. Humans had tinkered for millennia. But the advent of the

capitalist system and the Industrial Revolution produced more powerful machines than

ever before and set the course for the bigger, better, stronger, faster technology of

today. There has, however, been a critical shift, one that has influenced man's

relationship to both the machine and his own body. The cycle of capital relies on man's

labor, and his body is the instrument for this physical activity. Unlike in the barter

system, in which one utility was exchanged for another, in capitalism wealth extracted

by labor from the material world is exchanged for capital, which represents value. Such

a link between capitalism and nature places the human body as both the

laborer/producer and the carrier of capital/value.

What happens, however, when the body no longer is engaged in the physical activity of labor? Even with the advent of the Information Age, with increasing automation and a distance developing between the body and actual *labor*, man is still tied to the cycle of capital. But as automation increases and the human body is separated out of the labor process and the production of value, humans become alienated from the material world.

As Haraway writes, "I understand Marxist humanism to mean that the fundamental position of the human being in the world is the dialectical relation with the surrounding world involved in the satisfaction of needs and thus in the creation of use values. The labour process constitutes the fundamental human condition" (10). Labor is one of the primary aspects of human nature allowing humanity to separate itself from and yet remain in relation to the natural world. The production of capital, which represents a *value*, is not something that happens regularly in the natural world; no other creature produces or consumes beyond its need or to create some sort of surplus or extraneous value. This is the idea of *use value*, which, along with the act of production, lets humans take from the natural world and create something within the human world. Paradoxically, this act of production distinguishes humans from other creatures in the natural world, and thus from the natural world itself. Since humans cannot survive *without* the natural world, such production allows human beings to maintain necessary contact with the material world while also maintaining the *notion* of separation.

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Further, while humans are still produced by and rely upon the natural world, nature remains an "other" for humanity. This is evidenced by the mere fact that it is separated out as an entity that exists *in relation* to humanity. Marx writes, "Man *lives* on nature—means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature"(75). A part of nature yet *still distinct*: Distinct enough to remain in constant need of nature while desiring always to *control* nature. The natural world as a whole cannot be controlled; Williams' "inherent force" is simply that, inherent, and is beyond the power of manipulation. There is one part of nature over which man most strive to exert control and power: the human body. The body is controlled through an important dialectic, one that began to emerge in post-Jacobean England during the Enlightenment. This dialectic engaged, if not technically the spiritual soul, then the concept of subjectivity. A human being possessed subjectivity and was an "I;" the self was what set man apart not only from the natural world but from other "I"s as well. A human being was no longer a single entity but rather a unit comprised of two discrete parts: The subject (the "I") and the object (the body).

In her essay "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?" Sandy Stone refers to the writings of Frances Barker, relying on The Tremulous Private Body to provide insight into the separation of the body and the newfound sense of subjectivity (which some may envision as the human "soul") that first surfaced during the Enlightenment and

evolved through the Industrial Revolution and the Victorian era. Stone, in discussing

Barker's study on the "social economy of both the body and the subject," writes that

> the human body gradually ceased to be perceived as public spectacle, as
> had previously been the case, and became privatized in new ways. In
> Barker's model of the post-Jacobean citizen, the social economy of the
> body became rearranged in such a way as to interpose several layers
> between the individual and public space. Concomitant with this removal
> of the body from a largely public social economy, Barker argues that the
> subject, the "I" or perceiving self that Descartes had recently pried loose
> from its former unity with the body, reorganized, or was reorganized, in
> a new economy of its own. In particular, the subject, as did the body,
> ceased to constitute itself as public spectacle and instead fled from the
> public sphere and constituted itself in *text*(186).

She later writes, "In sum, the body became more physical, while the subject became

more textual, which is to say nonphysical" (187). The movement of the self away from

a public spectacle and into the body created a division between the subject and the

body. Yet even before this, as Stone mentions, the body itself had already been divided

between the newly constructed public and private spheres. The idea of the private

household had existed since the Romans, but powerful new categorizations of action

and discourse, particularly with regards to the body, were established in the late 17th

and early 18th centuries. The construct of the "public," an audience knowledgeable

about and versed in the political and social discourse, grew from that which had

previously been known as "private society," the group comprised of serfs and subjects,

churches and seigneurs, and the lords and leaders who ruled their areas and who were

ruled by the very public (indeed, the king's bowel movements were often watched and

examined) and powerful overarching monarchy. Changes in the political structure,

which would eventually strip monarchies of their power, meant that individuals were no longer owned by or under the direct administration of a noble or seigneur but were governed by a state. Such governance relied not on an audience, like the courts of the monarchy, but on a civil society—and this society grew from the "private" sphere. Notions of a *personal* private space, which heretofore had been limited, took on new meanings, with regards to discourse, the self, texts and textuality, and the physical body (Van Horn Melton 4-8).

Textual Subject/Physical Body

The private and controlled body is, for humans, a representation of a larger private and controlled society. I will further address this idea of the body as symbolic of society in Chapter III, especially with respect to purity, but I mention it here because it is within these concepts of privacy and control that the boundaries of the human body were first defined, and as these notions shift, it will have particular resonance within the human/machine relationship. As Stone writes

> The boundaries between the subject, if not the body, and the 'rest of the world' are undergoing a radical refiguration [sic], brought about in part through the mediation of technology. Further, as Baudrillard and others have pointed out, the boundaries between technology and nature are themselves in the midst of a deep restructuring. This means that many of the useful analytical categories have become unreliable for making the useful distinctions between the biological and the technological, the natural and artificial, the human and mechanical, to which we have become accustomed (188).

Such reconfiguration is especially apparent in the realm of sex and erotic desire, and within various sexual categories. Sex, sexuality, and desire, while perhaps

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never a completely public spectacle, were at one time, as Michel Foucault has written, a part of public discourse, familiar, knowable, and relatively acceptable. But as the Enlightenment made way for the Victorian Era, sexuality was concealed and pushed into the darkest private corners of the home. Barker argues that this transformation of the rhetoric of the body and of sex began even earlier; her analysis of Samuel Pepys' diaries, written in the post-Jacobean 1600s, reveal even then a distinct bourgeois discomfort with sex, a fear of discovery with regards to sexual pleasure, even sexual pleasure taken from the written word. The body, its functions, and its physical desires—already stifled under layers of clothing, hidden from public view—everything was concealed, even in private. Desire retreated into the unknown.

Both the subject and the body have re-emerged in recent decades, and the lines of public and private have been blurred repeatedly. Concerns about privacy encompass more than the workings of the private household, of private musings in a personal diary, or even of the privacy within a text. Sexuality, long banished to the privacy of the bedroom (or at least of behind closed doors) has come galloping out into the open, although there are still arguments over whether certain activities that are performed in such a private space are permissible. Internet privacy and surveillance/Big Brother issues have become focal points in discussions of modern civil rights. Additionally, what before would have been unacceptable public spectacle continues to become ever more commonplace. Yet in both these arenas, much of what has managed to bounce between the worlds of "private" and "public" in such a facile manner are those aspects

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of humanity that deal with the physical nature of the human body. A private textual space is as important as a private physical space. The incredible popularity of and need for privacy in cyberspace, the ultimate in textual reality, has shown this to be true.

It is interesting to note as well that the body again became a site for self-expression as it simultaneously moved away from its central role in the production/consumption/reproduction cycles of labor and capitalism. As the industrial age eventually made way for the information age, the text was mined for wealth as the natural world had been. The body languished; for many individuals, the body was not needed for production—labor was no longer a purely physical activity. As the subject was engaged in producing texts serving purposes beyond self-expression, the body re-emerged. In very recent years, use of the body for public spectacle/self-expression has become so prevalent that texts are regularly being written *on* the body, turning the body/text dialectic inside out. The body politic involves continued debates regarding indecency and overexposure and now includes questions about the very borders and boundaries of the body itself. What is the body's natural state? What changes and alterations, internal or external, cross over into unnatural?

Before we can begin to examine these questions, we must return to "the self" or the subject, where self-expression first became textualized. The self, both the purveyor of subjectivity and of the text, was separate, distinct from and even in control of the body. If the self has been divided into the physical and the textual or the body and the subject, and if, as mentioned, the self controls the body, then the subject controls a

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knowable part of nature. The natural, then, is that which we can comprehend and therefore maintain dominion over. To stray too far into the unknown is to sever the contact of the subject to that part of nature we, as humans, can know and control. With regards to the human body, the unknown is the unnatural; its very unknowableness gives it a sense of power within the human world. Once a foray has been made into the unknown, once another section of the unknown and unnatural has been conquered, this new frontier becomes a naturalized part of the human body. A sense of understanding, an increased level of comfort, and whatever was previously unknown/unacceptable/ uncontrollable/unnatural begins quickly to blend into the very normal human landscape.

With respect to technology, there are daily examples of the acceptance of and merging with the previously unknown/unnatural. Preventative and proscriptive medicine, plastic surgery and body modification, implants and prostheses, use of technology for machines and reproduction, and even the vast computerized network underpinning the social and economic structure of Western society were, at one time, regarded with suspicion, fear, and hostility. Now, of course, many exist unnoticed, only coming in to question when they again tread into the realm of the unknown and uncontrollable.

Another part of the human landscape, crucial to the division of the body and the subject, is desire. Yet for years, desire, in particular erotic desire, became an emotion fraught with torment: Many forms of self-expression were taboo, primary among them

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desire. This unavoidable yet inexpressible emotion became repressed. No matter how great the divide between physical and textual, certain aspects of the body's physicality obviously could not be isolated. Could the self dissociate itself from desire, from erotic urges? How to reconcile something felt so intensely by both the body and the self became an issue of great concern. Judging by Barker's reading of Pepys' diaries, it had to be hidden deep between the lines of the private text:

> A typical man. A bourgeois man. Riven by guilt, silence and textuality. Forbidden to speak and yet incited to discourse, and therefore speaking obliquely in another place. Who says sing when he means fuck, who fears sex and calls it smallpox, who enjoys sex and calls it reading, who is fascinated and terrified by texts and so reads them once, but only for information's sake… Who would rather burn his body, who would rather go blind, but who, as in the storm of rage with which he tears…his wife's pathetic love-letters, obliterates the texts itself. A representation of a representation (7).

The farther the self pushed desire into the text, the more hidden it became, eventually becoming deeply embedded in the unconscious—the unconscious, also a part of human existence that represents the unknown. I argue the unknown, whether within the human body or external to it, and along with it the unconscious, has power; the unknown is fearsome yet alluring. Will it contaminate and destroy, or can it be conquered? If we create a machine, will it be a monster or a servant, a virus or a cure, foe or friend?

Pushing something into the unknown, repressing it deep below the conscious mind gives it a sense of power. I would go so far to say that the unknown desire itself is desirable, once we become aware of its presence. Such repressed desire eventually makes itself known, either because it is dragged out, kicking and screaming, in an

attempt by the conscious mind to conquer the unconscious, or because it reveals itself through dreams and language. These unconscious desires, such as the desire to create a machine with the power to speak and assign meaning or even the "unnatural" erotic desire for a machine, are bubbling to the surface with increasing frequency, if theoretically mediated artistic texts and even instances of mainstream media production are any indication.

The desire for automation—of labor, of language, of meaning, of subjectivity, of textuality, even of desire itself—is a part of human nature. We have sought ways to make our lives easier, less complicated, free from so much *work*. But labor defines human existence, particularly in relation to the material world. Subjectivity, language, meaning, and desire define us in relation to each other. Each of these has been refined, restructured, reworked, and the only room for improvement is through automation. Or perhaps it would just be easier to give each of these to a machine and busy ourselves with our utopian ideals of lying in the long grass, frolicking and enjoying our free time. A machine, preferably a smart, conscious, technologized machine, could do it all. Maybe even do it better.

But could it really be conscious? Can a machine feel emotions? On an even more fundamental level, can a machine possess subjectivity? The answer to this last question lies in the definition of subjectivity, either through language or through ideology. Émile Benveniste writes that "[i]t is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*." As I speak, so I constitute myself as a subject, and if

the computer could speak in return, I would therefore speak with the *machine as a subject*. Louis Althusser might disagree that language would constitute the computer as a subject, for he finds subjectivity in *ideology*. The computer is not a subject in the *obvious* manner that you are or I am a subject. He notes that "you and I are *always already* subjects," and that much is obvious because we "constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects"(Althusser 117). Does this mean another creature, even a non-living creature like a machine, cannot become a subject—because it does not and potentially *cannot* function within an accepted and understood ideology? Not necessarily, for Althusser then reveals that "*all ideology hails or interpellates [sic] concrete individuals as concrete subjects*"(117). If an individual is *hailed*, "he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him." The machine, therefore, could indeed become a subject, could be transformed the same as a man from an individual into a subject.

