

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

PERFORMING CYBORGS

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ABSTRACT

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Emerging in American, Science Fiction films in the 1970s, the figure of the cyborg has become the site upon which ideas of postmodern experience and identity are played out. In the 1980s the cyborg became a mainstay of Science Fiction film and mainstream cinema bombarded the viewing public with images of hyper-masculinity in the presentation of characterisations like the Terminator, Robocop and the universal soldier. Since then, many different forms of cyborgian identity have appeared in films and, more recently, have provided the spectator with a startling array of cyborgian configurations. These have not necessarily been limited to the playing out of white masculinity but have also offered depictions that more readily bring into focus issues of female representation and images of racial difference. Not all of these films have been mainstream, Hollywood productions (many of my examples are more low budget, direct to video fare) but all offer the opportunity for focusing upon perceived shifts away from a traditional, humanist subjectivity. In an age in which humans appear to share centrality with machines, with the various technologies of the postmodern era, the cyborg-hybrid can therefore be understood as an important figuration 'standing at the threshold separating the human from the posthuman' (Hayles, 1995).

Through the filmic image of the cyborg, this thesis examines the ways in which issues of sexuality, gender and race are being depicted within Science Fiction cinema. By drawing upon a wide range of disciplines (e.g. feminist theory, postcolonial theory, film and genre theory, postmodern theory and sociological theory) the thesis aims to explore both residual and emergent elements inherent in these dramatisations of postmodern subjectivity. In particular, emphasis is placed upon precisely how the cyborg is performed and, in this respect, reference is made to performance theory as an illuminating tool in the analysis of cyborgian figurations. In past accounts of the cyborg critical analysis has largely been confined to visual and iconographic elements of a particular characterisation. However, through the use of actual theories of performance a more complex, accurate and richer accounting of these figurations emerges. The performance focus also allows for issues of agency to come to the fore, both in terms of filmic representation and in terms of how human agency may be seen to operate under current conditions. In pursuing how aspects of cyborgian identity are played out in Science Fiction films the thesis also places a certain amount of stress upon intertextual readings. This is particularly undertaken in conjunction with the unusual focus upon direct to video cyborg films and how these can be read against a mainstream product. In combination with the focus upon performance, this emphasis opens up a highly contingent space in which various cyborg imaginings can be seen to be conceived and contested. In this way the thesis extends and expands upon earlier, critical accounts of the filmic cyborg and also offers more alternative visions of this consummate postmodern creation.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis takes as its central focus the figure of the cyborg as depicted in Science Fiction film. As will become apparent in my forthcoming discussions it is my intention to explore the cyborg, as represented in film, with an eye on the degree to which existing figurations offer a potential liberation from the confinement of certain patriarchal paradigms and from the tautology of Western dualisms. The cyborg, at the most basic level of definition, represents a form of being that is identified as a melding of human/machine, of organic/inorganic, of natural/unnatural. Put very simply, this 'melding' necessarily complicates traditional, Cartesian dualisms. Definitions of human subjectivity (certainly in the Western world) have been founded on such dualisms, so it follows then that the cyborg presents a challenge to established philosophies/models, which have been built up around conceptual divisions and used in the production of 'authenticity narratives'. By this I am primarily referring to narratives that characterize the human subject by what it is not; that use oppositional exclusion as a process with which to define what is human. Beyond this, the figure of the cyborg can be seen to be articulating changes in what is considered the nature of 'human beingness'. If for many, certainly in the so called 'developed' world, the experience of the human condition is increasingly mediated through machines, through technology, then the cyborg appears to speak to shifts in the organisation and experiencing of present day subjectivity. So, on one level, the cyborg literally represents a breaking down or blurring of the dualisms inherent in Western philosophical thought. On another level the cyborg can be seen to articulate what it is to live within a postmodern technological society. It is therefore the intent of this thesis to explore the various ramifications brought about by this figuration through its filmic image and to look at changes in the way in which 'human beingness' is configured within my chosen films. In order to do this I will be drawing upon a diverse and eclectic range of existing approaches to this area and will also be looking to performance theory in order to further explicate what is being proposed by these cyborg images. Therefore this introduction is aimed at providing a background overview of the area as well as explaining my own rather unique approach in using performance theory.

