

Descartes Goes to Hollywood: Mind, Body and Gender in Contemporary Cyborg Cinema

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Many contemporary films take up and enter into the traditionally philosophical debates surrounding the so-called 'mind-body problem' and the nature of the human 'self', but few do so more explicitly than those centring on the representation of what is popularly referred to as a cyborg.¹ With their human/machine hybrids, these films foreground questions of dualism and personal identity especially clearly, and highlight contemporary concerns about the effects of technology on the human 'self' in the present and the future. The cyborg film is particularly interesting when considering the relationship between the Cartesian (or Cartesian-influenced) dualisms of traditional philosophy and those dualisms of gender that, arguably, underlie and inform such a conceptual division.

The cyborg film is a generic hybrid that draws primarily on the genres of science fiction, action and horror, and uses images of the technologized body to investigate questions of 'self'-hood, gender, the 'mind-body problem' and the threats posed to such concepts by postmodern technology and AI (artificial intelligence). Of course the current fascination with cyborgs per se is not limited to the cinema: there are numerous 'cyberpunk' comics, novels and video-games in circulation, for example. I will be concentrating on films in my discussion, though – primarily because they epitomize so well the contemporary concerns about strong AI, or technology more generally, 'taking over' and rendering humans and human-ness in some sense redundant.² Further, while I will discuss a number of cyborg films in this paper – *RoboCop 3*, *Cyborg*, *R.O.T.O.R.*, *RoboC.H.I.C.*, *Hardware*, *Cherry 2000*, *Universal Soldier* – my arguments will focus on the *Terminator* films, the first two *RoboCop* films and *Eve of Destruction*.

In concentrating on the cyborg film, I will be addressing questions of what it is, or means, to be human in an age where the boundaries between humans and machines are becoming increasingly difficult to define and sustain (Best, 1989). The relevance of such images to the 'mind-body problem' is self-evident, with a proliferation of central questions such as that of whether the individual 'self' remains when his (sic)³ brain and central nervous system are transplanted into a mechanical body, or whether a 'completely artificial' cyborg can be in any sense human: these are, indeed, the central questions of *Terminator 2*, *Eve of Destruction* and the *RoboCop* films. I will also be highlighting the way in which no longer self-evident gender differences are displaced 'on to the more remarkable difference between the human and the other' (Penley, 1990: 123) in the cyborg film, as part of its attempt to reaffirm and secure the basis of traditional dualisms. A central concern of this paper, in fact, is to show that the cyborg film's continuing engagement with the 'mind-body problem' and concepts of the 'self' reveals a great deal about the issues of gender at stake in the traditional philosophical positions it often (re)presents,⁴ and to which it sometimes represents a challenge.

Representations of Dualism and Materialism

At *RoboCop*'s most obvious level of narrative, the 'bad guys', Omni Consumer Products (OCP), are identified with an unquestioning, strongly materialist position, and it is OCP against which Murphy/RoboCop (Peter Weller) has to battle to recuperate and reassert his 'self'-identity. OCP assumes that once Murphy has been recycled as RoboCop, they can eradicate his personal identity by programming it out of existence (by re/programming his brain). Some weight is given to this materialist view because it is articulated when RoboCop has just failed to arrest the corrupt Jones, and this inability is because such an attempt is a 'product violation' which causes automatic shut-down. However, the (Cartesian) point is that although he is limited by his programming, he nevertheless retains the *will* to arrest Jones: the sequence in fact ultimately restores the dualistic position, as it is RoboCop's *body* that is actually disabled by the 'product violation', while his mental desire to resist appears to be unaffected.

At the end of *RoboCop*, the Old Man has to sack Jones to enable RoboCop to shoot him. This shows that RoboCop is still partly controlled by OCP's programming, despite his emphatic closing assertion that he is 'Murphy'. In *RoboCop 2*, however, RoboCop finally finds a way to eradicate all his programming: after being reprogrammed to the point of uselessness (with directives like 'Avoid making premature value judgments', and 'Avoid interpersonal conflicts'), he apparently retains so strong a will to escape that he 'fries' himself on power

cables when he hears that a huge electric current – while potentially fatal – might rid his brain of all the programmed directives. This clearly implies that RoboCop has an 'inner' desire to break free from his programming, although that very programming has rendered him unable to *articulate* such feelings. The suggestion that there is something which will enable humans to maintain control over their own bodies and technology in the face of such extreme adversity as the *RoboCop* films represent is a common one in contemporary cinema (Best, 1989).

The Terminator also asserts a very Cartesian picture of the mind-body problem, although it uses the cyborg in a very different way. The Terminator is *not* endowed with the status of human precisely because it is a purely *material(ist)* object with no self-identity. While *Terminator 2* makes some attempt to 'humanize' one of the Terminators by concentrating on how it can learn from human companions, the type of autonomous self-identity of the Cartesian 'self' constantly eludes it, as it always relies on its programming. Significantly, it never really *understands* why John Connor will not let it kill human beings, although it obeys his orders and refrains from so doing. This is hardly surprising, given the film's own Cartesianism: after all, a Cartesian 'self' (or 'soul') cannot be *acquired* – it is a mysterious 'something' that comes from 'elsewhere' to inhabit the body.⁵ Also, the T1000 model – the antagonist in *Terminator 2* – emphatically embodies the superficial nature of a cyborg's 'identity' by constantly changing its appearance.