Perhaps this sounds impossible, or at the very least uncomfortable. Benveniste states "Language is in the nature of man, and he did not fabricate it…We can never get back to man separated from language and we shall never see him inventing it…It is a speaking man whom we find in the world, a man speaking to another man, and language provides the very definition of man." So how, if language defines man, if language creates human subjectivity, could this be applied to a machine? In this we must understand that just because language produces meaning, it does not mean it also

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produces *consciousness*. A machine can have a language, just like a man or an animal. It can share this language, but knowledge of language and of meaning does not mean it also has consciousness. Lacan argues that it is language that leads us to the *unconscious* mind, not the conscious.

We must look first, then, at the machine possessing the capacity of language and the ability to communicate with humans, and then return to its sense (or lack thereof) of free will. Machines already have languages of their own, which they use to speak amongst themselves. These languages, while created by humans, do not by their nature include the capacity for true human comprehension and use. Computer languages exist only for communication centering around and including the *machine*. In much the same way as humans find subjectivity in the participation of their circuit of language/understanding, the machines find themselves interlinked, communicating amongst themselves, storing, sharing, and utilizing language. But the true mystery—as far as humans are concerned—is what might be the end result should machines possess the capacity to speak not *human-made* languages but *human* languages. Benveniste also posits that the sign in language is both mutable and immutable; the signifier, signified, and referent can find each other in new (and not necessarily arbitrary) ways. But the language itself is not "creatable." Interesting then, that we would wish to *produce a machine* that could imitate our ability to use the one thing we *cannot produce*: language. There is within this creation some desire to understand *how to make language*.

The science of computational linguistics engages in an irreconcilable paradox. How does a person teach a machine to comprehend language when the person does not understand how he himself comprehends it? Humans cannot produce language according to Benveniste's construct yet computational linguistics tries to create machines that can do this very thing—not simply replicate our speech patterns, grammatical structures, and vocabulary, but speak on their own accord, to answer us as subjects in their own right. Language defines us; if a computer has the power of language, then perhaps it can define the machine as well.

This brings us, then, to the next level: We speak, we are subjects, and we are conscious. Do language and subjectivity *lead* to consciousness? Or by consciousness do we simply mean a "coming-into-being," an awareness of the world within and without ourselves? This awareness is brought quite suddenly through Freud's Oedipal disruption and Lacan's mirror stage. This is the presupposition on which we must work: that consciousness is neither a result of nor dependent upon language, but is interwoven with language, each relying on the other to some degree. Lacan states that language (not dreams, as Freud would argue) leads to the *unconscious* mind. The unconscious is the negation or the repression of the conscious mind, and in order to travel the royal road to the unconscious and thereby learn more about the conscious, we must have language. Conversely, a language is not a *language* unless it is shared, and we cannot share it if we are not conscious.

Of course, when applied to a computer, we see that the power of language, which enables the machine to create meaning and to be a subject, does not also automatically grant it *consciousness*. Yet, what do we demand from our machines? We want them to respond to us with consciousness, or some semblance of it; whether or not they are truly conscious or merely appear to be so is not a major sticking point, as long as we can revel in and fear their "intelligence." Few of us, after all, want our progeny and assistants to be stupid and useless. Humans cannot fabricate language, even as it defines us, is the basis of our subjectivity, and is the road to our unconscious. But what role do we play in the creation of consciousness? Ultimately, we cannot assert without a shred of doubt that humans alone possess subjectivity and consciousness.

A machine, I have already argued, is more than an inanimate object. It seems to hover between worlds, both animate and not, organic and mechanical. Even the definition of the word machine exemplifies its own inherent dialectic. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary provides multiple definitions, including "an assemblage of parts that transmit forces, motion, and energy one to another in a predetermined manner" and "a mechanically, electrically, or electronically operated device for performing a task." It also provides these definitions: "a living organism or one of its functional systems" and "a person or organization that resembles a machine (as in being methodical, tireless, or unemotional)." The human-as-machine and the machine-as-human. The physical human form is shared by these beings and is at the center of

this discussion. Something about the body has taken the relationship between humans

and machines from production and consumption into the realm of desire and fear.

CHAPTER III: "MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN"

One of the most intriguing treatments involving the machine in human form is

Ridley Scott's 1982 film <u>Blade Runner (The Director's Cut)</u>. The movie, with its

science fiction and cyberpunk roots, is certainly a theoretically mediated production,

but it has its roots in mass media as well. Though originally rejected by mainstream

audiences, it has found its way into the cultural pantheon as a prime example of a

dystopic, postmodern aesthetic and a doomsday narrative of the machine at odds with

its human creator. The machines in <u>Blade Runner</u> are called replicants, not androids;

director Scott specifically avoided the word android because of the preconceived

notions he felt were unavoidable with its use.

> When we set out to do this film, we decided to make "android" a taboo
> word. I said anybody who uses the word "android" gets their head
> broken with a baseball bat. The word sets up all sorts of preconceptions
> of the kind of film this could be. An android might be human, actually
> be flesh and blood, genetically structured, but we simply decided not to
> use the word because its over-used and misused. So we developed our
> own word, which is the word "replicant."
>
> A replicant is essentially a total human being, an all-flesh culture, that is
> very advanced and highly perfected (R. Scott).

The "all-flesh culture" would seem, at first, to put the use of the replicant at odds with

this discussion of humans and machines. However, as I discussed in the previous

chapter, a machine can be made of mechanical *or* organic parts. The replicant is man-

made: It is considered to be "more human than human." Further, in <u>Do Androids</u>

<u>Dream of Electric Sheep?</u>, the novel on which <u>Blade Runner</u> was based and whose text

I will also explore in this chapter, the term android is used. The androids are described as considerably more human-like than simply a computer in a human suit, but they are still based on electrical creation. The replicant is "more human than human" in part because it is such an advanced and exquisitely engineered machine.

The primary narrative of <u>Blade Runner</u> is that of Rick Deckard, the bounty hunter ordered to "retire" a group of replicants who have escaped the colonies and returned to Earth. Whether or not this is a human or machine narrative, however, is never fully revealed: One of the primary questions that has emerged through discussion and criticism, and that is unanswered in the movie, is whether Deckard is himself a replicant. This concern echoes the sentiment: What is the division between humans and machines designed to be "more human than human"? Are we all machines and simply cannot tell the difference because, ultimately, the only true difference is one we actually create? Beyond Deckard, there are various threads that play into these questions. The issue of labor is addressed somewhat obliquely: the replicants exist to perform arduous and dangerous tasks on the off-world colonies. The automation of at least one form of labor has been achieved, and the necessary slave race has been created. Yet beneath these concerns, and beyond the fear generated by the replicants who, with their superior strength, intellect, and conscience-free penchant for murder and violence, have the potential to dominate any and all humans, there are two more subtle issues.

(Re)Production

One of the central themes of the film is the existence of a father or father figure, specifically in a process of (re)production in which an actual biological father is technically unnecessary—the replicants clearly do not follow human, or "natural," methods of reproduction. I have singled out the father for this discussion rather than the mother or the (more general) parent because of notions of patriarchal lineage addressed in the film, and because there is no representation of the mother. In discussing A.I. I will move toward the mother and the interaction of both parents, but here I will focus on the idea of the father.

Clearly, there is no father for the replicants in the biological sense, but because this text is mediated by the male perspective and the very masculine history of technology, a father figure does play a critical role. Such beings have a creator (or creators), who, in the Blade Runner text, is considered to be more of a Creator, a god-like figure. Not only has he designed and brought life to the machinic humans, he has encoded each one a specific date on which the replicant will cease to function, four years after the incept date. The creator, then, directly controls both birth and death, which, since no mother exists (eliminating one form of human labor), gives the father figure a far more powerful role than in the cycle of human reproduction. For humans coming into self-awareness, there is both Freud's emergence into patriarchy and Lacan's *imago* phase. Yet for the replicant, there are problems with both: Not only does the father figure effectively take the place of both the mother (nurturer, locus of

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reproduction, object to be both desired and despised) *and* the father (cause for disruption, object to be desired and destroyed).

Classic movies have shown a man-made creature, such as Dr. Frankenstein's monster, reach out to his creator for help and nurturing, we have seen the creature desire all that the creator has, and we have seen the creation ultimately return to murder his "father." Such a scene is played out in Blade Runner, when Roy Batty, the lead replicant, finally meets Tyrell, the god-like leader of the replicant-manufacturing Tyrell Corporation and, ultimately, Batty's creator. He enters Tyrell's bedroom, a cavernous chamber lit with candles; Roy, blond and handsome, wears black, while Tyrell, short with enormous, thick glasses, wears a white robe. When Tyrell expresses surprise that Batty took so long to come to him, Batty responds, "It's not an easy thing to meet your maker." While the notion of the "Maker" for humans is, essentially, God, for the replicant the M/maker is both: Roy Batty must meet the man who made him, his father/mother who in effect birthed him as Zeus did Athena when she sprang fully formed from his head. But he must also meet a god, the one who is responsible not simply for his life but for his death as well; this man is responsible both for the replicant's existence and the parameters that define his existence.

The replicant's, or android's birth, is, like human birth, a traumatic experience for the replicant, though the trauma is very different from the human experience. Throughout Blade Runner, there are various references made to memory and to specific memories; the "memories" that are "remembered" by the replicants are merely

implants, the memories of others, of humans, programmed in. A replicant who knows

he is a replicant is aware that these memories are false, yet they hold sway over him.

Leon, for instance, has a set of photographs that are of great sentimental importance to

him—photographs that represent a lifetime of memories that do not and have never

belonged to him. Rachael, upon realizing that she too is a replicant, drops a single

photograph on Deckard's floor: A picture of a little girl and her mother, who Rachael

had always assumed was *her* mother. The replicant, whose conscience is limited by a

lack of that very human emotion, empathy, has apparently been equipped with

sentiment to continue the human-like illusion. Is it the knowledge that she is a replicant

or that the memory of her mother is false that is most traumatic? The replicant has no

memory, unconscious or otherwise, of the perfect oceanic existence in which he would

have been suspended before the trauma of his birth. The replicant emerges into being

as a whole being. There is no transition, no growth, no period of protection from the

mother, no feeling of warmth and security to which he can try and return, except those

implanted in him. His memories are an illusion because they are not *real*, but perhaps

for the spectator, this may be sufficient to see the replicant as *human enough*. I will

return to this idea of the real and of the illusion of emotion in the next chapter.

While the replicant in Blade Runner may possess superhuman strength, his

sense of security comes only from his own body—again, the only history of parental

love, if it exists, is an illusion. There is no training in physical security, either; the

replicant or android is assumed to know his physical boundaries and limits

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immediately, unlike a human child who is taught and given time to learn. Yet, as we have seen through Roy Batty's insistent desire to change his bio-engineered code, and as we shall see with the little mecha boy David in A.I.: Artificial Intelligence, even the "unhuman" must occasionally explore his own physical limitations. He must also search fruitlessly and endlessly to fulfill his maternal and/or paternal needs.

The replicant's coming-into-existence is even traumatic for humans, albeit on a psychological level. A confrontation with a being that has been designed to be "more human than human" is deeply threatening on its own. Given that, in the context of Blade Runner, the rebel replicants have escaped the shackles of off-world slavery *and* are aware of their physical (life span) and mental (false memories, hence no allegiance to their human creators) limitations, the threat is significantly greater. The replicant, beyond its powers of strength and intellect, has been born and has come into being through a process of reproduction that is "unnatural" and that defies the human emergence into patriarchy. If we return to the Enlightenment theory discussed in the previous chapter, the universal *human* is man as the body without orifices, in opposition to woman-as-vessel. While this theory has certainly evolved in post-Enlightenment philosophy, it is still ingrained in many Western ideologies; since these texts are, again, of a historically masculine tradition involving technology, the notion of this naturalized heterosexual male as the *human* is still involved in this dialog. The product, then, of this body without orifice, is the replicant: The body without organs, the post-human, the being that is "more human than *man*." It is little wonder, then, that

in nearly every text, whether artistic, theoretically mediated, commercial, or some combination of the three, the individual who is most threatened by the replicant/android is the male—viewed as the closest being to God. He has created a god in his own image, just as God did. Except that God created *man* in His image, rather than create another god—a creature smarter, stronger, more powerful, and, without the safety valve of a predetermined lifespan, nearly unbeatable—a creation beyond the control of its very creator.

Roy Batty technically has neither mother nor father, but in <u>Blade Runner</u> he still has a "father-figure" in Tyrell. While the patriarchal family structure (and the support of "family values") has emphasized human loyalty to the father and patriarchal lineage, the "unnatural" creature has no such history of fealty.

The cyborg, which will be discussed in the final chapter, must be introduced here briefly, even if it is not as central to this discussion as are androids (robots in human form), since Donna Haraway's comments on the nature of cyborgs extends to androids and replicants as well: "The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential"(151).