But firstly, a study of the representation of the cyborg in Science Fiction cinema requires a brief guiding framework within which it can be textually and theoretically located. It therefore seems appropriate to begin by pointing out that although George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) can be seen as early examples of Science Fiction films, the form predominantly emerged as a recognised film genre after World War II. However, it is only very recently that the genre has been seriously engaged with, even though Science Fiction literature has, for some time, been seen as a suitable area for academic study. Previously, the Science Fiction film has been largely regarded as a banal form; intended for child audiences, as purely escapist entertainment, or as a 'low art' genre arising from a 'B movie' market place. It is true that many early Science Fiction films were marketed toward children and teenagers, but, as Vivian Sobchack points out:

It is clearly evident since 1968 and the huge success of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (certainly an intellectually provocative film on a number of levels) that the film medium can accommodate "adult" science fiction.¹

So, although many of the early films fell under the classification of the low budget 'B movie' or 'Matinee' film, it seems that its later generic development allowed for the more 'serious' and 'adult' Science Fiction film to emerge. Having said this, with the demise of the 'B movie' and 'Matinee' format in American cinema and with the coming of the broad appeal, New Hollywood, Blockbuster Science Fiction film in the 1970s/1980s, later films can also be seen to have borrowed from these earlier forms (both aesthetically and in terms of narrative construction). For example, George Lucas' *Star Wars* series (which began in 1977) could be considered as big budget, somewhat epic versions of 'Saturday Cinema' serials like *Flash Gordon* (made by Universal Studios from 1936). Also, later mainstream films, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Dir: Steven Spielberg, 1977), can be aligned with low budget 1950s movies like *It Came From Outer Space* (Dir: Jack Arnold, 1953). These apparent references back to the 'trashy' or 'kitsch', 'low art' Science Fiction films of preceding times may well have marked the genre, for some, as unworthy of academic attention. However, the rash of mainstream Science Fiction films in the 1970s (beyond attesting to a certain

¹ *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, (Ungar, 1993), p.26.

nostalgia) in combination with a growing interest in viewer reception within film studies, may well have helped to focus attention upon a genre that was now regularly commanding a mainstream audience. In this sense, Science Fiction film appeared to offer a fertile ground for the application of psychoanalytic readings and later spectatorship theory. In terms of textual study, H. Bruce Franklin argues that Science Fiction films of the 1970s through to the early 1980s say much about the political and cultural considerations of the time. In brief, his study connects the many images of a dystopian future in these films with an 'apocalyptic imagination' set into being by the Vietnam War and the growth in production of nuclear weapons at this time.² This kind of approach takes these films seriously in regards to how they may reflect the zeitgeist of the period and also how the form can be seen to work through societal concerns, particularly in connection with emerging technologies. In fact, Annette Kuhn has suggested that Science Fiction films basically display a 'twofold' thematic structure; 'having to do with technologies on the one hand and with modes of societal organization on the other'.³ In accepting her account, and not meaning to suggest that Science Fiction films prior to the 1970s cannot be usefully studied, the genre can now, most certainly, be seen to engage with 'important' issues. For instance, even a film like *The Stepford Wives* (Dir: Bryan Forbes, 1974), although much maligned by critics at the time of its release, does not require deep psychoanalytic analysis to recover its more serious content. In this film the 'recalcitrant Ms.'⁴ is threatened by the seemingly polite, suburban male, who is shown to literally replace her with an obedient, robotic copy. Whether this film is read as endorsing a kind of backlash against the Women's Liberation Movement or rather as making manifest the extent of the threat posed by the movement is open to debate. However, what is clear is that it remains a Science Fiction film deserving of attention, even given its appalling critical reception. However, it is not only manifest content that makes Science Fiction film worthy of academic consideration. As previously mentioned, recent application of psychoanalytic methodologies to the genre appears to reveal much about the latent content of what, previously, might have been considered purely escapist, Science Fiction film.