The cyborg-wife in *Cherry 2000* is in this sense very similar to the Terminators: her whole 'identity' is held in one (very expensive) microchip, and while her husband in some sense sees a particular *type* of body as necessary to her continued identity, the *particular* body is clearly no more an integral or constitutive part of her than are clothes and make-up. Here, we can begin to see exactly how much the bodies of cyborgs *do* in fact matter. After all, if we look at the Terminator, RoboCop, Eve 8 (in *Eve of Destruction*) or Cherry 2000, it is clear that each and every one of them has a highly gendered appearance in addition to the fact that they *have* bodies – rather than just minds/computers – at all. While it may be understandable that cyborgs have humanoid bodies and even the appearance of human beings – especially when they are used as 'infiltration units' (Kyle Reese [Michael Biehn] in *The Terminator*) – this does *not* in itself fully explain or justify the highly muscled and exaggeratedly gendered nature of their bodies. Rather, the cyberbodies are represented in such a highly gendered way to counter the threat that cyborgs indicate the loss of human bodies, where such a loss implies the loss of the gendered distinctions that are essential to maintaining the patriarchal order (which is based on exploiting difference) – a point to which I will return later.

The fears concerning technology in the cyborg film appear to be two-fold – representing both fears that human beings will be *replaced* by, and that we are

becoming machines (Best, 1989: 51). However, as both Steve Best and J.P. Telotte point out, the films simultaneously operate to deny the possibility of these things actually occurring by dramatizing the resilience of the subject, and juxtaposing 'the dystopic projection of a hyperalienated future . . . with a utopic hope for spiritual survival, salvation, and redemption' (Best, 1989: 51). The films endow pure consciousness with some kind of 'redemptive power', and visualize a 'testimony to the ghost in the machine' (Telotte, 1988: 256). But as Yvonne Tasker (1993: 151) has noted, '[w]hen all else fails, the body of the hero, and not his voice, or his capacity to make a rational argument, is the place of last resort' – the sole space that is safe, as it were. And this – the last resort to the body – remains 'even' in cyborg films (and others) that ostensibly work to (re)assert the Cartesian superiority of the 'mind' over the body.

The cyborg film represents purely mechanical/technological alternatives to cyborgs as inferior – especially when comparing them to cyborgs with a 'self'. This again suggests the importance attributed to the body on a visual level despite ostensive narrative concerns to remain with the 'mind'. For instance, the *RoboCop* films represent all the purely robotic alternatives to RoboCop as inferior: an ED 209 malfunction, killing Kinney, shortly after Jones introduces him as 'the future of law-enforcement' in OCP's board room. It is further coded as inferior when it is unable to navigate the stairs to follow RoboCop, and ends up falling down them, flailing helplessly. ED 209s are compared with RoboCop in *RoboCop 2*, as well, where they are implemented throughout the city during the police strike despite 'widespread complaints of their malfunction'. In *RoboCop 3*, an ED 209 is further ridiculed; a young girl hooks up her PC to it, and thus takes control of it – saving her fellow citizens and turning it against the police. Also – and significantly for the role of masculinity in these films – the other cyborgs in *RoboCop 2* are far less (coded as) male/masculine than RoboCop: the two whose 'suicides' we see briefly on videotape have recognizably human-shaped 'bodies', but lack the excessively masculine coding of the original RoboCop. And Cain's robotic body is also less masculine-looking – it is bigger than RoboCop's, but more like an ED 209 than a man.

'Things Are Not Always What They Seem'

An implication of the cyborg film is that being human is anything but simply a matter of appearance. In most cases a 'genuine' human mind is identified as the essential element of a human person; and a mind is precisely what we are told RoboCop and the Universal Soldiers have retained, and what the Terminators and Cherry 2000 never had and cannot acquire. The whole issue of appearance and its

(un)reliability is central to the cyborg film, of course, which ostensibly operates to warn us that 'Things are not always what they seem' (McQuade [Gregory Hines] in *Eve of Destruction*). Despite such narrative assertions, however, the films' own attitude to the importance of bodies makes their position ambivalent: after all, the body does seem to provide some level of certainty insofar as it is the site on and over which battles for 'self'-hood are fought.

The Terminator's otherness is already apparent because of the computerized images that represent its point of view. This emphasizes the extent to which the Terminators do not 'see' as we do – where 'seeing' has both literal and metaphorical weight. In the case of RoboCop and the protagonists of *Universal Soldier*, a computerized image is not always used to represent their point of view. Rather, as the narratives progress, and the protagonists become 'more human', computerized imagery gives way to a more 'normal' representation of vision. This 'normal' vision that is a mark of human-ness is shared by Eve 8. Also, once the (original) Terminator has lost its human appearance and its machine-skeleton is revealed (after Kyle blows it up), its point of view shots are no longer computerized. This is primarily because we no longer need this kind of 'proof' that the Terminator is a machine because we can now see that to be so. However, the change still provides a problematic: there is no simplistic and generalized way in which to read the use of computerized versus 'normal' vision in the cyborg film. One constant feature, though, is that only cyborgs endowed with a 'self' by the narrative have dreams and/or flashbacks – which are always represented as uncomputerized images with epistemological authority. None of the Terminators are allowed this kind of 'vision'. This lack brands them as inhuman, where human-ness is apparently marked by having (or 'being', in Eve 8's case) an unconscious and/or conscious memory to provide such images – images like those experienced by RoboCop, who, in *RoboCop 3*, thanks Dr Lazarus for not erasing his 'memories'.⁶