This issue of the father will become particularly apparent in the discussion of <u>A.I.: Artificial Intelligence</u>. Here, we will see how Tyrell suffers at the hands of his "son," Batty. Tyrell represents a visceral fear for the male within the historic trajectory

of automation. Haraway makes note of the militaristic and patriarchal capitalist aspects of the cyborg's lineage, of which there is no doubt. I have posited that the desire for automation, from which cyborgs, androids, and robots have arisen, is certainly borne out of the highly masculinized capitalist system, itself a machine. The capitalist desires automation to gain more wealth and to free himself from labor to enjoy this wealth. I posit as well that automation, while touted as the route to labor-free utopia for all humans, is, in fact, a boon not to the laborer himself but to those who control capital; automation eliminates the need for the *worker* and not the *owner*, and it holds within it the capacity to free the owner from the independent worker. A human laborer can complain, form unions, and go on strike, all of which an android or replicant supposedly would not do. This, then, explains much of the violence inherent in the legacy of automation—capitalism's history has seen its share of violence, from the men involved as well as from the machinery itself, attacking the earth to extract wealth like never before. Automation is much more likely to crush those at the machine's side rather than those who control the machine. The militaristic aspirations of men have also inspired major technological advances as well as much automated violence; many machines and technologies we rely on today had their roots in the needs of the military.

Our historical approach to technology then, is based in highly masculine settings, and our continued approach serves to solidify this masculinity. As automation and technology are imposed, they provide another lens through which the masculine is repeatedly re-naturalized. Unfortunately, while the masculine is perpetuated through

technology, there is no guarantee that this re-naturalized masculinity will be *human*.
We see the male and the masculine in our technology, because we have long been
disciplined to naturalize technology as such. The fear, however, as shown in <u>Blade
Runner</u>, is that a "new masculine" will arise and, despite being the offspring of these
patriarchal lines, will no longer continue them.

Batty appears, at first, to need Tyrell, his creator/father. Tyrell even
acknowledges this relationship by calling Roy "the prodigal son." Batty assumes,
perhaps like any child, that Tyrell wields the power to alter the course of his existence.
Yet unlike the child who learns that his father is neither invincible nor omnipotent, the
failings of his father do not lead to a greater sense of self-awareness or self-reliance for
Batty. Instead, they lead to Tyrell's destruction.

Like Frankenstein's monster, Batty has been vicious and violent, killing
everyone in his path to get to his creator. Unlike the monster, however, it isn't a
companion he's looking for. Instead, Batty wants *more life*. He has returned to the
source of his existence because he wants his creator to change his biological coding
and increase his longevity. But Tyrell reveals that he and his bio-engineers have tried
and failed to do this; as Tyrell says, "You were made as well as we could make you."
At the end of the conversation, Batty sits down next to Tyrell on the bed. He clasps
Tyrell's face with both hands, kisses him on the lips, and proceeds to murder Tyrell by
crushing his face and head. The juxtaposition of tenderness and an almost eroticized
kiss (sitting together on the bed, a kiss on the lips between father and son) with Tyrell's

violent death again evokes the merging of the parental roles. For the replicant, unlike

for the human, the mother and father are one and the same. And perhaps, as we will

explore with David in <u>A.I.</u>, the only way to ensure any type of loyalty to a parent, is to

pre-program it. Humans are fully indoctrinated with the family as the corner stone of

Western society, but machines do not have an overarching Ideological State Apparatus

regarding loyalty. The allegiance of each machine will, at least initially, depend on the

coding provided by his creator. As the machine consciousness grows, how will this

loyalty change?

Not only does the replicant lack true parents, it also has no *imago*, and thus no

Lacanian mirror stage. Much of a human child's self-identification results from the

discovery that the *imago*, the mental image of the idealized self, or what Lacan calls

the "jubilant assumption of his spectacular image," is quite different from the real self

that appears in the reflection (2). The replicant, or the android or even the cyborg, is

specifically created to be an improved or even *the* idealized individual. Roy Batty was

made as well as his human creators could make him: He is the ideal, at least until a

new model comes along. Yet he has no need to imagine his "spectacular image," nor

does he feel disappointed by the reality in the mirror. His ideal is what he sees; he

surpasses every human action and expectation. The replicant's self-awareness is

learned elsewhere, through is own consciousness and experience, one that is linked to

but outside the human experience. This separate consciousness is deeply threatening to

humans; the creature designed and controlled by man should be unable to have

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experiences beyond the human. Yet as Batty himself says, "Well, if only you could see what I've seen with your eyes." The memories he has from before his incept were programmed, but those from his life are his own.

The Ideal Body

Batty does not find himself as less than ideal but rather as limited by the restrictions imposed on him by humans. When asked what problem he has with his design, Roy responds, "Death." It is a moment of confusion for the viewer: Do replicants die? When Deckard, or another bounty hunter, destroys a replicant, it is not murder; instead, the replicant has been *retired*. Something that is not human, that is not "alive" and that does not have empathy for another creature cannot be killed. But Batty, while he may not possess the empathic response for humans and animals that would mark him in the text as human, views his own end and the end of his fellow replicants as *death*. This is his experience and he is aware of similar experiences in his fellow replicants. What is this if not empathy? His self-identification, then, is that he is a living creature and that, as a result, he will die. During an earlier scene, he tells a human, "We're not machines, Sebastian. We're physical." Yet as I argued in the previous chapter, they may be machines, but so are humans—machines of various natures. He juxtaposes "machine" with "physical" yet uses the word physical almost as a label. They are and are not machines. They are and are not human. They *are* physical because they are machines in the human body—just like humans, only better.

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Such a perfect body is both intriguing and frightening to humans. In the current cultural climate, replete with rampant gym culture, plastic surgery, and emphasis on appearance and longer, stronger life spans, we strive endlessly to improve, alter, and adjust our own bodies. There is a constant renegotiation of the boundaries of what the body can tolerate and what we can accept and redefine as, if not natural, important to improving the standard of human life. These efforts exist under the aegis of "improvement," but there seems to be a direct link between improvement and this quest for perfection. This quest is, perhaps, more easily traversed by building a new body altogether, as in <u>Blade Runner</u>. The replicant type featured in the film, the Nexus-6, is as perfect as a body can be—so perfect that it has the potential to dominate man, so perfect that the Nexus-7 is intended to be designed as more human-like, in strength, ability, and intelligence. A body that is designed to be flawless is enviable, but one that is designed to see no distinction between the idealized and real selves is beyond enviable: it is confusing and threatening, to us as well as to itself. Batty as a concept embodies this confusion: He has been designed to be so perfect, sees no limits within himself and has no fear, yet even though he is not meant to see the difference between the ideal and real self, he does. He sees that his so-called perfect life will end, removing it from the idealized state in which he was meant to exist. Is it any wonder he destroys Tyrell? The film represents the human desire to create it and harness the power of such a remarkable creature, yet judging by its design, it is better from the outset than a human can even hope to be. More importantly, it does not need to

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discover self-identification through a disruption in assumptions about itself. Any form of self-awareness based on limited ability would be *our* fault: We create them but we are quick to impose both safety valves and our own needs and desires. A parent may learn that he cannot control his child, but there is a system in place within which a human parent can try to negotiate power and control, and within which the child can explore his own self-awareness and existence. Additionally, while blame can be placed on the parent for limitations, biological determination will always factor in. Blade Runner's representation of the creation and determination of the replicant reveals that the structure for negotiation is shaky at best, and that a creature who is *built* rather than *born* has a different recourse of action. The spectator is made both anxious and aware: If we do not have a system through which humans, as creators, and machines, as creations, can explore the questions of power, authority, self-awareness, and (God-given) ability, will violence and destruction towards humans be the final outcome? Is the safety valve—a short lifespan, in the case of the replicant—sufficient?

Need and Desire

Desire plays a major role in Blade Runner and in the original text of Dick's book, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, as well as in the texts addressed later in this work, A.I. and Tetsuo: The Iron Man. So much of the push for automation and for smarter, faster machines is attributed to need; the idea of need encompasses a large spectrum from workplace efficiency to aiding disabled individuals in their daily life. Indeed, there are certainly individuals with great need whose lives could be vastly

improved by forms of automation and intelligent technology. But the reasoning for these machines "more like us" relies on the rhetoric of need as well. In a <u>New York Times</u> article, researchers discuss how, as robots become more autonomous and adept at a variety of activities, they must also become more acceptable. The article notes "researchers are still a long way from realizing the guiding vision of robotics: machines that can move and work like humans, learn new tasks with little or no training, and react with sensitivity to the changing moods of their mortal masters." But while this goal may be a long way off, researchers are still striving to understand the interaction between humans and robots: "If people are to teach machines…what would be the best way? And if machines are to serve people…what kind of robotic behavior will people be comfortable with? How should the robots appear?"(Bhattacharjee). Making the machine more human-like is *necessary*, according to the researchers, because that will improve the interaction between machines and people, which is *necessary* if these robots are to perform their automated duties. Even looking beyond the rhetoric surrounding the basic relationship of humans and machines—master and servant—this discussion about automation and humanoid machines is very much in the realm of need.

But how much of this drive is founded, *not* in need, but in *desire*—the desire to create a new form of life, to improve upon nature, to interface the human with the machine and the natural with the unnatural, to design a being whose sole purpose is simply to fulfill human desire in its most basic forms?

The issue of desire arises as a central theme in each of the texts I chose for this thesis. In <u>Blade Runner</u>, as well as in <u>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</u>, the inclusion of desire is uncomfortable and fraught with uncertainties about both the object of desire and about the very desire itself. There is a more tenuous relationship with desire in these texts. Replicants have been created for labor purposes; they perform dangerous jobs that would place human lives in peril in the off-world colonies. They are designed and built on earth, and then shipped off to the colonies under strict supervision. Their purpose is technically utilitarian, but while the replicant is supposedly meant to fulfill a human *need* (safety, exploration, labor) they are based as much in human desire as any other technology. Given their absolutely idealized physical qualities, and the repeated cycles of improvement and enhancement, they reveal so much human desire: to play God, to create and build a being, to tinker with life and meaning and consciousness. If these replicants were meant only to meet a particular need, would they be so superior and so desirable? The replicants are highly eroticized in the texts, and this erotic charge lends itself to this idea that, while they are intended to fulfill a particular need, there is an unspoken need that is also waiting to be fulfilled. This sexual need, similar to those physical urges felt and suppressed by Samuel Pepys, as discussed in the previous chapter, is undeniable. To *feel desire* for a replicant (or any machine) is therefore deeply confusing. It betrays what a human believes is the "purpose" of the replicant, a purpose that is based in "need" and not "desire." It is desire between a creator and his creation, between the organic and the

machinic. For these reasons it is "unnatural"—but it is especially so given that we have no category of erotic love for something that is not entirely human, or that is not human at all.

Blade Runner reveals the discomfort with this erotic desire through Deckard's initial hesitance, his awareness of Rachael's longevity (or lack thereof), and the overall tone of the love scene between Deckard and Rachael. Rachael has visited Deckard once before, but fled, dropping the picture of the little girl and her mother as she went. Her second trip occurs after Deckard's run-in with another dangerous replicant, Leon. Deckard's job is to retire Leon but Leon overpowers him easily, nearly killing Deckard until, at the last minute, Rachael saves him. One replicant retires another, yet the ambiguity remains: When she saves Deckard, is Rachael saving a human or a replicant? Does she feel empathy for Deckard or does she save him to help herself? Whatever the answer, the scene reveals to the spectator that we cannot clearly define between *human* and *not human*. Even in the text itself, a highly sensitive test is used to determine if someone is a replicant or human. With only visual cues or dialog or even actions, we can never know what is "real" or really human. We cannot assume that the separation we have constructed between "us and them" will make the other into an Other. The relationship we build between humans and machines will, regardless of our intentions, prove to be as much about the experiences we cannot predict as those we can.

When the two return to Deckard's apartment, Rachael is a state of shock, and their tense conversation is revealing:

> Deckard: Shakes? Me too. I get 'em bad. Part of the business.
> Rachael: I'm not in the business. I am the business. (moments later)
>   What if I go north. Disappear. Would you come after me? Hunt
>   me?
> Deckard: No. No, I wouldn't. I owe you one. But somebody would.
> Rachael: Deckard… You know those files on me? The incept date, the
>   longevity, those things. You saw them?
> Deckard: [looking away] They're…classified.
> Rachael: But you're a policeman.
> Deckard: I…didn't look at them.
> Rachael: You know that Voight-Kampff test of yours… you ever take
>   that test yourself? Deckard?

Beyond the implication that Deckard is himself a replicant, Rachael's statement that she is the business is her first full self-identification as a replicant. In creating her, Tyrell and his engineers did not foresee a mode of self-realization outside of the pre-programmed memories, ideas, and consciousness. But Rachael has come into her own experience outside of that which was designed for her. She is the business—she is designed, built, and she may have to be retired. The viewer understands that she is *aware* of being this business, yet her reaction to "retiring" a fellow replicant is considerably more human-like than the audience anticipates. It is at least as human as Deckard's own response—and the viewer does not know yet whether Deckard himself is a replicant. Rachael's reaction is personal and based around her own experience, but she mentions being the business. If, as mentioned, the defining aspect of the human is empathy, she and the spectator now have a shared experience.