² 'Visions of the Future in Science Fiction Films from 1970 to 1982', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1990), p.19.

³ *Alien Zone: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, (Verso, 1999), p.3.

⁴ This expression is borrowed from a critique of the film, soon after its release in Britain. Julian Fox, *Films and Filming*, V.23, N.3, (December, 1976), 38-40, (p.38).

Contance Penley's reading of *The Terminator* (Dir: James Cameron, 1984) allows her to link the psychoanalytic concept of the 'primal scene' and aspects of gender formation with the construction of various Science Fiction films.⁵ Likewise, Barbara Creed's account of the 'monstrous feminine', as figured in Science Fiction film, has opened up a world of opportunity for feminist analyses of these films.⁶ In fact, links between an interest in Freudian psychoanalysis and Science Fiction were actually foregrounded in much earlier films like *The Forbidden Planet* (Dir: Fred M. Wilcox, 1956) - a film in which alien technology allows for the manifestation of 'creatures from the Id'. So sex/gender politics and issues surrounding human identity have been, and continue to be, dealt with in Science Fiction films - either in terms of latent content or in more manifest form.

With the release of Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and the later *Blade Runner* (1982) the Science Fiction film finally attracted broader, academic consideration. Both of these films (particularly *Blade Runner*) have been deconstructed, analysed and researched by many academic critics. In a sense, these two examples can be said to mark the coming of age of Science Fiction films as appropriate texts for study. Focus on these films, apart from indicating that the more philosophical aspects of the genre have finally been recognised by the academic establishment, also implies that a growing concern with ideas surrounding person-hood, human identity and subjectivity is being tackled within the films, as well as within academia itself. This thesis can be seen as expanding upon this growing area of concern, as both inherent within many recent Science Fiction films as well as intrinsic to present day academic studies in a variety of fields.

Concentrating as I am upon the representation of the cyborg in contemporary Science Fiction film (from the 1970s through to the present day) it is notable that *Blade Runner* sports this figuration (I will be arguing for Rachel's status as a cyborg) and that the later *Alien: Resurrection* (Dir: Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997) makes a cyborg of Ripley (the central heroine of the *Alien* series). *Blade Runner* was certainly not the first film to feature a cyborg. Earlier examples can be found in the featuring of Darth Vader, in the *Star Wars* series, and, more

⁵ 'Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1990), pp.116-127.

⁶ *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (Routledge, 1993).

notably, in Donald Cammell's *Demon Seed* (1977) - where I place the birth of the cyborg to the cinema. Having said that, it can be traced back to the American television series *The Six Million Dollar Man* (beginning in 1973). Although the central hero here was called 'bionic', the pilot film for the series was actually entitled *Cyborg: The Six Million Dollar Man* and Martin Caidin's novel was published under the title *Cyborg*.⁷ However, *Demon Seed* seems to provide the most clear starting point in a study of this cinematic figuration and I will be returning to this film in chapter two. I will not be providing yet another extensive account of *Blade Runner* or *Alien* (as these films have already been much written about), but will instead be using these two seminal texts to provide comparative analysis with a number of later Cyborg films. For instance, in taking a more in-depth look at *Alien: Resurrection*, I will be returning to *Alien* to clarify certain points and to illustrate my arguments. I will also refer to *Blade Runner*, throughout this thesis, by way of comparative analysis with other mainstream Cyborg films as well as those that are released direct to video.