The unconscious plays a central and defining role in the cyborg film, where its presence generally denotes the human-ness of the 'self' which is endowed with it. The loss of 'self', of course, is the essential tragedy of *RoboCop* and *Universal Soldier*. *Eve of Destruction* makes particularly interesting and overt use of the concept of the unconscious, with significant ramifications for the representation of gender in the (cyborg) film. In the film, Eve the scientist and Eve 8, her cyborg creation in her own image, are played by the same actress (Renée Soutendijk). Effectively, Eve 8 is the literal embodiment of Eve the scientist's unconscious desires: she is, if you like, Eve's id. And, as is made clear by the narrative, Eve 8 is very much an id-monster in the tradition of the cyborg film and its generic influences. The positioning of Eve 8 as her creator's unconscious (revolt) is made blindingly obvious at the level of narrative when Eve tells McQuade that Eve 8 is

'going back through my life. Only there are no barriers, no stop sign. The damage she sustained destroyed all her inhibitions. She's doing things I might think about doing but never dare to do – never have the courage to do'. Eve 8, then, is not merely an embodiment of unconscious desires, but of Eve's unconscious *revolt* against the rules, limitations and injustices of patriarchal society. The film's anxieties about the feminine sexuality represented by Eve 8, and the female procreative abilities represented by Eve the scientist/mother are also made abundantly clear. For instance, Eve 8 'goes nuclear', and McQuade says that 'When God created his Eve he did it to shake us up a little. Now you've gone one better and designed her to blow us all the fuck away'. However, this misogyny is countered a little by the film's ambiguity regarding who to *blame* for Eve 8's (and by implication, Eve's) revolt: it is never clear, for instance, what Eve 8's motivations are for going into 'battlefield mode', but the implication is that it is *her* response to the bank robber's violence against woman, and *not*, as the scientists suggest, merely a 'mechanical' fault caused by her bullet-wound.

It is difficult, then, to decide conclusively whether or not Eve 8's revolt is a 'feminist' one (although it is less difficult to conclude that the film is, overall, *not* feminist). In many ways, it seems more of a device to represent masculine fears about femininity; one which is set up – as so often in films – only to be knocked down again. An example of the complexity surrounding the apparently regressive stereotypical positions inhabited by Eve 8 can be illustrated by considering the sequences where she first picks up and then mutilates a 'redneck' at the motel near her childhood home. On some level, this is 'feminist' in its attack on aggressive male sexuality as represented by the redneck and his companions. However, it also reveals extreme castration anxiety in its representation of Eve 8 as a literal *vagina dentata*, showing active female sexuality in a very negative light. This shows Eve/Eve 8's sexuality as something 'evil' to be eradicated: and it is partly because it *is* eradicated at the end of the film that *Eve of Destruction* is, in the end, far from being a feminist film: while the threats posed by Eve 8 in the body of the film *are* in some sense 'feminist', the narrative identifies her actions and the desires they represent as 'bad', and its closure literally kills off the unconscious revolt that Eve 8 represents. In addition to this, Eve is the one who destroys her own 'monstrous' creation (and, by implication, her own transgressive desires), with the suggested result that she enters fully into the patriarchal order, rejecting (her) femininity as purely negative.

The Pain of Being Human

The concept of pain – a common theme in the philosophy of 'mind' – is invoked as a sure signifier of human-ness in the cyborg film. RoboCop feels both emotional and

physical pain. He suffers anguish when he sees or remembers his wife and son, and is clearly upset whenever he finds his actions restricted by his programming. In addition, physical pain is something that is blatantly foregrounded in the *RoboCop* films. The most insistent instances are of RoboCop's pain in each of the first two films' mutilation sequences: in the original *RoboCop*, the entire cyborg narrative is initiated when Boddicker's gang tortures Murphy almost to death, allowing for his recycling as 'RoboCop'. In *RoboCop 2*, the scenes in which RoboCop is ripped apart by Cain's gang echo this original sequence, and as some oil-like substance splatters from his mechanical insides onto his baby-like face, RoboCop's screams leave us in little doubt as to whether or not he still feels pain. Moreover, RoboCop's technician rejects OCP's claim that he's 'just a piece of equipment', saying 'Don't tell me he can't suffer', and responding to the argument that he's merely 'electrical' with a vehement 'Bullshit'. She further insists that 'He's suffering' because 'his pain centres are alive' and 'lit up like Christmas tree lights'.

In direct contrast, the human-looking cyborgs in the *Terminator* films feel no pain of any sort. This is asserted very clearly in the first film, and its significance as a differentiating factor between humans and machines is underlined when Sarah bites Kyle (Michael Biehn) and he tells her that 'Cyborgs don't feel pain. I do'. Emotional pain is also used as a signifier of human-ness in *The Terminator*. Sarah is horrified when Kyle says that 'Pain can be controlled. You just disconnect'. She asks him, then, 'So you feel nothing?' – to which he responds with a declaration of love, saying: 'John Connor gave me a picture of you once . . . I came across time for you Sarah. I love you – I always have'. This display of emotion – sited in a context of discussing human pain – reveals what it is that the cyborg film identifies as a central difference between humans and machines: that is, human desire (where this is something that the Terminators, along with Cherry 2000 and the *Hardware* cyborg, clearly do not have, while cyborgs who were created 'from' human subjects – such as RoboCop, Eve 8, and the cyborg in *Cyborg* – do retain it in some form). In *Terminator 2*, cyborgs' inability to feel pain is overtly articulated when John Connor asks the 'good' Terminator whether he feels pain. The cyborg's response is that 'I sense injuries. The data could be called pain' – but it precisely *isn't* pain in the human sense that John means it. The same applies to emotional pain in the films, where both 'bad' Terminators clearly have no feelings at all (not even of aggression), and the limits of the 'good' Terminator's ability to learn about such things are revealed when he tells John that 'I know now why you cry, but it is something that I can never do'.