This self-identification reveals Deckard's conflict. His willingness to "owe" her one is understandable, but when he looks away and his voice breaks as he says, "They're…classified," one senses something deeper is at stake beyond her having saved his life. In fact, it is in the moment when Rachael fully admits she *knows* she is a replicant that the spectator sees Deckard's desire for Rachael. Before this scene, Deckard is, in general, apathetic towards her, along with everything else. Yet something about Rachael, or perhaps a glimmering realization about himself, draws him to her; the resulting scene is both tender and angry, as if he desperately wants to submit to the desire but fights it all the way. After her comment about the empathy test, used by humans to determine whether an individual is a replicant, Rachael finds Deckard asleep on the couch. She goes to the piano, where she finds a group of photos, many of women, presumably Deckard's mother and female ancestors. She removes her jacket and begins to play the piano, her music mixes with the movie's score. The tone is soft and romantic, yet almost bittersweet. She stops playing and reaches up, letting down her hair, releasing the curls and tendrils around her face. The transformation softens her—perhaps even humanizes her—and there is something reminiscent in her look of the women in the black and white pictures. Deckard awakens and comes to the piano:

> Deckard: I dreamt music.
> Rachael: I didn't know if I could play. I remember lessons. I don't know
>   if it's me or Tyrell's niece.
> Deckard: You play beautifully.

He leans over and kisses her on the cheek, his face hidden in her hair. He pulls back,

looks at her, and leans in to kiss her on the lips. Rachael starts, then stands up and

walks quickly out of the room. She gathers her belongings and begins to run to the

door. Deckard follows her as the music suddenly takes an ominous tone, and as she

opens the door he bangs it shut with his fist, his face creased with a deep scowl.

Grabbing Rachael by the arms he flings her against the wall and window blinds behind

her, an aggressive, abusive move. The suggestion of coercion and rape is undeniable.

The score transitions again, this time a mixture of romantic and menacing, soft and

hard, and as Deckard approaches Rachael he raises his hands as if to gesture that he

means no harm. He pins her against the wall, and kisses her.

> Deckard: I know you'll kiss me
> Rachael: I can't… no… I
> Deckard: Say, "Kiss me."
> Rachael: Kiss me.
> Deckard: I want you.
> Rachael: I want you.
> Deckard: Again.
> Rachael: I want you. Put your hands on me.

Throughout this course of dialog, Rachael is tearful but her tone is flat. Her

repetitions are simply that, without inflection or emotion. Does she desire, or is she

simply fulfilling Deckard's desire? He has fought with his desire, betraying both what

is natural and what is directed by the order of things. Yet the question remains: is

Deckard even human? And, if so, is his own tentative desire, which seems at time to be

acted rather than felt, like Rachael's, in fact an effort to assert his "humanity"?

Performing this act of the body, this desire for something that is not human, could be

for Deckard a way to assert his *physicality* and to prove that he is not simply a *machine*. The audience knows that the replicant is not an empathetic creature, but the spectator is never told whether the replicant can feel desire. Desire is, as I discussed in Chapter II, experienced as much emotionally as it is physically, and as Batty says to Sebastian, the replicant is "physical." Is desire inherent in a physical being? That the issue of desire as an emotion (or of most emotions beyond empathy) is never resolved explicitly with respect to the replicant, and because the replicant is *built* and *encoded*, the assumption remains that, if the replicant feels desire, it is at the very least different from human desire.

Rachael obeys Deckard's orders and submits. Does Deckard believe Rachael feels what he wants her to, or does he want her to repeat only so that he can play the role he was "programmed" to play? The spectator does not know if this is through her own desire. Do replicants and androids have the capacity for desire, or do they only simulate desire? What becomes apparent to the spectator in this scene is that it does not matter whether Rachael's desire is *real*. As long as she provides the illusion and plays the role, both Deckard and the scene as a whole accept this *as* desire, whether or not it truly is. Rachael, as a replicant, has been made to fulfill the needs—and the desires—of *men*. Her desire, the "feminine" desire, is a simulation, which is sufficient. In general, the replicants themselves represent to the spectator desirable simulacra. They are outrageously eroticized in the movie: Batty is the blond, muscular god, Zhora is the overtly sexual woman, who dances naked with a snake, and Pris is highly infantilized,

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the girl-woman as erotic object. The objectification of Rachael and of these other

replicants is from an entirely masculine perspective, so much so that even Batty—also

an object of desire—has an almost feminine quality. The replicants are objects to

desire either through wishful identification (Batty) or stereotyped categories of female

sexuality (feisty and playful girl; Eve the snake-charming whore; hesitant but

ultimately submissive virgin).

Despite the use of these categories, however, there is clearly a sense of

discomfort with the categorization of erotic desire *itself* for something that is not

human, not "one of us." Such uneasiness is present even without the existence of

replicants—anyone who participates in bestiality is the recipient of condemnation as

well as guilty curiosity. We can even find echoes of the replicant in modern sex dolls

(such as those on www.realdoll.com) that are made to look and feel life-like and, when

placed in a warm bath for a set period of time, even have a body temperature. There is

a distinct cultural stereotype of the man with a doll, even a blow-up doll. His erotic

desire for something that *isn't even alive* is weird and unnatural, sad and pathetic—one

wonders if he has some sort of sexual dysfunction, a problem with the body, or just

can't relate to other humans. The stereotype is an extreme, but within it lurks a critical

question: are we comfortable with unfamiliar, unknown erotic desire? With erotic

desire for something that is not within the bounds of what we, as individuals, may each

deem as "normal," "acceptable" or "natural"?

Deckard's actions with Rachael are the actions of someone who, at least in that moment, is still presumed to be human. He, and the audience, may wonder if he is a replicant, or may secretly be convinced that he *is* one. Nevertheless, whether or not he is a replicant, he is behaving as a human—either because he is one or because he has been designed to do so. His desire for Rachael, therefore, may be disturbing on two levels: first, because a design to be human-like means this desire is not *real* but is a simulation, and second, because, while desire is part of human (physical and emotional) nature, this particular desire is not. There is physical desire, as evinced by Deckard's intense physicality with Rachael, but the subject rebels. What is the source of his aggression with Rachael: Is it because she flees or because he is angry with himself for wanting her? Or is it neither?

In Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? both the desire and the fear of desire are more overt and masculinized. The androids ("replicant" was chosen by director Ridley Scott, "retire" is used as well as "kill" in the book) are slaves in the off-world colonies, but Dick's text allows for illicit romance between humans and androids. Rick Deckard discusses his fears with Phil Resch, a fellow bounty hunter (who is not a character in the movie). In realizing that he is feeling deep empathy for the some of androids he must kill, while Resch obviously feels none, he thinks to himself, "There's nothing unnatural or unhuman about Phil Resch's reactions; *it's me*"(142). Empathy, in the context of the novel and the film, is a decidedly human emotion; in fact, a lack of proper empathic response is one of the few identifiers of an android or replicant. Yet

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for Deckard to have *empathy for an android* is, in his opinion, a decidedly *unhuman*

response. According to Deckard's "order of things," androids do not exist to inspire

feelings in humans, especially not if they are to be retired. (The book, unlike the

movie, involves artificial animals as well as humans; since most animals are extinct or

very rare, the cost of purchasing a real animal is astronomical. There is deeply

involved system of ownership in which there is great embarrassment in admitting a

family pet is electric. People become very attached to their "fake" animals by caring

for the pet as if it were real and by nearly convincing themselves the animal *is* real. Of

course, the underlying message is that true emotion for a creature can only exist when

the creature is real.) A few lines later, Resch reveals the true root of the problem.

> "You're in a spot, Deckard," Phil Resch said; it seemed to amuse him.
> Rick said, "What—should I do?"
> "It's sex," Phil Resch said.
> "Sex?"
> "Because she—it—was physically attractive. Hasn't that ever happened
>   to you before?" Phil Resch laughed. "We were taught that it
>   constitutes a prime problem in bounty hunting. Don't you know,
>   Deckard, that in the colonies they have android mistresses?"
> "It's illegal," Rick said, knowing the law about that.
> "Sure it's illegal. But most variations in sex are illegal. But people do it
>   anyhow"(143).

Empathic feelings for an unnatural, unreal creature are one thing, but to desire

it? Deckard is terrified of this desire but also intrigued by it; eventually he explores it,

hesitantly and clinically. When he calls and asks her to fly down to San Francisco to

help him retire the androids—and to come to a hotel room—his voice is hoarse, from

exhaustion and resignation about his desire. She arrives and he continues to analyze

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her and the situation, distancing himself and de-eroticizing the moment; he gazes at her body and notes the individual parts and the body style on which her android figure had been modeled. Later, "[h]e finished undressing her. Exposed her pale, cold loins"(193). Rachael herself, as in the film, joins in to remind Deckard (and the reader/viewer) that she is not human: "We *are* machines, stamped out like bottle caps. It's an illusion that I—I personally—really exist; I'm just representative of a type" (189). Is this what enables us to distinguish what is a machine from what is human? Or is it intriguing because, if *we*, as humans, are machines as well, we wonder if we are also representations of a type? Perhaps the idea of the android is frightening because, in its human-like body, how we classify it reveals uncertainties we have about ourselves.

Deckard later observes Rachael's "emotional" state in discussing the situation at hand, including Deckard's impending job of killing three other androids, one of whom is of the same model type as Rachael herself. He notes, "No emotional awareness, no feeling-sense of the actual *meaning* of what she said. Only the hollow, formal, intellectual definitions of the separate terms"(190). This dialog, then, provides a counterpart to the insistent desire Deckard has finally recognized: a constant emphasis that this desire involves a *non-human*. Without this equally insistent reminder, the participants might allow the sheer physicality of the desire to take over, with the curiosity, physical need, and erotic excitement overriding any objection from the subject. Unless the human cannot ignore that the android is the unnatural "Other," he might allow a mechanical representation of a human to *exist as a human*. Both

human and android/replicant physicality allow for this possibility in a manner that

would elude a machine without the human form.

> Rachael later asks Deckard:
> "Have you ever made love to an android before?"
> "No," he said, taking off his shirt and tie.
> "I understand—they tell me—it's convincing if you don't think too
> much about it. But if you think too much, if you reflect on what
> you're doing—then you can't go on. For, ahem, physiological
> reasons"(194).

Whatever should be natural becomes unnatural. Being with an android—desiring

something that does not have a place in the category of natural erotic desire—is not a

normal part of the physical aspect of desire. If Deckard does not think about Rachael as

a replicant, his physiological ability to desire her, and therefore perform sexually,

proceeds accordingly. One could even say the ability proceeds *naturally*, in that it is

the *body* that can desire freely whereas the self is leashed by notions of what is natural

and normal. Once thought and recognition enter the picture, the self reconnects the

physical desire with the *idea* that this being is wrong, unnatural, not to be desired. The

android is so physically human-like that it can inspire human desire and potentially

bypass the necessary "protective" measures created by the subject to maintain a natural

order.

The human experience is impeded by the presence of this non-human, although

one could ask which one is truly the non-human, for Deckard's status is unknown.

Further, his behavior is antithetical to what supposedly defines the human condition:

Empathy. What Deckard mistakes for an empathic reaction to the androids is actually

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desire, according to Resch. But empathy, in both the book and the film, is effectively

the defining characteristic of what it is to be human. The Voight-Kampff tests, used to

determine whether a subject is a human or android/replicant, are based entirely on

empathic reaction. The novel, in fact, utilizes empathy as a central part of a subplot,

one that significantly distances the human experience from the android's:

> Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community,
> whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every
> phylum and order including the arachnida. For one thing, the empathic
> faculty probably required an unimpaired group instinct; a solitary
> organism, such a spider, would have no use for it; in fact it would tend
> to abort a spider's ability to survive. It would make him conscious of
> the desire to live on the part of his prey. Hence all predators, even
> highly developed mammals such as cats, would starve.
> Empathy, he once had decided, must be limited to herbivores or
> anyhow omnivores who could depart from a meat diet. Because,
> ultimately, the empathic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and
> victim, between the successful and the defeated (Dick 30-31).

Humans, in Dick's novel, engage in a philosophy or religion known as

Mercerism, at the core of which is empathy. The empathic response, particularly for

humans as a group, is a defining characteristic of the human condition and of humans

themselves. Mercerism is never mentioned in Blade Runner, and the focus on empathy

is more subtle, but its inclusion in the film is no less critical than in the novel. Empathy

is used to distinguish humans from replicants/androids. This defining characteristic, or

lack thereof, creates a consciousness outside the human experience. The replicant sees

and experiences things no human can, not only because he has no empathic response,

but simply by nature of being a replicant. The narrative of the machine is different

from the human narrative, yet what makes each machine and android persist is a

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distinctly human emotion: desire. For humans, "[a] desire must insistently repeat itself until it be recognized" (Gallop 104). Desire for more life, for love, for acceptance, for revenge, for automation, or simply just desire itself. No matter that the repercussions of desire are unknown and go unexplored. No desire is harmless, and even if it may ultimately herald the downfall of a human or humanity as a whole, we cannot help but recognize it.