As implied in my above account, Science Fiction film has most certainly been concerned with images of the Other - commonly played out in terms of alien beings or humanoid, mechanical constructions set off against human protagonists. Many critics have commented that these images can be seen to operate as a metaphor for forms of Otherness built upon gendered divides or upon distinctions based on racial differences. So, in this sense, Science Fiction film can be seen to rework, within a fantasy scenario, anxieties and fears that an Other might hold for a dominating patriarchal society. Further to this, specific to the Science Fiction genre is the figuring of mechanical and technological beings created by man. As J. P. Telotte has noted these images can be taken to be human 'doubles' which may operate as a kind of self-projection - an uncanny reflection of the self.⁸ What Telotte is pointing out is the way in which the Other can be seen as sutured into a binary dichotomy - either in terms of representing what has been ejected from the self, what lies dormant or repressed within the self, or in terms of how the Other may reflect back upon the perceptions and deeper desires of the self. So, it would seem, many Science Fiction films can be

⁷ Martin Caidin, *Cyborg*, (Mayflower Books, 1974). Martin Caidin was a pilot and former air surgeon, as well as being an avid Science Fiction writer. Although this book was first published in 1973, Caidin held the copyright from 1972. It is unclear as to whether the novel is actually a spin-off from the series or vice versa.

understood as upholding, in the most stringent of ways, the dichotomous modelling upon which traditional Western philosophy is based - a modelling that has underpinned narrative structures as well as cinematic visual images. However, the kind of suturing that Telotte refers to, whilst potentially marking a blurring of divides between self/Other is taken a step further in the figuring of the cyborg. Here we have the literal melding of human self with Other (namely technology), which poses a potentially more potent threat to the dichotomous structures of Western thought. As Claudia Springer puts it, whereas in past Science Fiction films 'robots represent[ed] the acclaim and fear evoked by industrial age machines for their ability to function independently of humans, cyborgs incorporate rather than exclude humans, and in so doing erase the distinctions previously assumed to distinguish humanity from technology'.⁹ So it seems that many Science Fiction films can be understood as providing a potential playing field upon which the very structures of dominant Western thought are being worked through, re-worked, or even challenged.

I will be approaching the issues raised above, in more detail, in further sections of this introduction and throughout this thesis, but what I wanted to make clear from the outset was the way in which representations in recent Science Fiction film, and more specifically the Cyborg film, may be seen to stand at the centre of far broader concerns: within Science Fiction as a film genre, within Hollywood cinema as a whole, and within cultural constructions on a wider scale. However, before I return to the image of the cyborg in film, it is important to lay out some of the background to this study and to outline certain theories and methodologies that have been drawn upon in the following chapters.

⁸ 'The Doubles of Fantasy and the Space of Desire', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1990), pp.152-159.

⁹ 'The Pleasure of the Interface', *Screen*, V.32, N.3, (Autumn, 1991), 303-322, (p.306).

CYBORG GENEALOGY

Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline originally coined the term 'cyborg' in 1960, to describe 'self regulating man-machine systems'.¹⁰ In conjunction with research which was looking to how the human body could be altered in order to survive extra-terrestrial environments, Clynes and Kline were busy re-conceiving the relationship between the human and the machine. These developments not only conceptually incorporated the human into a technological network but also intruded upon more traditional physiological modellings; modellings that had previously been utilised to segregate and categorise human individuals.

With the advent of the cyborg came a focus of attention upon how the living organism (in particular the human) is affected by both conceptual and literal changes in relation to various, cybernetic technologies and organisational systems. Beyond this initial focus, the term has also come to allow for a very broad description of cyborg being; spreading liberally to encompass practically any living organism that is altered by, or interacts with, mechanical and bio-technologies. For instance, in terms of the human/machine cyborg, Katherine N., Hayles (a leading theorist and science critic) makes the case that:

About 10% of the current U.S. population are estimated to be cyborgs in the technical sense, including people with electronic pacemakers, artificial joints, drug implant systems, implanted corneal lenses, and artificial skin. A much higher percentage participates in occupations that make them into metaphoric cyborgs, including computer keyboarder joined in a cybernetic circuit with the screen, the neurosurgeon guided by fibre optic microscopy during an operation, and the teen gameplayer in the local videogame arcade.¹¹