Whatever the individual cyborg's inability to feel pain in these movies, it *always* has the ability to *inflict* pain through physical violence. The cyborg film constantly foregrounds physical violence – and especially physical violence directed towards

bodies. This points to the cyborg film's concern with the human body, where the *visual* nature of this theme is paramount, as 'physical pain defies language' (Codell, 1989: 12) in the way that so many of our experiences of 'self' seem to do.

The significance of gender to the in/ability to feel pain in the cyborg film cannot be ignored. While bullets bounce off the masculine-coded Terminators and RoboCops (although they are not invincible),⁷ and the Universal Soldiers deal with their wounds by cauterizing them with cigarette lighters, Eve 8 feels pain when she is shot, and Cherry 2000 and RoboC.H.I.C. are far from immune to bullet-wounds. The sexualized resonance of this cannot be missed when we consider that bullets cannot *penetrate* RoboCop when his adversaries yell 'Fuck you!' at him, while Eve 8 is not only shot, but we see shots of her breasts when she tends to the injury in her motel room. There are other comparisons to be made here – such as that between the Terminator's dealing with his injuries at a sink and Eve 8's actions in a similar situation: they are both cyborgs, but the Terminator feels no pain as he pulls his eye out and gouges his arm open, while Eve 8 flinches – despite the fact that her biological system is, according to Eve, 'entirely cosmetic'. Also, while Sarah Connor is represented as a good fighter, she is constantly penetrated by both bullets and metal shards (parts of the Terminators) in both *Terminator* films; that is, her success in 'battle' is always qualified or undermined by injury – the sexual resonance of which is hard to avoid, especially given the 'obviously phallic' nature of the Schwarzenegger Terminator.⁸

Examples like these suggest that Tasker (1993: 19) is quite right to hold that

In crude terms, if images of men have often needed to compensate for the sexual presentation of the hero's body through emphasizing his activity, then images of women seem to need to compensate for the figure of the active heroine by emphasizing her sexuality, her availability within traditional feminine terms.⁹

Certainly, the male/masculine-coded cyborgs are decidedly *asexual*: the Terminators have no conception of sexual desire, and RoboCop is on several occasions reminded that he can no longer be 'a proper husband' to his/Murphy's wife. In contrast, while E. (Melanie Griffith, in *Cherry 2000*) asserts that 'I am not a fucking machine', that is precisely what Cherry 2000 is. And the sexualization of Eve 8 could hardly be more blatant: McQuade even blames her violence on Eve the scientist's 'teenage sex fantasies', and misogynistically yells: 'So this device of yours is horny as well as psychopathic – that's quite a combination in a woman'.

The Gendered Body of the Cyborg Film

In foregrounding the concept of pain, and pointing to the relation between human bodies and manufactured bodies, the cyborg film displays a decidedly *unCartesian*

emphasis not only on the *body*, but on its *constructed* nature. A paradox is at play here: as Claudia Springer (1991: 303) puts it, 'while disparaging the human body, the [cyborg] discourse simultaneously uses language and imagery associated with the body and bodily functions to represent its vision of human/technological perfection'. This paradox is imbued with a number of gendered implications, too, which are unavoidable given the centrality of gendered body-imagery to the cyborg film. If cyborgs, in transgressing the boundaries between human and machine, are indeed 'the consummate postmodern concept' (Springer, 1991: 306) it should follow that cyborg films are the consummate postmodern texts. However, despite the arguments of theorists such as Donna Haraway (1990) that cyborgs are androgynous entities that render gender boundaries meaningless, this is effectively irrelevant when we look at *actual* cyborg texts. In actual cyborg films, while boundary breakdowns between humans and technology are enthusiastically explored, 'gender boundaries are treated less flexibly', with cyborgs tending, in fact, 'to appear masculine or feminine to an exaggerated degree' (Springer, 1991: 308, 309).

The mere titles of many cyborg films often imply that gender is their primary concern. *Cherry 2000*, *RoboC.H.I.C.* and *Eve of Destruction* all have sexual connotations and explicitly foreground issues of the constructed nature of gender identity. And *Cyborg*, despite its title, turns out to be little more than a Jean-Claude Van Damme vehicle, where the assertion of a violent but ultimately 'good' masculinity is what is really at stake.

It is difficult to argue against reading the cyborg film as upholding often stereotypical and exaggerated gender differences at both a narrative and visual level. The representation of cyborg (and other) males in the cyborg film clearly fits with Steve Neale's theory that violence displaces male sexuality (in our homophobic culture) by undermining any notion of the male body as passive spectacle through narrative intervention which justifies the camera's objectifying gaze by making him the object or perpetrator of violent action (Neale, 1983). In light of this, with characters such as the Terminator and RoboCop epitomizing filmic images of near-invincible soldiers, Springer (1991: 317) claims that the cyborg film reveals 'an intense crisis in the construction of masculinity'. That is, integrating men (sic) with technology in the image of the hyper-masculine cyborg operates to 'shore up the masculine subject against the onslaught of a femininity feared by patriarchy – a femininity so feared, Springer (1991: 318) suggests, that to avoid it the male body is transformed into something which is no longer really human. This creates an ambivalent relationship between masculinity and the male body – to which patriarchy responds by suggesting that there is an essential masculinity that *transcends* the body: and this, of course, is precisely what traditional philosophy

has always insisted upon. Descartes's own assertions, after all, rested purely on his mental activity and did not *necessitate* his actual physical existence.