By the movie's end, a matrix of "normal" desire and masculine human dominance appears to have been renegotiated. Batty has been vanquished (albeit by his own longevity), along with his insurgent cohorts; Rachael and Deckard flee for parts unknown, to be together for as long as she (or he) has left to live. The spectator is left with an illusion of normalcy, of this "man" and "woman" riding off together into the sunset. But the illusion is incomplete. The dominant human male is Deckard, who may in fact be a replicant and who, based on his confrontation with Batty, is also neither ideal nor dominant. The relationship between Deckard and Rachael is still uncertain and perhaps unnatural. That they are forced to leave in order to continue their relationship reveals to the (human) spectator that their desire (or the illusion of it) is still unacceptable to the *human* society in which they exist. Despite the sort of mock heterosexuality of their relationship, they will not reproduce.

In short, the end of the movie only reinforces the spectatorial anxiety regarding each of the issues discussed in this chapter. In fact, the final resolution is itself an illusion: The replicant has *not* been put in its place, and masculine/human control has

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not been reinstated. The perfect body that threatens humans is allowed to escape into its own experience. Desire for the replicant, for something that is not human, has not been made either natural or normal but has been allowed to slip away unnoticed into society as a whole. Despite the implications of the final scene—the replicant (the ideal being) is no longer a threat and Deckard and Rachael disappear—the implicit fear is realized. This couple that cannot reproduce, that does not represent "normal" desire, that carries with it replicant self-awareness and consciousness, and that seems to have no knowledge of the difference between the ideal and real selves is all that is left. Technology has killed the father, changed the face of desire, and escaped human control. It exists within its own experience. As I explore in the following chapters, these are the central fears embedded within the human/machine relationship.

CHAPTER IV: "THE ARTIFICIAL BEING IS A REALITY, A PERFECT
SIMULACRUM"

> The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory
> banks and command models – and with these it can be reproduced an
> indefinite number of times (170).

> - Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations"

> At Cybertronics of New Jersey, artificial being has reached its highest
> form. Universally adopted mecha, the basis for hundreds of models,
> serving the human race in all the multiplicity of daily life. That's far
> enough. But we have no reason to congratulate ourselves. We are,
> rightly, proud of it, but what does it amount to? Sheila, open. A sensory
> toy.

> - Dr. Allen Hobby, the Visionary, A.I.: Artificial Intelligence

One of the more recent and surprising narratives focusing on the

human/machine relationship can be found in the collaboration of Stanley Kubrick and

Steven Spielberg. The movie, A.I.: Artificial Intelligence, released in 2001, is both a

theoretically mediated text and an unabashedly commercial product. That it was

intended to be a successful mainstream movie lends to the unexpectedness of its

various subtexts: while one might expect such material from Kubrick, the darkness

explored by Spielberg is startling. A.I. tells the story of David, a mechanical prototype

boy; the movie uses the terms "orga" and "mecha" to distinguish between human and

machine. This prototype has been created to fulfill the needs of parents who are lonely

and childless—they exist in a futuristic world where licenses are required to have a

baby. David is given to Henry and Monica, test subjects whose biological son Martin

has been cryogenically frozen to keep a fatal disease from killing him. Monica, initially

reluctant to accept David, runs the imprinting program to turn David from a mechanical boy into an eternally devoted mechanical *son*. After the imprinting, Henry begins to distrust David; eventually, Martin experiences a miraculous recovery and returns home. Henry demands that Monica return David to be destroyed—the only way to end his eternal love for her—but she chooses to leave him in the woods, telling him to run and never be caught by any humans. David meets up with another type of mecha, a pleasure mecha, named Gigolo Joe, who helps David in his quest to become a "real boy" so that Monica will eventually love him. This chapter focuses on scenes from the first third of the movie, when David is with Monica and Henry; also included are one scene from the film's middle third and the final scene. The middle section of A.I., which covers David and Gigolo Joe's adventures, is remarkable, particularly with in relation to Blade Runner and with regard to the issues of desire and technology created for women. Whereas the eroticisation of the replicants in Blade Runner represent male desire, the pleasure mechas of A.I. allow for female desire; even so, fulfilling this desire does not go unpunished, for Gigolo Joe has been set up to take the fall for a murder and is himself a fugitive when he joins David. The introduction in the film of Gigolo Joe also allows for some exploration into the categorization of erotic desire for the mechanical and not human. For the purposes of my consideration of the family and maternity, of desire beyond the erotic, and of purity, however, the Flesh Fair scene from the middle section and the scenes involving David and his "family" take precedence.

Robotic Love and Hate

As in <u>Blade Runner</u> and <u>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</u>, where the defining aspect of humans in relation to replicants is the capacity for empathy, true emotion is what seems to define humans as human in <u>A.I.</u> Specifically, it is love—and along with love, desire—around which many of the movie's questions revolve. The Cybertronics corporation makes a robot that can love, to see if it works. Through this mechanical boy, the spectator wonders: Can a robot be made to love? Can a human love a robot?

Before these questions can even be discussed, one must return to the central concern of this thesis. Specifically, what *is* so pivotal about the machine in human form? Consider any technology in its more machinelike physical form, for example the computer, whether a boxy PC or a rounder-edged Macintosh. Or the steel frame, plush interior, and purring motor of the automobile, for decades now the "she" in one of America's most persevering love affairs. There is no denying that individuals "love" their machines. Not a love borne of dependence or necessity, though clearly much of the human world relies heavily on technology, sometimes to the point where lives are essentially controlled *by* technology, albeit indirectly. But while dependence, and by extension the use of machines for labor and the automation of *need*, are very compelling and the source of many dystopic futuristic visions, such as that presented in <u>Blade Runner</u> with the replicants' struggle, there is something particularly compelling about love (in relationship to machines). A completely automated labor force

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integrated into human society is important to consider, but for many these notions are still so embedded in science fiction or so great in scope and scale that they cannot be fully conceptualized. Love and desire, however, are as seemingly personal and individual as the human body itself—emotions brought down to a scale of one. <u>A.I.</u> takes the issue of desire, which I explored in the previous chapter between Deckard and Rachael in <u>Blade Runner</u>, and scrutinizes it more intensely. Desires of various types are brought into play beyond the erotic desire, and the question of love is posed more directly.

The idea of interacting with a being physically resembling us to such a degree that we might be unable to distinguish it from human and might unwittingly begin to construct a relationship—particularly one based around love—as we would with another human is unnerving. What causes this? When a machine is in its "machinic" form, like a car or an everyday computer, there is never any question of friendship or romance. The "love" that exists for the technological object is one way, from the human to the machine. No one expects anything more or less because the machine is a *machine*, but as soon as we begin to envision the android, a robot with the humanoid body or a cyborg, the hybrid of flesh and machine, some part of this relationship structure disconnects. New questions suddenly arise: How will they behave? How will we behave? What will be our interactions?

If the android is a machine created by man, is its place in the order of things different from other physical manifestations of technology? If the same parts and configurations that enabled the machine to love and desire a human were inserted into a square box, would we be as curious about a relationship or whether we could love the machine? Consider the "devil in human form," a theme again featured in religious doctrine as well as in literature and film, particularly within the horror genre. When a person is "taken over" by another life form, or when that life form somehow assumes the human form on its own, the general reaction within the text is horror and revulsion. Rarely, if ever, has an author presented such a situation and resolved it with a happy or even ambiguous ending. Even if it is conceptualized in the ideal human form, this "invader" is never welcomed, never accepted. The witch-hunts that are scattered throughout Western history are a prime example; the witches were "possessed" by some form of evil and were, quite often, destroyed if the invader could not be cast out of their bodies. There are also more recent representation such as The Omen, in which a young boy is found to be the devil's spawn, in The Exorcist, a classic story of possession, or even in a more comedic setting like Men In Black, in which an alien kills a human and then uses the body as an ill-fitting disguise. In A.I., however, the robot is unlike these evil fictional life forms and is a being created by man, neither beamed in from parts unknown nor sprung up through mutation or disease. We can see, then, that it is not solely the human body around which this relationship revolves, since the machine in its own form goes unacknowledged while the "alien" in human form is

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jettisoned. Rather, it is the intersection of the physical body with desire and labor, as I explored in the previous chapter with Blade Runner. The physical and emotional engagement of each of these is what drives us in our construction and representation of the relationship with machines—as well as what drives us *away*.

Of course, the androids, replicants, and robots in such films as A.I. and Blade Runner have been specifically created to fulfill human-like roles, as opposed to an alien being appearing uninvited, or even opposed to a machine such as that in Robert Heinlein's The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress, an intelligent, even conscious machine with a voice and very human qualities whose purpose is to maintain the control system of a lunar colony. But there is no requirement in this role, or again in the role of HAL in 2001, for the machine to have the human form, or to look like humans; something else drives this aspect of the creation, and this aspect is what, in turn, enables authors, directors, critics, and audiences to raise such questions about love and desire. The human body is both the bridge toward a connection with machines and an illusion that causes discomfort with and questioning of its use in these representations.

While A.I. does focus on the moral and emotional issues associated with creating and utilizing a robot that will not only love but *exclusively* love whomever it imprints on, the questions and discomfort exist within the narrative as well. The axis around which many of these concerns revolve is the question of what is *real*. "Realness," in the context of the movie, is both quantifiable and not. What is "real" is human and organic, what is "not real" is mechanical. The separation between "orga"

and "mecha" is unavoidable, but the actual distinction is much harder to make—for the characters as much as the audience. If the mecha has a "human body," how unreal is he? Is it what is physically inside that counts, or what is emotionally inside? If it is a human's emotional capacity that separates him from a mechanical being and makes him real, can this distinction be maintained once a robot can be designed and programmed to love?

While Roger Ebert, in his review of A.I., says that the robot "only seems to love" and to have emotion, Spielberg's aim in creating the mecha boy is to show that this love is actually *real*: David truly loves his mommy, Monica, and once he imprints on her through the special code, he loves her for all of eternity. What is unreal about this emotion? The simple fact of it residing in an artificial body? But if the love seems so real—and the body also—how does any human know his own emotion is real? This complexity reveals that what is *real* is not ultimately definable. Baudrillard writes "*it is now impossible to isolate the process of the real*, or to prove the real"(182). We have become so familiar with spectacle and simulation that the idea of "real" is arbitrary. "Real" has an individualized and ever-shifting definition, one that is itself based on the very simulacra which reflects the real.

Or perhaps, as Baudrillard also writes, we no longer need to be concerned with defining what is real: "It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of

the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced"(170). David's love for his mommy does not have to be real. It must merely replicate the real, which, in many cases, is better and more believable than the real itself.

A.I. continually toys with the notion of the real, most notably in its storyline parallels to Pinocchio. The physical illusion of the mechas and their incredible "likeness" causes confusion and shifting allegiances. A.O. Scott, in his New York Times review, notes that, when Monica's real son, Martin, is brought home, he is "is sneaky and disobedient, sarcastic and manipulative." In comparison to perfect, wide-eyed (and perennially unblinking) David, Scott notes, "Real children, it turns out, are more difficult to love." Will a spectator want to side with David because his is the primary narrative or because he is so perfect, so much better than *real*? For Monica as well as the spectator, this is a difficult decision. Martin may be "real," but David *seems* just as real, plus he's uncannily perfect and devoted. All parents want the perfect child; fingers and toes are always counted upon birth, and details of the most mundane occurrences are recounted endlessly. The imperfect child, in both the prenatal fears of the parents as well as in the postnatal reality, is less lovable. Of course, at the same time there is something unnerving about perfection and unwavering devotion, particularly in a child. For as much as a parent hopes to have the ideal baby, she hopes as well for the child to grow, change, and learn—in other words, to be *real* and *human*. This, then, is the dialectic in which Monica, and through her the viewer, must operate

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with regard to David: the desire for perfection engaging with the desire for imperfection gained through growth and mistakes. As the unchanging and perfect child, David is an idealized simulacrum, but his very unchangeableness is frustrating, repetitive, and never surprising. And as this perpetual child, David represents for the viewer the "be careful what you wish for" result of playing God, of making conscious creatures simply to suit the needs and desires of humans. The forever-child is an unending burden. Parents will grow old, get sick, become infirm, and die, but this child will never grow, never change, and never leave. The text reveals this by making David's life span virtually eternal, unlike the lifespan of the replicant. The only way to rid the family of David is to destroy him or to exorcise him.

Spielberg's choice of a "child" as the ultimate achievement of artificial intelligence is not arbitrary. The child's body is not as threatening as the body of the full-grown man. Adult mechas exist in <u>A.I.</u>, and most of them are pleasure mechas. Their purpose is to fulfill yet another vast and oceanic aspect of human need, erotic desire. But the consciousness of these mechas is definitively different from David's: They fulfill a need without asking for anything in return. David's love for his mommy is so powerfully intense and distilled down to its purest essence it practically demands reciprocity (A.O. Scott). The child mecha allows for a sort of controllable emotional experimentation; if an orga child is subject to authority, then a mecha child is doubly so. Yet at the same time, the interactions between David and Martin, the "children," reveal to us even children know that to be human is to be imperfect.