Hayles' extensive list, along with her distinction between the metaphoric and technical cyborg, not only alludes to the current potency of the term but also signals the way in which the cyborg can be considered a creature of both fiction and reality. In other words, her list emphasises the literally constructed nature of the cyborg as well as its reliance upon a particular conceptual apparatus. This has the effect of foregrounding the cyborg as both a material production and product of an imaginative process. Of course, this opens up a highly

¹⁰ 'Cyborgs and Space', *The Cyborg Handbook*, Chris Hables Gray ed., (Routledge, 1995), p.30, (reprinted from, *Astronautics*, [September, 1960], 26-27, 74-76).

¹¹ 'The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman', *The Cyborg Handbook*, p.322.

contingent space in which various cyborg imaginings can be conceived and contested - a space from which some have found it especially useful to challenge traditional/dominant ideas of human social/material arrangements (particularly sex/gender relations under patriarchy - given the challenge the cyborg offers to much of Western philosophy's reliance upon Cartesian dualisms). These inroads into 'cyber-territory' will be more thoroughly discussed below and in order to provide a fuller background to certain political and theoretical stances I will now briefly set out some of the genealogical threads from which the cyborg seems to have emerged.

The term 'cyborg' is actually a neologism, from cybernetic organism, thus referring back to the advent of an earlier scientific discipline known as Cybernetics. Norbert Wiener is commonly considered the 'father' of Cybernetics and he described this 'new science' in his book *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine* (originally published in 1948).¹² In brief, Wiener's theoretical system, or science, was born of the marriage of communications theory with a number of other scientific disciplines and, according to Hayles, it aimed at developing 'a common explanatory framework to talk about animals, machines, and humans by considering them as information processors'.¹³

It is interesting to note that the word cybernetics was taken from the Greek 'kybernetes', meaning steersman,¹⁴ but it has also been traced back to Plato (who used the term in connection with the art of government) and has been linked to the French physicist, André Marie Ampère, who (in the 1830s) devised a classificatory system of human knowledge. In his grand system Ampère designated a sub-category of politics within which he referred to Cybernetics as a 'science of governance'.¹⁵ However, the more modern definition generally refers to Cybernetics as a paradigm within which humans have come to be understood as coextensive with other forms of life as well as with machine systems. As Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor and Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera suggest:

¹² (2nd ed., MIT Press, 1961).

¹³ 'Making the Cut: The Interplay of Narrative and System, or What Systems Theory Can't See', *Cultural Critique*, N.30, (1995), 71-99, (p.82).

¹⁴ Wiener, pp.11-12.

¹⁵ 'Cybernetics and Ego Death', <<http://www.egodeath.com/cybernetics.htm>>, (30th July, 2000).

There is no longer a 'partnership' between machine and organism; rather there is a symbiosis and it is managed by cybernetics, the language common to the organic and the mechanical.¹⁶

During World War II Wiener, as part of the war effort, was connected with developments that led to significant advances in the use of anti-aircraft guns and precision bombing equipment. Underpinning these developments was a focus on more effective and responsive forms of attack and defence. What emerged were systems of communication that allowed for quicker and more precise tactical actions/reactions. Central to these weaponry systems, and to the later development of Cybernetics, was the concept of the feedback loop. As J. de Rosney describes it, feedback occurs in a system of inputs and outputs:

The inputs are the result of the environment's influence on the system, and the outputs are the result of the system on the environment [...] In every feedback loop, as the name suggests, information about the result of a transformation or an action is sent back to the input of the system in the form of input data. If these new data facilitate and accelerate the transformation in the same direction as the preceding results, they are positive feedback - their effects are cumulative. If the new data produce a result in the opposite direction to the previous results, they are negative feedback - their effects stabilise the system.¹⁷