However, there are complexities surrounding the representation of gender in the films: they are not simply stereotypical representations of masculine men and feminine women. Most notably, the pumped-up hyper-masculine bodies of the male cyborgs can be read either as straight reassertions of hegemonic masculinity, or as hysterical over-compensations for a masculinity in crisis (Tasker, 1993; Creed, 1993). And the centrality of the figure of the bodybuilder (male and female) in the cyborg film cycle often deconstructs the stabilities of gendered identity that the narratives work to ensure – with the result that an either/or reading of gender and its representation is completely inadequate. The constructedness of the cyborg itself implies the constructedness of gender, and Tasker (1993: 77) suggests that '[t]he combination of passivity and activity in the figure of the bodybuilder as action star, is central to the articulation of gendered identity in the films in which they appear', where such a figure combines 'qualities associated with masculinity and femininity, qualities which gender theory maintains in a polarized binary'.

While Murphy's death is in some sense blamed on OCP,¹⁰ the actual incident in the narrative that enables OCP to use his body is blamed on a woman – Murphy's partner, Lewis (Karen Allen). The implication is that Murphy would not have been left alone and vulnerable had Lewis not been distracted by the black criminal's penis, allowing the criminal to knock her out and thus unable to assist Murphy when he calls for her. The implicit question is whether women should be in the 'public' space of law enforcement. The event certainly serves to undermine the argument that *RoboCop* represents an 'egalitarian' view of women: there may be women police officers, and they may well share changing-rooms with their male colleagues, but that in itself does not make the film 'feminist', especially given the context of other, stereotypically feminine female characters (such as Murphy's wife, Cain's girlfriend and the potential rape victim).

There are similar problems in the *Terminator* films' representation of Sarah Connor and other women. While its 'authors' (director James Cameron and producer Gale Ann Hurd) claim that the *Terminator* films are in fact feminist, Sarah's being a 'strong' woman is hardly adequate grounds for such a claim. Her strength is anyway qualified by and contained within the patriarchal structures of the films, and other women characters are frequently coded as highly feminine 'bimbos' (such as her flat-mate, Ginger). And even if Kyle is a physically small – and sexually innocent – man, he is still the one who teaches Sarah how to fight, and has epistemological superiority throughout most of the film. But most significant, I think, is that while Sarah is the one who eventually destroys the Terminator – supposedly a feminist statement in itself – it is Kyle who first blows it up (twice),

removing its human seeming shell and thus its 'masculinity'. The result is, as Margaret Goscilo (1987–8: 49) so lucidly points out, that Sarah's destruction of the Terminator 'has none of the sexualized, gender-specific charge of [its] own pursuit of her. What she destroys is no longer Schwarzenegger's recognizably male persona but a neuter machine run amok'.

The central fear seems to be that in a possible cyborg future, biological gender would disappear, rendering patriarchy's centrally constituting hierarchy of masculine over feminine untenable. So, asserting an essential masculinity simultaneously with an essential humanity seems imperative, as the resulting masculine nature of the 'purely' mental provides a 'transcendental masculinity' – ensuring that even with no biological gender the hegemony of masculinity can be sustained. This of course runs into complications when we consider the cyborg film's implication that a cyborg with no biological mother is denied human status – or any real 'self'-hood – while cyborgs who started out as human beings retain such a status. This in itself supports Mary Ann Doane's contention that the representations of cyborg films – or, in fact, science fiction films more generally – are concerned not so much with production as with reproduction (Doane, 1990: 164).

There is a clear history of (male) desire to create life without the mother – from Adam and Eve and *Metropolis* to contemporary films such as *Frankenhooker*, *Weird Science*, *Junior*, and the cyborg film. This 'womb envy' (Doane, 1990: 169) is apparent in the cyborg film where narrative structures juxtapose the questions of biological and technological reproduction. Such structures are 'provocative', Doane points out (1990: 169), because the technologies thus represented 'threaten to put into crisis the very possibility of the question of origins, the Oedipal drama and the relation between subjectivity and knowledge that it supports'. The suggestion is that *motherhood* is feared by (patriarchal) masculinity because it deconstructs conceptual boundaries between 'self' and 'other' – throwing into question traditional assumptions about 'self'-hood and personal identity – and that technology is thus looked to to control, limit and regulate the maternal. However, Doane also asserts that an ambivalence occurs because as well as being frightening, the concept of motherhood ensures a fair degree of epistemological *certainly* – it is the mother who guarantees at least the *possibility* of certain historical knowledge. The tension between envious fear of and epistemological reliance on the maternal is clearly at play in the cyborg film's representations of gender and human/machine interaction, with the insistent presence of *cyberbodies* – despite the simultaneous assertion of an essential 'human-ness' that transcends the body. Such tension is clearly a motivating factor in the appropriation of the maternal function represented by the 'good' Terminator in *Terminator 2*, and in the 'masculinization' of Eve the scientist in *Eve of Destruction*, as I will discuss below.