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This interaction also includes the willingness of the child to see the moral and metaphysical potential of the machine, as revealed both by David's childlike desire to prove his *realness* as well as by Martin's very human competitiveness with what is really just a machine. Sherry Turkle provides an example of this that is particularly striking in relation to A.I. She relates an anecdote of some boys at the beach who play with a toy she brings to them, a handheld computer named Merlin that plays tic-tac-toe. The machine is not predictable in that occasionally it will use a different strategy, and the children do not always win. One of the children, Robert, declares that the machine has cheated, continuing, "And if you cheat you're alive"(Turkle 29). The boys argue over whether the machine is smart or stupid, whether it is conscious of cheating, and whether its "brain" knows it is cheating. They are caught in the same conundrum as the mecha boy himself. He is real, but not real. He is conscious but exiled.

The Real

Upon the return of David's quasi-brother Martin, the competitiveness between the imperfect real and the perfect simulacrum is immediately revealed for the spectator. Martin must make certain he distinguishes what is real from what is not. In a scene following his return, David and Martin are in Martin's room; Martin is competing with David to see which boy Teddy, the teddy bear super-toy, will choose. After Monica takes Teddy away, Martin decides to learn more about the new "super-toy," David.

> Martin: He used to be a super-toy, but now he's old and stupid. You
>   want him?
> David: Yes please.

Martin: So I guess now you're the new super-toy. So, what good stuff
can you do? Oh…can you do power stuff like, uh, walk on the
ceiling or the walls? Anti-gravity, like float, fly?
David: Can you?
Martin: No, because I'm *real* (points to himself). (walks over and picks
up a toy) Can you break this?
David: I better not.
Martin: This things, they do look better in pieces. They do.
David: I can't.
Martin: Stand up. Look! They made you bigger than me.
David: Who did?
Martin: They did. The doll makers. They made you taller. (touches
David's face) Why don't you look like one?
David: Like one.
Martin: You're not cute like a doll. You *just look like some ordinary kid*
(emphasis mine).

Beyond Martin's competitiveness and his condescension towards David, the

most obvious disparity between the two is physical. As Martin notes, David is bigger.

More importantly, Martin is vulnerable—he has only just returned from the hospital,

where he was cryogenically frozen to save him from a virus for which there had

previously been no cure. He wears braces on his legs to support his weakened muscles;

he cannot bend his knees, and so, encased in these metal structures, he lurches around

the room. David appears to be a physically perfect little boy. The mechanical-looking

braces and their restriction on his movement give Martin a machine-like quality, but he

is, in reality, the human. The images jar the viewer's preconceived notions: A robot is

made of metal, a human of flesh. Perhaps, then, the boundaries, distinctions, and visual

ideals we create with regard to the human body are arbitrary, shifting, and potentially

overlapping with those we create for other beings. Martin's metal is on the outside,

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David's on the inside. Martin asserts that he is *real*, but how does he—or the audience—know this for certain?

As I have argued, what it means to be real is arbitrary. The real has become as produced as any simulation. Is someone who has been so affected by medicine and science just as "natural," "organic," and "real" as any other human? Perhaps, for Martin as well as for the audience, the question of real serves as a distancing tool between what is human and what is not human. Without this distinction, can we maintain any sense of hierarchy or order, like that discussed in Chapter II? The audience is expected to know that David is not human, but the illusion is so complete that we cannot be certain. We must fall back on the real because it is our conceptualization of what it means to be human and to have a human body, with which we (the audience and Martin as our point of reference) were "programmed" by a pre-existing ideology that has failed us.

Purity

From Martin's perspective—from his society's perspective, and perhaps from a general societal perspective as interpreted by Spielberg—real is equal to human. However, this definition of humanity relies on the notion of purity, which, through Martin, the spectator learns is not an absolute. Martin has clearly been altered. Given the various technologies that have kept him alive, there is a part of him that is no longer purely organic and natural but, instead, is altered and man-made. The spectator can simply assume that Martin's "purity" was destroyed by the disease entering his

body. But the interaction between Martin and David provides a more important insight: The very idea of purity itself is highly problematic. Purity, particularly for humans, does not exist—no matter that we have separated ourselves from animals and from the natural world and that we strive endlessly in cultural productions to distinguish ourselves from machines, the very Other we create and produce. Purity is as much a necessary construct as the real.

Despite our knowledge of genetics and evolution, and our involvement with the "natural world," we must contend with the history discussed in previous chapters that places man as an entity unto itself, as a separate race and species. No matter how much DNA we may share with chimpanzees, orangutans, and worms, humans have frequently been viewed as *separate*. Were we to even be able to admit our own hybrid make-up, what would we be hybrids of? Jennifer González writes

> What makes the term [hybrid] controversial, of course, is that it appears to assume by definition the existence of a non-hybrid state – a pure state, a pure species, a pure race – with which it is contrasted. It is this notion of purity that must, in fact, be problematized. For if any progress is to be made in a politics of human or cyborg existence, heterogeneity must be taken as a given. It is therefore necessary to imagine a world of composite elements without the notion of purity (67).

Perhaps it is sufficient to simply abandon the notion of purity, rather than determine precisely what our constituent parts are, or in what ratio they must be for the label human to still apply. Or maybe we must understand that these ideas—of ourselves as pure humans and of our bodies as *markers* of purity—on which we base so many of our relationships to each other, to our own bodies, and to the rest of the

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material world, are in fact representative of a larger structure. Namely, as Mary

Douglas posits

> The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its
> boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or
> precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its
> different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other
> complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning
> excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in
> the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers
> credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body
> (115).

Martin's body, as are all human bodies, was not impervious to disease. During the time

he needed to rely on technology to exist, he was nearly replaced by David in the

familial structure and, more horribly, in his mother's love. His body serves as a

representation of human society; the impurities that affected him are, for the spectator,

representative of the technological impurities that affect the structure of our own

existence. In a later scene, after David has been forced out of the home, he finds

himself at a Flesh Fair, in which mechas are ritualistically destroyed in a coliseum-like

setting. The mechas are caged, separated from the humans, and treated as if they are a

virus that has infected human society and forever altered its "purity." The scene

provides an interesting commentary about the humans' need to reassert their own

"realness," especially in relation to the mecha. Rather than have some stand-alone

absolute for what it means to be real and human, these humans destroy the mechas to

prove dominance and difference. The human is proved to be real in relation to the

Other. Realness relies on an opposition, on something that is *not* real. Once the

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audience at the Fair decides to release David instead of destroy him because he looks so real and is "only a child," however, the absolute disappears and David breaks through the barrier of purity.

The notion of purity notion is a protective device. If we can believe in the purity of humans and in the purity of our own bodies, we can preserve belief in the structure of our society as separate, distinct, and *human*. Unfortunately, nature, however distanced we think it may be from us, and however much we believe we can control our own piece of it, still has dominion over the human body. Human nature as well still has control over our societal structure as a whole. The mecha body is designed to defy much of nature, including disease, hunger, and, the ravages of time. David's mecha body is threatening to Martin; while *looking and feeling so real*, David is immune to disease, time, and muscle degeneration. Humanity is immune to none of these things, yet we cannot stop striving for the perfection as illustrated by these machines at the very time we wish to separate them from ourselves. We create androids and robots to perform duties, but we design them to be perfect, and we work on ourselves through medicine, plastic surgery, exercise, and physical enhancement— to perfect ourselves, and perhaps even to "cyborg" or "robotize" ourselves. We have forever tinkered with machines and technology and allowed ourselves to be tinkered with. As much as these cultural representations display a wish to separate out the machines and place them in a category outside and below humans, and as much as

these texts portray the fear of what the machine's existence will do to us as a human body—such as replace us altogether—we never end our quest to create them.

In two subsequent scenes, one at the dinner table and another at Martin's birthday party, David's resilience again defeats Martin. Whereas Martin was frozen to stop the progress of his fatal disease, David escapes near "death" by being serviced, as would any machine. During the meal, Martin taunts David with the "realness" of eating food—not only does David never feel hunger, he cannot digest. After shoveling spinach into his mouth to compete with Martin, who ignores his parents' demand that he stop his goading, David begins to malfunction. In the very next scene, a duo of engineers has arrived at the Swintons' house and opened David up to clean his various memory cards and computer parts. The father, Henry, and Martin look on, while Monica holds David's hand. The scene, of course, is of a surgical procedure, and echoes the Swintons' regular visits to the Cryogenics Institute to sit at Martin's side. Except in this operation, David is awake, or "on." He never sleeps, not even when his body cavity is split open. As he lies there, the engineers busily cleaning and reminding him that spinach is not for "roboboys," David gazes longingly, lovingly at Monica and trumps Martin once again. "Don't worry mommy," he says, "it doesn't hurt." The mother need not fear that life will inflict pain on her "child," unlike with Martin. And Martin must continue with his attempts to conflate evil and danger with David's lack of "realness."

Where Is Humanity?

For the emotions of the viewer, the organic and mechanical bodies have been

intertwined. The dialog between Martin and David distinguishes David as the Other,

the not real, but the visual cues complicate this narrative. David looks just as real as

Martin, except that he is perfect: his movements are fluid and normal, unlike Martin's

Frankensteinian lurching. While David may have been "brought to life" only recently,

Martin, we must remember, was cryogenically frozen for many years and only recently

"brought (back) to life" himself.

> As A.O. Scott writes in his <u>New York Times</u> review of the movie:

> Our startled discovery that we may prefer David to his quasi-brother –
> he's perfect, after all – is an indication of how tangled and ambiguous
> the movie's themes are. If we fall for David, and if, later, we side with
> his mechanical brethren against their human oppressors, are we
> affirming our humanity or have we been irrevocably alienated from it?
> (Scott)"

The viewer's perception of David is contorted by the visual cues and by the

simple fact that the entire film is, ultimately, about the mecha/robot experience and

consciousness. While at the outset it appears to present the human perspective, as when

David is first brought home by Henry, the movie, as Scott mentions, subtly shifts,

alienating the audience from its own humanity and from the human experience. The

audience has human characters almost as markers: each provides a c(l)ue for the varied

human emotions, responses, questions, and allegiances to the idea of the android. As

the mother who may have lost her son forever, Monica wants to love and be loved by a

child; she is initially frightened of David and occasionally repelled by him, but she can

overcome neither her need to be loved nor her maternal instincts. David is "real" enough, or perhaps "real" in a different way; in one scene, she says, "He is only a child, Henry." Henry says, "Monica, he's a toy," but Monica responds, "He's a gift, from you." Monica represents the mother/female/maternal as well as the repetitive cycle of fear, desire, and acceptance. The nuclear family has been disrupted, through various natural disasters. The introduction of the mecha child is an effort to reintroduce the operation of the mother and to uphold at least the illusion of reproduction. A family with two parents and a mecha child is the post-nuclear family, a simulation of a normal human family. The spectator can accept it as real as long as there are no disruptions.

Henry, the father, provides this perspective. Henry and Martin are the two primary voices of dissent and anger, of masculine fear, but whereas Martin is scheming, manipulative, and suspicious of his "replacement," Henry brings David home and willingly "fathers" the child to fulfill Monica's need and desire. The problem arises when Monica grows to accept and even love David, causing Henry to turn against the mecha. In two incidences after the spinach scene in which David appears to be harming first Monica and then Martin—only the audience knows he is innocent—Henry's core distrust of David is readily apparent. He sees David as a threat to his wife and son, and therefore to himself as the father, the patriarchal leader of this familial unit unbalanced and invaded by the Other. We could assume he is jealous or simply does not like David. But the movie as a whole brings in a deeply interwoven Oedipal subtext: by the movie's end, the viewer is aware that, for the male figure, the

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mechanical boy again represents impurity disrupting the structure of the family. The final scene of A.I., in which David is supposedly granted his wish to become a real boy so his mother can really love him, occurs after not only the eventual death of the father but of the human race as a whole. David spends a perfect day with Monica, and at the end of the day, when she will again go to sleep and disappear forever, David crawls into bed with her and goes to sleep, just like any real boy. Henry is gone, unmourned. As in Blade Runner, the father is "inessential."