So, the development of Cybernetics offered a model of causation that was based upon a kind of circular exchange of information whereby both fully automated systems as well as systems that require the participation of a human being could be conceptually enclosed within a given feedback loop. This modelling, as Stephen Pfohl points out, 'replaces earlier modern (scientific and popular cultural) images of 'cause leading to effect'. He goes on to state:

Substituted for such linear modellings of causation is a more complexly suggestive theoretical-statistical imaginary: a computational modelling of 'interactive' shapings and reshapings of the energetic boundaries between communicative agents - not all of whom need to be human.¹⁸

Cybernetics can also be understood as part of a more general scientific and academic shift present in Post-World War II theory, across a variety of disciplines. For instance, alongside

¹⁶ 'Cyborgology: Constructing the Knowledge of Cybernetic Organisms', *The Cyborg Handbook*, Chris Hables Gray ed., (Routledge, 1995) p.4.

¹⁷ 'Principia Cybernetica Web: Feedback', <<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/FEEDBACK.html>>, (26th July, 2000).

¹⁸ 'The Cybernetic Delirium of Norbert Wiener', <<http://www.ctheory.com/a44.html>>, (26th July, 2000).

its development something called Systems Science was also unfolding. Systems Theory was proposed in the 1940s by the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy who thought there was a need to think of real/material systems as open and in interaction with other systems or a given environment. Initially, Bertalanffy formulated a model of the human body as a dynamic system. Rather than reducing an entity (e.g. the human body) to the properties of its parts or elements (e.g. organs or cells), Systems Theory therefore focused on the arrangement of and relations between the parts connected into a holistic whole. He then placed this earlier model of the dynamic organism into an environment within which it also had a dynamic relationship. Following this work and 'as a metaphor derived from both theories, Bertalanffy introduced the *GST* (General Systems Theory) as a new paradigm which should control the model construction in all the sciences'.¹⁹ So, in very general terms, whereas early Cybernetics appears to have begun with a mechanical modelling, placing the human within a mechanical system (making them one with the machine), Systems Theory began with a modelling of the human organism and then extended this to the outer world. It is also interesting that early Cybernetics was developed with an emphasis on control and closure of a given system (thereby removing as many variables from communications feedback systems as possible) - whereas, early Systems Theory, it appears, was concerned with acknowledging variables as part of a dynamic process. However, the later development of both Cybernetics and Systems Theory has seen the two separate fields become practically interchangeable. For instance, in more recent years the cybernetic paradigm has been expanded to include societal organisations/'machines' (commonly known as Social Cybernetics) and, as Gordon Pask points out, 'second order' Cybernetics includes the observer as a participant in and part of the observed system; thereby shifting the focus from communication and control to interaction.²⁰

It was not only in the purely scientific field that ideas revolving around the notion of feedback seemed to proliferate during the post-war period. Pfohl points to some interesting parallels/similarities between Cybernetics/Systems Theory, poststructuralist theory and

¹⁹ 'International Society for the Systems Sciences: Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972)', <<http://www.isss.org/lumLVB.htm>>, (27th July, 2000).

²⁰ 'Different Kinds of Cybernetics', *New Perspectives on Cybernetics: Self-Organization, Autonomy and Connectionism*, Gertrudis van de Vijver ed., (Kluwer Academic, 1992), pp.11-31.

existentialism. He goes on to suggest that these similarities may be seen in the light of a response to what can be 'discerned as the deadly freeze-framings of fascism'.²¹ In other words, these new modellings/philosophies/theories may have begun to provide, at this time, a more fluid perception of the world in which control mechanisms could be understood as operating in a less deterministic, violent or repressive fashion. Of course, Pfohl's reading is rather reductive but it certainly seems to be the case that in the emerging, post-war, post-Fordist world Cybernetics (along with Systems theory) presented a 'fundamental shift in the way the operation of power was viewed and organised'.²²

THE CYBORG BODY-POLITIC

The earlier, Pre-World War II theories and practices of people management had been largely based on the idea of division of labour and hierarchical control. This was a kind of factory model, which was paralleled in the biological image of the body as a collection of separate organs led, or managed, by the brain. Replacing this model was the more de-centred notion of complex control mechanisms, which came to focus upon the interactions *between* organisms - a system of management that allowed for greater fluidity and relatively rapid change. More importantly, what was previously understood as discontinuous was now being seen to be connected and interrelated. Of course, this was part of the project of Cybernetics (to find a common paradigmatic language for machine and biological entity), but beyond this what seems to have occurred more recently is a veritable implosion of the organic/mechanical divide making it difficult to distinguish the one from the other.