Fe/males, Re/production and the Primal Scene

The role of women as mothers is certainly a central theme in the cyborg film. Sarah Connor is the 'mother of the future' in the *Terminator* films, and her representation centres around that role. Despite her other roles, Sarah's main function in the films is, it seems, to keep herself alive so that she can have her son and then ensure that he survives: her valuing of him over herself is made clear in *Terminator 2* when she reprimands him for coming to rescue her from the asylum, asserting that he is more important than her.¹¹ It seems that Sarah's sexuality and gender are subordinated to her reproductive function to a considerable extent. Even more alarming, though, is the way in which the 'good' Terminator takes over Sarah's role in *Terminator 2*. As Susan Jeffords (1993: 248–9) illustrates, because the Terminator moves from being the source of humanity's annihilation to the 'single guarantor of its continuation', it becomes 'not only the protector of human life, but its generator. By "giving" John Connor his life, the Terminator takes, in effect, Sarah Connor's place as his mother'. As if to add insult to injury, Sarah herself describes the Terminator thus: 'It would die to protect [John]. Of all the would-be fathers who came and went over the years, this machine, this thing, was the only one who measured up'. And when Sarah is given a chance to speak out against masculine birth compensation, it is couched in near-hysterical terms ('Fucking men like you built the hydrogen bomb. . . . You think you're so creative'), and her own son stops her in her tracks, telling her that 'We need to be a little more constructive here' (Jeffords, 1993: 252).

Eve of Destruction is especially alarming in its play with the concept of motherhood: it seems by the close of the narrative that Eve has *rejected* her role as (Timmy's) biological mother *and* as (Eve 8's) technological mother, because she both destroys Eve 8 – and with it her own unconscious revolt – and does not seem to know or care where her son has gone: she is more intent on helping McQuade limp out of the subway(!). This ending is quite bizarre, in that it seems to have radically 'masculinized' Eve; it is certainly unable to allow her to retain both creative *and* procreative abilities.

Constance Penley (1990: 119) investigates the operations and significance of the time-loop paradox in *The Terminator*, arguing that the film 'is as much about time as it is about machines'. Her consequent assertion that '[t]he idea of returning to the past to generate an event that has already made an impact on one's identity lies at the core of the time-loop paradox story' (Penley, 1990: 119) seems reasonable enough – especially considering that the paradox is frequently described as 'the grandfather paradox' in scientific discussions of the concept. This gives further weight to her 'feminist' reading of how the narrative serves as a masculine fantasy of omnipotence and self-creation for John Connor (whose primal scene is illustrated

in *The Terminator*). Penley reads *The Terminator*'s use of the time-loop paradox as undermining any feminist potential of the film, as she sees it as representing John Connor's fantasy of orchestrating his own primal scene. This again limits Sarah Connor's role to being primarily that of John's mother – which is what Penley finds objectionable and regressive about the film. She holds that because *The Terminator* continues in the sci-fi tradition 'to dissipate the fear of the same, to ensure that there is a difference' in gendered terms, it ultimately (re)presents 'a conservative moral lesson about maternity, futuristic or otherwise: mothers will be mothers, and they will always be women' (Penley, 1990: 175).

However, Penley's reading comes under attack from Mark Jancovich (1992), who suggests that the narrative does not *necessitate* our reading it as John Connor's story – in fact, he claims that this is hard to do because he is never *seen* in the film. I find Jancovich's point interesting, but not entirely convincing: first, it immediately privileges *sight* by stating that John Connor is a less important character because he is not seen. Also, while it is true that Sarah Connor is 'associated with the maternal while also performing activities usually restricted to men' (Jancovich, 1992: 11), this alone does not make *The Terminator* a feminist film – especially when, as I have mentioned above, Sarah's 'masculine' attributes are constantly undermined and made decidedly secondary to her role as John's mother. And, while I accept the argument that *The Terminator*'s primal scene is not *necessarily* orchestrated by John Connor, but could be read as Sarah's wish-fulfillment, I remain sceptical. First, the film's generally stereotypical and sexist representations undermine this reading, which does not fit in with the film as a whole. Second, 'masculinizing' Sarah is anyway not a feminist move: as Luce Irigaray has written: 'women merely "equal" to men would be "like them", and therefore not women' (cited in Sellers, 1991: 71). Representing 'masculine' women is far from being feminist, as it fails to adequately deconstruct the basic dualism of gender constructed and sustained by the patriarchal order.

The original *Terminator* film does not play havoc with the time-loop paradox in the way that the second film does in its attempt to represent a more 'positive' ending (Jancovich, 1992: 14). While the first film merely violates the causality principle in the way that many scientists see as entirely plausible (Parker, 1992), the second film violates its *own* logic because, if the future has changed, its characters' own pasts cannot have existed. The strength that Jancovich (1992: 14) identifies as that of the first film, then – 'that its presentation of time as a cycle does not imply a subjectless determinism' – is lost in *Terminator 2*: the later film fails to assert that the past and future are dependent on each other. Jancovich likens *The Terminator* to John Wyndham's short story, 'Chronoclasm'. Both narratives, he points out, challenge the very idea of a chronoclasm by illustrating the *interdependence* of past and

future, rather than suggesting that events would *change* with the advent of time-travel (Jancovich, 1992: 13). Also, both stories point to the importance of human *desire*, which exists precisely because the 'self' is unrealizable without continual interaction with others: this is what differentiates the Terminators from humans, and is what motivates Kyle to come back through time to rescue Sarah and her (their) unborn son.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1992: 415) asserts a necessary connection between subjectivity and temporality, arguing that time is 'not an object of our knowledge, but a dimension of our being'. The Terminators – who last just as long as their batteries do – have no conscious relation to time, just as they have no *conscious* motivations, or consciousness at all. The emphasis on memories (whether conscious or unconscious) and relations with others, then, are obvious marks of human-ness in the cyborg film. And both these concepts require a 'self' that interacts with other people *in time*. The primal scene narrative enacted in and by *The Terminator* suggests the human desire to control time; and, while it shows that human beings cannot *change* events, it shows how important their (our) decisions are to events in the world. The cyborg film – along with other 'dystopic future' films – is clearly revealed as critiquing not only possible futures, but also the present. These films clearly cite present human actions and decisions as heavily responsible for our future, and especially for our dystopic visions of that future.