The inessentiality of the father in A.I., however, reveals a somewhat different fear than in other texts. In Blade Runner and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, for example, the technology created—the replicant—is created for what are primarily masculine needs. The replicant is a laborer and occasionally a lover/mistress. Its purpose, therefore, is to satisfy the male; he no longer has to perform dangerous labor and his erotic desires are met. A.I. presents technologies that can be applied to women as easily as men, if not more so. There are nurses and laborers, as well as pleasure mechas whose single purpose is to provide sex to humans; Gigolo Joe is a boy toy. The child mecha is directed at those longing to be mothers. Unfortunately, the representation of female-oriented technologies reveals another fear. Given that these cultural productions are produced in the United States and are from a male (or masculine machine) perspective, and given that the history of automation is a masculine endeavor, the texts reveal *male fears*. It follows then that a technology designed for women that may not only replace humans but specifically men has a

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threat all its own. Henry, in <u>A.I.</u>, begins to truly distrust David *after* Monica runs the imprinting program. During the imprinting scene, when David switches from generic mecha boy to Monica's mecha son, she is kneeling in front of him. The light is soft and filtered, and the room seems to exist in a fuzzy, dreamy haze. As soon as he imprints and calls her mommy, he reaches down, puts his arms around her, and kneels on her thighs. Their bodies create almost a full circle, and the position is such that it reintroduces the natural form of reproduction; David is curled, in almost fetal position, in Monica's lap. This complete circle between mother and mechanical boy appears to negate the need for the father and for natural reproduction. Whether or not he even has genitalia is unknown (another boy inquires about this at Martin's poolside birthday party) but *he* certainly has no need for the phallus. While David himself cannot reproduce, he can be reproduced, and if Monica can love him as she seems to in this scene, he is a threat to his human counterparts.

Henry's fear of David causes the family to cast aside the mecha boy. When Monica asks David to go for a drive in the woods she is meant to return him to Cybertronics for destruction but she cannot bring herself to do so. Again, the audience sees the danger inherent in a technology meant for women. While the man—Henry— would have destroyed this mechanical threat, Monica does not. Instead she abandons him in the woods and tells him to run. Again the viewer is given dual texts; the dialog between Monica and David is at odds with the visual cues showing Henry directing David's fate and Monica complying, unwillingly and with deep emotional conflict.

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It is important to note that, while Martin and Henry represent a valid and common part of the human experience, neither is a compassionate or particularly likeable character; to identify with either is to willingly side with antagonism, mistrust, manipulation, and fear. In comparison with David's perfection and eagerness to please, it is almost too easy to side with him against these protectors of human male dominion. The scene in which Monica leaves David in the woods only underscores the initial empathic response of the spectator on David's behalf; the visceral trauma of the abandonment scene (reminiscent to some spectators of Bambi's mother's death) emphasizes both David's absolute isolation and his need for *someone* to care for him. As we saw in Blade Runner and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep, empathy is a decidedly *human* response. The audience, then, is true to its humanity—or is it? Following A.O. Scott's comment, and considering Rick Deckard's conundrum, what does it mean for a human to feel empathy for something that *is not human*? The shifting allegiance is ultimately alienating and threatening, at least as represented by A.I. Monica is forced to give David up and realign herself with her human (male) family members. In order for David to reunite with his mommy, he believes he must become real, but at the movie's end, he is allowed to reunite with her through a simulation even though he has not been made "real," as in human. Perhaps becoming real is less important than freeing Monica of the father (and the "real" son). Or perhaps it is no longer necessary to become "real" when the human race no longer exist, for by the movie's end all that is left of humanity are the memories stored in David's mind.

He has outlasted the human world and prevails in the end. For the spectator to empathize with David is to side with the non-human at the expense of the human.

The sensation of being both drawn to and repelled by David, represented through Monica's experience, is at first familiar. Upon first seeing David, Monica says, "I mean Henry, did you see his face? He's… he's so real. But he's not." How indeed could a human be asked to love, or even empathize with a robot? But as the conflicting narrative and visual cues collide, David's lack of "realness" becomes questionable. If something not real can look and act so real, and if something real has the physical markings of the not real, where should the line be drawn? Even if he is not *real* boy, a human boy, does this mean he cannot be loved? Does a human need to be loved in return, or is the assumption of mutual love, with no evidence to the contrary, sufficient?

At the very beginning of the movie there is a long scene in which Professor Allen Hobby, the Cybertronics Visionary, describes to colleagues the next big thing in mechas: the child mecha. A female colleague raises this question:

> Female Colleague: You know… it occurs to me with all this animus
> existing against mechas today, it isn't simply a question of
> creating a robot who can love. But isn't the real conundrum: Can
> you get a human to love them back?
> Professor Hobby: Ours will be a perfect child caught in a freeze frame,
> always loving, never ill, never changing. All the childless
> couples, yearning in vain for a license, our little mecha will not
> only open up a completely new market, it will fulfill a great
> human need.
> Female Colleague: But you haven't answered my question. If a robot
> could genuinely love a person, what responsibility does that

person hold toward that mecha in return? It's a moral question, isn't it.

Professor Hobby: The oldest one of all. But in the beginning, didn't God create Adam to love Him?

Whether or not David really loves Monica or, as Ebert writes, only seems to, is not nearly as critical as it may appear. David is an instance of man playing God, creating in his own image; David is even god-like in his perfection but still imbued with human emotion. David's purpose is to fulfill a vast, oceanic human need—to be loved by a child. The movie's opening shot is of ocean waves crashing, with the voice over narrating the story of the future, in which the ice caps of melted, the vast oceans have swallowed coastal cities, and millions of people have perished.

This ocean may be a symbol of maternity, as Scott notes, but as the image shifts into the next scene, with Professor Hobby and his colleagues it comes to represent something more. The audience is confronted with a new, unfamiliar form of maternity: maternity of the future, in which human reproduction, no longer part of the natural cycle but is a precious commodity obtainable through great expense and strict licensing, now involves an inventor, a corporation, a conglomerate in which offspring are conceived, produced, built, but never nurtured—a "child" borne of desire, not of need. A.I. takes the representation of the father figure explored in Blade Runner and expands it to include maternity and a mother figure. This movement towards the mother is not a movement *away* from the father but simply a more complex engagement with the parental unit (either two people or one individual representing both the maternal/paternal).

Beyond maternity, however, the vast undulating ocean is now a visual representation of endless human need and desire. David, upon whom human desires, needs, and emotions have been imposed, he becomes engulfed and consumed by the needs and desires that produced him. Yet the audience notes that he is saved by a future iteration of robot, and the only connection left to humanity exists *within the machine*. Our desires and needs, the spectator is shown, may one day be met so completely that humans will no longer be needed, either in the production or fulfillment of these needs. Those arbitrary and shifting boundaries we create around the human body and around the machine may one day disappear altogether. Robots will be able to carry the desires we imposed on them and carry them out through an entirely new consciousness past the end of human existence. This, perhaps, is not the legacy we intended.

CHAPTER V: "TURNING THE WHOLE WORLD INTO METAL"

The relationship between humans and machines can no longer be considered as a simple, one-sided engagement between "us" and "them," the user and the tool. While the machines, androids, and replicants explored in this work exist only in the world of science fiction and futuristic fantasy, they provide compelling evidence for a narrative of technology and automation existing in our collective consciousness. These are only brief instances of cultural commentary, but they speak volumes of our fears regarding the machines we strive to build—and which may very well come to exist in the future. Humans, from a Western male perspective, have a deep-seated uneasiness about these androids, one that is based in an uneasiness regarding our own physical bodies, particularly as they engage in desire and labor.

If we are to move forward with the development of this technology and with structuring relationships with increasingly conscious machines, we must address our darkest fears. One of the most vivid iterations of the fear in our relationship with sentient machines is the movie Tetsuo: The Iron Man, released in 1992. As the final aesthetic text of this thesis, it provides both a counterpoint to the other texts as well as a theoretical bridge to future investigation. Tetsuo, while not a film with a fully defined plot or classic narrative, tells the story of a man who has no name; he is what is referred to as a "salary man." He wears glasses, suit and tie, rides the subway to work, and has an intensely sexual relationship with his girlfriend. He has no obvious defining characteristic other than the private passion he shares with her. In a series of

flashbacks, the viewer learns how the salary man's car struck an unknown man, whose presumably dead body the salary man and his girlfriend dragged to a ravine and eyed warily while having sex against a tree. As the film progresses, and as the salary man turns inexorably from human to metal monster, the true story emerges. The victim, who survived the accident, is known as the Metals Fetishist; after the accident, he discovers he can control metal with his mind—and uses this newfound ability to take revenge on the salary man, turning him bit-by-bit into a machine, one that will be as aggressive, violent, and unremorseful as the man who, in one instant, struck the Fetishist and left him to die in a ditch.

Blade Runner and A.I., while excellent representatives of genre and of a collective awareness of the desire intrinsic to the human/machine relationship, visualize very heavily stylized, postmodern worlds. The machines are given hyper-idealized physical human forms. These are the beautiful people of the future, created to be the ultimate specimen. What would be the purpose of creating the perfect machine creature if the marriage of flesh and machine revealed itself to be hideous and terrifying?

Because the relation of the human to the machine is so fraught with desire and fear, the possibility exists of uglier, more frightening outcomes than presented in those commercial texts. Tetsuo: The Iron Man represents the visually nightmarish side of the human interconnectedness with machines.

A Cyborg Nightmare

The primary character in Tetsuo is technically not an android but a cyborg. I have not discussed cyborgs since the first chapter, but the particular cyborg in Tetsuo is of importance to this argument because his emergence represents a set of human fears critical in the human machine relationship. He is not a human-turned-cyborg by choice—in fact he initially unaware of what is happening to him. His consciousness morphs from the human to the machine; he is forcibly removed from the human experience and thrust into that of the cyborg, entering a new existence in which he, as a heterosexual male, is denaturalized and changed into a machine. One could argue that, as humans do not ask to be born, androids and cyborgs do not ask to be created. But his metamorphosis is so brutal and visceral that his experience, and the viewer's experience in witnessing the physical and psychological transformations, transcends definitions of cyborgs, androids, and humans, and displays much of the underlying fear so critical to the machinic/organic relationship.

The salary man regards the gnarled pieces of metal, twisted wires, and rusted bolts bursting forth from beneath his skin with terror. By the movie's end, he is a seething mass of wires and mechanical flesh, entirely consumed by the Fetishist's anger and by the machinery that sprang from within his body.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Tetsuo is the appearance of the salary man's body as it progresses from ordinary to abomination. The viewer's reaction to the chunks of metal popping through to the surface and replacing flesh and skin is disgust

and discomfort. Such a visceral transformation of the familiar human shape is a jolting reminder that the boundaries of the body are not inviolable. The salary man is at the mercy of another man's revenge and is controlled by the fetishist's creations as he simultaneously becomes such a creation.

Whether from Star Trek or Terminator, audiences are familiar with cyborgs. Metal grafted onto and into skin, enhancing or reconstructing lost or damaged body parts, can be made to seem graceful and natural even if also menacing and threatening. Tetsuo makes no appeal to the physical aesthetic. This cyborg's body is ugly and his transformation is agonizingly painful. In this text, the marriage of man and machine is not and will never be a happy one. In the final scene, when after a fierce battle the salary man, metal fetishist, and mountain of metal have melded into one being, what is left of the salary man's face shows only defeat and resignation. He is slumped, drooling, as if beaten into submission by the technological slagheap that has consumed him.

The appearance of the cyborg transformation is crucial, as it deeply affects the viewer. The quivering biomass technology portals in such works as David Cronenberg's Existenz cannot compare visually to the lump of steel in Tetsuo. The low budget production adds to Tetsuo's visual impact; there is nothing refined, no edges smoothed over, and no parts created for the movie. Everything is real and realistic, yet pieced together in such a fashion that its familiarity no longer comforts the viewer. In fact, the very familiarity—the outline of the human body and the scrap yard junk that

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defiles it—is at the core of what is so disorienting. That the film was shot in black and white adds to the alienation. Here is flesh, there is metal, and yet the two cannot easily be distinguished: There is no color to simultaneously allow the viewer to separate out the parts yet find some continuity with blending hues.

His new physicality terrifies and dehumanizes the salary man; his pain, bewilderment, and agony are evident with each explosion of metal. How can his own body so betray him? How can his physical form be controlled by someone else's mind, by *another subject*?

Heavy Metal, Heavy Desire

Lurking beneath the black and white horror is, unavoidably, lust. In various scenes throughout his progression, the salary man hides, cowers, and covers himself, pushing his girlfriend away out of fear and shame. Given their obvious desire for each other, and their frequent erotic couplings (ranging from sweaty and passionate to cool and detached), his separation from her is more pronounced. Perhaps more importantly, that *he* is distancing himself from *her* gives rise to the argument that this technological takeover hints at the deep, Lacanian male fear. His desire—masculine desire, at the center of this text—has been defeated. While this original desire—original sin, to continue the metaphor of Adam—is a mere blip on the screen, the viewer cannot ignore the underlying meaning. In flashback scenes of the accident, the camera focuses briefly on the driver side door and, as the salary man emerges, the shot is exactly at the level of his crotch. His fly is undone, and the implication is that he and his girlfriend

had been engaged in some unknown sexually activity while he was driving. His desire, and perhaps more importantly the intersection of male desire with the use of a machine/technology, has driven him straight into this massive collision, forever altering his human existence.