Conclusions

I would firmly agree with Telotte (1988) that the cyborg film embodies a reaction against the increasingly popular acceptance of the mind-brain identity theory, both because of worries at the thought of strong AI and because of resistance to collapsing such traditionally distinct conceptual categories as human and machine – especially with all their gendered implications. The films I have looked at certainly try to (re)assert fairly radical forms of dualisms, shoring up both human-ness and masculinity against the postmodern fears of encroaching technology and femininity (a strange pairing!). However, despite resting on distinctly Cartesian assumptions, they come up with no advance on Descartes's *Meditations* as to how or where the mysterious 'link' is between the 'mind' and the 'body'.

As David Porush (1985: 85) has pointed out in regard to 'cybernetic fiction', '[t]he most primitive response to the threat of cybernetics is paranoia'. The same appears to be true of the cyborg film and other cyborg texts in the postmodern age. Porush makes the link between cybernetics and paranoia very clear – suggesting that it is essentially because cybernetics *threatens to*, and paranoia is *threatened by* 'control through the forces beyond the power of the individual' (Porush, 1985: 85).

In the gendered context of the cyborg film, this paranoia is perhaps more understandable than if we take it as 'just' a response to the purely technophobic threats posed by AI, postmodern medicine and technological advances in general. After all, a rejection of AI in favour of some kind of unique *human* being tends to privilege the body and women more than has traditionally been the case. And if the fear of losing the human 'self' is closely linked to that of losing the masculine nature of the philosophical/cultural subject, then paranoia is to be expected. The cyborg film *narrative* operates as a *myth* to reassert the 'mind-body' dualism and those of sex and gender that parallel it, where its ideological aims are achieved by first illustrating the materialist position, and then showing it to be inadequate, naive and in some sense 'morally wrong'. The patriarchal bias of the narrative comes into play because Cartesian dualism is held up as the (only) viable alternative to materialism, and this belies the cyborg film's visual suggestions that the 'self' is in fact a unified 'body-subject'.

The cyborg film, in accepting and therefore worrying about the computer/mind analogy (and thus the machine/human analogy), extends already considerable concerns about 'our ambivalent feelings about technology, our increasing anxieties about our own nature in a technological environment', to include its own 'kind of evolutionary fear that these artificial selves may presage our disappearance or *termination*' (Telotte, 1992: 26). This creates complex problems and contradictions for the cyborg film and its response to the perceived threat from the cyborg and all that it represents.

So, despite an apparent narrative concern to (re)assert dualisms of mind/body, male/female and masculine/feminine, I conclude that such a project is often undermined by several visual elements and devices of the cyborg film. At the level of representation, the cyborg film suggests that the gendered human body is as central to constituting 'self'-hood and personal identity as is the individual 'mind', making the distinction between 'mind' and 'body' a virtually impossible one. In the end, though, it is difficult to make assertions regarding *unspoken* implications about the body-subject in the cyborg film. The endings of these films, while often unconvincing, still make it hard to avoid the recuperative functions of their stories and narrative structure.

Clearly, the 'mind-body problem' is a central issue in the cyborg film, whose narrative tends to reassert an essentially mental, Cartesian 'self' over any materialist conception of selfhood. And while various devices operate to align the audience with the Cartesian rather than materialist position, the centrality of the *body* in these films tends to undermine the narrative emphasis on the disembodied 'self', rendering the films' own position riddles with ambiguity and uncertainty. Such confusion is often mirrored in the cyborg film's gender representations, which, in

an attempt to reassert a hegemonic masculinity, raise questions about the stability of that very concept and its traditional justifications. So, despite the fact that it is ironic that 'a debate over gender and sexuality finds expression in the context of the cyborg, an entity that makes sexuality, gender, even humankind itself, anachronistic' (Springer, 1991: 322), it is clear that issues of gender *do* in fact underlie and inform the narrative concerns and visual representations of the cyborg film, and by implication underlie many of our contemporary fears about the future.

Notes

Many thanks to Frank Krutnik for his inspiration and to Martti Lahti for his invaluable critical and editorial skills in the final stages of editing this article.

1. The term 'cyborg' – standing for cybernetic organism – is not really the proper name for what popular culture refers to as cyborgs: a human being is a cybernetic organism, after all. The cyborgs in these films, then, 'should' rather be called *symbiotes* to denote the human/machine hybrids represented by Terminators, RoboCops, etc. However, having noted this technical 'inaccuracy', I will continue to refer to symbiotes as cyborgs, accepting the popular use of the term (which, arguably, is now correct anyway, given that most people regard 'cyborg' as denoting a human/machine hybrid).

2. I am not implying here that such concerns are exclusively contemporary. Indeed, such concerns have been central to a wide variety of genres – literary as well as cinematic – for a very long time (Doane, 1990; Franklin, 1990; Geduld, 1975; Porush, 1985; Telotte, 1988). However, as my discussion is of a group of very recent films (1980s and 1990s), I *am* suggesting that many of the particular concerns represented in and through them are in some sense exclusively contemporary – primarily when they deal explicitly with *new* advances in technology.

3. 'He' is the appropriate subject here, as the films which deal explicitly with this issue are the *RoboCop* trilogy, which of course involve a(n originally human) male protagonist.

4. Here I am referring to a wide range of dualisms, from radical Cartesian rationalist forms to the more body-orientated dualisms espoused by philosophers such as Henri Bergson. Effectively, many of my references to Descartes refer to the range of appropriations and inflations of his views that have occurred in the history of western philosophy, rather than to only his views *per se*.

5. Despite my assumptions here, it *could* perhaps be argued that *Terminator 2* does in fact suggest that the 'good' Terminator does in some sense acquire a 'soul' of sorts. For instance, it takes on the role of John Connor's 'father'; it learns how to use colloquialisms (and therefore not be 'such a dork all the time', as John Connor puts it); and could be said to 'die' rather than merely be 'terminated', because, as Forest Pyle writes (1993: 240), 'the Schwarzenegger terminator sacrifices himself in order to prevent the possibility that any prototypes or computer chips from this deadly technology would remain', going against John Connor's wishes for the first time – thus committing its most 'human' act of all. However, I remain sceptical: first, it seems that its humanity is more of a projection (by John Connor) than an actuality. Second, when the Terminator tells John that 'I understand now why you cry, but it is something I can never do', there seems to me to be a hint that he cannot ever cry precisely because he does not really, fully understand human emotions. Either way, Pyle is certainly right to observe that this illustrates how far the film's 'knotting of human and cyborg is inextricable', and that it responds to the original film by making 'the triumph of humans and humanism . . . dependent on the humanizing of cyborgs' (1993: 240).

6. The area of memories and emotions is an area in which a discussion of the cyborg film overlaps most obviously with discussions about *Blade Runner*. Some people regard *Blade Runner* as a cyborg film, in fact, and have suggested that I might include it in my discussion. However, there are two (main) reasons

for my decision to avoid its inclusion. First, the replicants of *Blade Runner* are, it seems, *not* cyborgs: they are, effectively, human beings, and *not* in any real sense hybrids of human and technological 'parts'. The whole point is that the only way in which their 'inhumanity' can be detected is by revealing their lack of a (genuine) childhood (and the genuine memories that go along with it). It is not a question of their having mechanical parts! So, essentially, I feel that the central concerns examined by *Blade Runner* revolve more around genetic engineering than they do around cybernetics. Second, I feel that *Blade Runner* has already been written about to the point of exhausting the possibilities for further real insight! After all, not only numerous articles, but entire books have been published on the film (e.g. Kerman, 1991).

7. It is interesting that while *RoboCop* is seemingly impenetrable so far as bullets are concerned (unlike 'female' cyborgs), he is relatively more vulnerable than are the Terminators to 'traditional', human types of attack. So, while there are many impressive sequences where bullets *do* in fact bounce off *RoboCop*, we also see him being beaten and ripped apart by better-equipped enemies. This serves to represent *RoboCop* both as an impressive, phallic fighting machine, *and* as an essentially human being who is capable of feeling pain (but only, like Rambo/Rocky-type characters, when the opposition is incredibly intense).

8. The phallic coding and representation of the Terminators and RoboCops is frequently remarked on and/or discussed by critics who have written about the films (Codell, 1989; Springer, 1991; Jancovich, 1992; Tasker, 1993).

9. Here she makes reference to the work of both Richard Dyer (1982) and Steve Neale (1983).

10. OCP, it is revealed, has deliberately placed prime candidates for the *RoboCop* project in dangerous precincts. That is, having asserted that the police force have 'signed themselves over' to the corporation, OCP takes full advantage of using those rights: it treats the police officers as its property before *and* after their deaths.

11. I am not suggesting that in 'real life' a mother can not simultaneously value her child's life more than her own and be a feminist. What I am questioning here is whether Sarah Connor's representation is regressive or not.

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Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*

ALISON LANDSBERG

In the 1908 Edison film *The Thieving Hand*, a wealthy passer-by takes pity on an armless beggar and buys him a prosthetic arm. As the beggar soon discovers, however, the arm has memories of its own. Because the arm remembers its own thieving, it snatches people's possessions as they walk by. Dismayed, the beggar sells his arm at a pawnshop. But the arm sidles out of the shop, finds the beggar out on the street, and reattaches itself to him. The beggar's victims, meanwhile, have contacted a police officer who finds the beggar and carts him off to jail. In the jail cell, the arm finds its rightful owner – the 'proper' thieving body – a one-armed criminal, and attaches itself to him.

This moment in early cinema anticipates dramatically a preoccupation in more contemporary science fiction with what I would like to call 'prosthetic memories'. By prosthetic memories I mean memories which do not come from a person's lived experience in any strict sense. These are implanted memories, and the unsettled boundaries between real and simulated ones are frequently accompanied by another disruption: of the human body, its flesh, its subjective autonomy, its difference from both the animal and the technological.

Furthermore, through the prosthetic arm the beggar's body manifests memories of actions that it, or he, never actually committed. In fact, his memories are radically divorced from lived experience and yet they motivate his actions. Because the hand's memories – which the beggar himself wears – prescribe actions in the present, they make a beggar into a thief. In other words, it is precisely the memories of thieving which construct an identity for him. We might say then that the film underscores the way in which memory is constitutive of identity. This in itself is not surprising. What is surprising is the position the film takes on the relationship between memory, experience and identity.