The film provides a representation of desire as man's downfall. It is not simple lust that destroys him, but desire as seen through the dual lenses of technology and fetishism. The salary man is controlled by the *Metals Fetishist*; he is physically turned into a fetish object. In recent years, technology itself has become increasingly fetishized. The introduction of the eroticized machine, whether in cyborg, android, or robotic form, has provided a conflation of technology and flesh. On a more basic level, one that may prove more critical for an understanding of the broader social implications of our love/hate relationship with technology, humans have come to see technology (such as computers, gadgets, and cars) as ultimate objects of desire. We therefore fetishize technology and machines through both Freudian ideas of fetishism as well as Marxian. The representation of fetishism in <u>Tetsuo</u> appears to take from both theories, despite their disparities; in fact, I argue that it is through this representation of the machinic that the social and psychological underpinnings of fetishism begin to converge. Laura Mulvey writes "Both Freud and Marx use the concept of fetishism in an attempt to explain a refusal, or blockage, of the mind, or a phobic inability of the psyche, to understand a symbolic system of value, one within the social and the other within the psychoanalytic sphere"(2). She goes on to explain "the differences between

the two invocations of fetishism," remarking that in the Marxist variation, "[i]t is in and around the difficulty of establishing the exchange value of actual objects produced under capitalism that commodity fetishism flourishes, while the Freudian fetish, on the other hand, flourishes as phantasmatic inscription. It ascribes excessive value to objects considered to be valueless by the social consensus"(2). <u>Tetsuo</u> provides the spectator with a visual manifestation of a fetish object that resonates socially and psychologically, that is an actual object produced by the capital system but is ultimately a phantasm, which is of uncertain value and is produced of valueless parts.

Labor and Aggression

The cyborg in <u>Tetsuo</u> begins as a Japanese salary man; even Western viewers unfamiliar with this concept will recognize his suit, glasses, and briefcase as the markings of the white-collar worker. The more cynical might see him as the homogenized paper-shuffling member of the rat race. As a member of a society that has experienced many "technological changes," he is no longer physically involved in the labor process (Marcuse 255). His physical separation from labor and the material world have thoroughly altered his connection to nature; what purpose does his physicality serve if the only link he has to the natural world is through desire and *re*production instead of production? Even his connection to the outside world is through technology; the spectator only sees him in "nature" after the accident, during which the salary man drives his car. He belongs in the society of Herbert Marcuse's essay "Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society:

Since physical labor tends to become increasingly unnecessary and even wasteful, since the work of salaried employees too becomes increasingly 'automatic' and that of the politicians and administrators increasingly questionable, the traditional content of the struggle for existence appears more meaningless and without substance the more it appears as unnecessary necessity. But the future alternative, namely, the possible abolition of (alienated) labor seems equally meaningless, nay, frightening (255).

There is something terribly familiar about the salary man with his bland everyman quality, and this identification allows the spectator to experience the futility of his "struggle for existence" during his transformation *and* before it. Which is worse: to be turned into a machine or to merely be an unnoticeable, unnecessary *part* of a machine? Neither is preferable but given this trajectory—from salary man controlled by capital to denaturalized cyborg controlled by a fetishist—neither, it seems, is avoidable.

At the heart of <u>Tetsuo</u> is, again, a narrative of technology's masculine history and the notion of the universal human as the heterosexual man. This narrative includes the salary man as the fetish object but also, more importantly, displays him consciously performing the fetish through a dream. This dream hints at the baseline heterosexual male fear with regard to machines—not simply that machines will take over the world and enslave us, but that technology will do so by penetrating and subverting the social structure, feminizing men and denaturalizing the universal human. By the end of the movie, this fear will be fully realized: whereas in <u>Blade Runner</u> and <u>A.I.</u> the structure of the human/machine relationship appeared to be more universal, with heterosexual male fears as a subtle subtext, in <u>Tetsuo</u> the universal is unmasked.

During the salary man's transformation, as he loses control of his physical

being, his behavior becomes more irrational and aggressive. His relationship with his

lover, with whom he had shared both intimacy and the secret of the metal fetishist's

presumed death, begins to disintegrate. She begs him to reveal his body, and swears

she'll accept him. Initially she shows interest and affection, desiring his new body as

much as she desired the old. But when the full metal transformation occurs, and the

salary man emerges with a giant, pointed, spinning drill in place of his penis, her love

and desire shift swiftly to disgust and horror. The salary man has been transformed into

something *unnatural*.

Though a huge phallic drill with a sharp point is frightening on a base level,

this fear is more complex. B*oth male and female desire* have been devoured and

replaced by the machine. If the machine can replicate or remove human desire, one of

the most fundamental human emotions of both the body *and* the subject, at what point

in our quest for automation do we discover that we have automated *ourselves*?

A fear of technology then is attached to a fear of desire, but also to a fear that

our selves and our desires will be destroyed. Categories we have identified as

humans—such as gender, sexuality, erotic desire, and the natural—cannot exist in the

realm of the cyborg. The machine is *not natural*. Even if the audience sees a cyborg or

an android as female or as desiring the male, the spectator can impose this category on

the machine. If we insist the machine has a gender, we negate the belief that gender is

biologically determined and thus undermine a baseline belief of what it is to be *human*, as in *natural* and *real*.

As I have argued, the division of the self and the body allowed for control (or at least the appearance of) over the physical and the natural. Control over the body, as with the issue of purity, represented control of larger social structures. If we, as humans, cannot *naturalize* this new body, even if we have created it, how can we expect to control it? And if we cannot control the machine's effect on ourselves, how can we continue to control our bodies and our society?

Denaturalized Desire

Even texts that hint at desire beyond the heterosexual bounds, such as A.I. with its pleasure mechas, focus primarily on the heterosexual. Tetsuo displays the annihilation of naturalized heterosexual desire, which suggests that the machine and the quest for the ultimate technologized world will only do the same. The film follows an arc from heterosexual desire into homosexual desire into the ungendered body of the cyborg. Soon after his transformation begins, the machinic surfaces, appearing from the salary man's unconscious in a dream. This dream, which is one of the most evocative scenes in the film, features a cyborg-like creature—the girlfriend wearing a metallic bikini with long, thin, corrugated-pipe penis, which whips back and forth. The tip of this penis is a bulbous lump of metal, which the girlfriend caresses, dances with, and ultimately uses to anally penetrate the salary man. The salary man awakes with a start, only to find himself in his normal heterosexual setting, in bed with his fully

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human girlfriend. His physical and psychological transformations are occurring simultaneously, as more metal has emerged from his body during the night.

The anal penetration with the metal phallus, and his acceptance of it while on his hands and knees before a metal sculpture, shows the salary man engaging openly with the fetishism of the metal and of the phallus. His dream, with a fully equipped cyborg goddess no less, appears at first to be heterosexual fantasy, merging the machine and the flesh on the female body, the site of male desire. The spectator is undoubtedly familiar with images of android and cyborg women, sleek and shiny, intrinsically feminine but made of metal, complete with phallic stilettos and other fetish objects. But the salary man's penetration portends a very different narrative. Quite clearly, the audience gets the message in the basest, bluntest common parlance: If technology gets out of hand, man will certainly be fucked—up the ass. And as the final scene reveals, he may even come to like it.

This penetration scene plays on traditional notions of the dominant male/passive female by subverting the roles. The masculine is always posited as the active sexual role with regards to penetration; homophobia has deep roots in the belief that to receive/be penetrated is inherently *feminine*. Leo Bersani writes that "the moral taboo on 'passive' anal sex in ancient Athens is primarily formulated as a kind of hygienics [sic] of social power. *To be penetrated is to abdicate power*"(12). Quite clearly, the salary man has abdicated power. He in fact has no choice. His girlfriend in the dream appears to control the phallus, but as it winds around on its own the viewer

is not so sure. Perhaps it is the machine that controls the girlfriend and, through her, will control the man. By the film's end, he will have submitted and be irreversibly bound to the machine and to the Metals Fetishist.

The final scenes of <u>Tetsuo</u> are the visual proof of this union. After the mighty battle between the fetishist and the salary man, the camera travels alongside the quivering mass and suddenly the viewer is sucked inside. The scene is a womb-like state, with two fully-grown male bodies (the fetishist and the salary man) suspended like unborn babies, reaching out to each other, hands caressing each other lovingly. The score, which for almost the entirety of the film has been heavily industrial, returns to a sample of music used in the very beginning, during the collision of the salary man's car and the fetishist's body. This part of the soundtrack is jazzy with a crooning saxophone, almost like a lounge love song, and is so diametrically opposed to the pounding pipes and speeding industrial sounds featured elsewhere that it marks the scene as the matching bookend, the end result of the collision of machine and man.

This scene inside the machine's "womb" signals that the relationship between the two men, between the man and the machine, must be *reborn*. The human may be disciplined to impose "male" and "female," or "heterosexual" and "homosexual" on the machine, but these categories cannot function with respect to the machine's body.

The womb scene fades into a shot of a metal fence-like grid, and the camera pans along large letters made of metal that spell out, in English, "NEW WORLD." The industrial music begins to mix back in with the jazz as the shot moves to the mass of

metal that had previously swallowed the men. The metal splits and a face attached to a

seething pile of wire surfaces, writhing and laughing; a second shot, and a second face

emerges. As if the egg is hatching, there is an undeniable birth-like quality to the

emergence of these faces—the only physically human part that remains of their bodies.

The music stops abruptly, and the camera swirls over steaming rocks and wires,

through a warehouse, over the skyline, as if searching for the two men. As the drums

and synthesizers of the industrial soundtrack begin again, the camera travels up the

now-familiar twisting pipes and torn planes of metal, and two faces are revealed. One,

about halfway up the heaving body of this new creature, is the salary man. Only one

eye, his mouth, and part of his nose is visible. The head of the fetishist, he whose mind

controls the metal, sits atop the body, next to a humanoid hand clutching a gun.

Grimacing, the salary man says (all dialog subtitled):

> Salary Man: Ah…I feel great.
> Metal Fetishist: How about turning the whole world into metal? You
>   and me.
> Salary Man: Sure.
> Metal Fetishist: And we can rust the whole world and scatter it into the
> dust of the universe.
> Salary Man (drooling through metal-covered teeth): Sounds like fun.

This variation of doomsday theory—that the machines created by humans will

ultimately defeat the human race and rule the world—is a fascinating twist. Tetsuo

openly focuses on the individual human body as the locus of interaction between man

and machine, flesh and metal. While the effects of this change on the human mind are

evinced through the salary man's shrieks, tormented facial expressions, and frequent

thrashings about, it is his physical transmogrification that transfixes the viewer. The boundaries of the human body should be inviolable, except by choice or, perhaps, by a strictly random act of God. This slow erosion, however, of the physical integrity of the human form, and of its ultimate castration, both literally and figuratively, through desire, is deeply disturbing.

Commercial movies may feature androids and replicants, but they still reveal some of the rhetoric of the collective consciousness, particularly with respect to male fears and desires regarding the machine—each one was written, directed, and or produced by a male, with a male-centric focus. Tetsuo's imagery takes these fears to a nearly unimaginable conclusion.

Is this, then, what truly terrifies us? That machines will denaturalize us, exist beyond our control, and turn our world to dust? We see our world as the inviolable whole, as represented by the male body—the Enlightenment "body without orifice"—yet in technology we see the potential for that which can violate the (w)hole. Neither the boundaries of the body nor the borders of human society are static or strictly definable. Through technology, and the way it has so seamlessly merged with our daily existence, crossing our borders with very little limitation, humans have found an admirable friend as well as a frightening foe.

Each of the texts discussed in this work engages with these very questions, either through subtext or by thrusting the horror in our faces. Moving forward, we must be willing to openly address these fears, as well as move on to more truly universal

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fears. If we cannot view the human body as replicable and malleable, how can we hope to share the world with a creature that shares our shape but not our consciousness? Humans will never cease in the quest to play God; we will forever be trying to fashion a living, breathing creature out of a rib or from harvested stem cells. We have been willing to engage in discussions of symbiotic relationships with machines, as well as entertain the many doomsday possibilities that might result from the most utopian intentions. A.I.: Artificial Intelligence, Blade Runner, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, and Tetsuo: The Iron Man, however, reveal that perhaps we have spent too much time *entertaining*. I consider the currents that sustain the narratives of these texts to be a part of our collective consciousness. The issues, with respect to our own inhabitance of the human body as well as to the machine co-opting it, have barely been unearthed. No matter how much we love our televisions, our PDAs and cell phones, our cars and our talking toasters, somehow we find ourselves secretly creeped out by the man with the cochlear implant or the woman with the prostheses or the idea of a robot that looks just like you or me but isn't *human*. The human body, as with the rest of nature, can never really be controlled. It is itself a machine, one that malfunctions occasionally and that can be fixed, altered, and improved. Non-organic machines, when they finally do enter a form of consciousness, may be just as beyond our control as well. Are we prepared? Not yet.

NOTES

ⁱ There are many available texts beyond these four, including such notable examples as the <u>Terminator</u> movies and <u>Star Trek: The Next Generation</u>'s Lt. Commander Data. Data is an especially fantastic representation of an android; in an episode from 1989 entitled "The Measure of a Man," the question of his consciousness and sentience is raised.

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