The bodily models that have paralleled these shifts appear to concentrate on breaking down a more traditional notion of organismic unification on both a material and conceptual level. For example, the 'monarchy' of the brain, understood as the organising/controlling force in charge of the rest of the body has, to some degree, been replaced by the gene (now understood as the ultimate carrier of information): the micro replaces the macro in this shift and can be seen to provide a more dispersed and potentially less confined image of

²¹ 'The Cybernetic Delirium of Norbert Wiener', <<http://www.ctheory.com/a44.html>>, (26th July, 2000).

²² Tiziana Terranova, "Digital Darwin: Nature, Evolution, and Control in the Rhetoric of Electronic Communication", 'Technoscience', *New Formations*, N.29, (Autumn, 1996), 69-83, (p.77).

embodiment. Simon Penny perfectly illustrates this when, in an article exploring various paradigms associated with 'artificial life' projects, he describes how a 'top-down' procedure is fast being replaced by a 'bottom-up' approach. In very simple terms, designers are increasingly concentrating on small components which, when brought together into an interacting whole, do not necessarily produce a foreseeable result. This is markedly different from starting out with a required result and attempting to work backwards in order to produce/reproduce that result. Penny, in commenting on this shift, notes that:

The distinction between Top-Down and Bottom-Up is not consistent, but can be characterized in terms of dualism. Top-Down embraces the notion of a panoptical mind-proxy in control, bottom-up strategies (in different ways) make less clear distinction between 'mind' and 'body'.²³

Of course, using the body as a naturalising metaphoric mechanism within a system of social organisation has a long history. As Bryan S. Turner has stated: 'The human body is an ancient metaphor of political institutions' and has been 'used as a more general metaphor for the structure and function of society as a whole'. He goes on to explain that the 'teleological purposiveness of the body' has been employed to 'legitimate political and social divisions in society'.²⁴ In *The Body and Society*, Turner outlines a history of the human body as a central metaphor for social organisation, social practices, and, conversely (by drawing upon Michel Foucault's work), maps out the ways in which the body becomes disciplined through and by society. Turner sums up his brief historical summary by saying 'that patriarchy was a fundamental dimension of the modernizing process of which Cartesianism was a dominant ideology' and goes on to state that 'Cartesianism pre-eminently expressed the virtues and values of possessive individualism, of the rational enquiring mind and of mastery over the natural environment'.²⁵ In bringing the reader to the present day he argues:

Western thought has been profoundly shaped and influenced by a series of primary dichotomies namely between body/soul and nature/culture [...] The dominance of Cartesianism with its separation of mind and body has been challenged directly by feminism, postmodernism and critical theory which are in turn philosophical and

²³ "The Darwin Machine: Artificial Life and Interactive Art", 'Technoscience', *New Formations*, N.29, (Autumn, 1996), 59-68, (p.64).

²⁴ 'Government of the Body', *The Body and Society (Second Edition)*, (Sage Publications, 1996), p.175.

²⁵ Turner, p.14.

social consequences of major transformations in the nature of society, primarily towards the emergence of a postmodern or information society.²⁶ Chris Shilling, in his book *The Body and Social Theory*, maps out a shift in the way in which the contemporary human body is perceived or drawn upon in social theory. He notes that what he terms the 'naturalistic approach' (an approach that views 'the body as the biological base on which arises the superstructure of society') has been challenged recently by a range of theories that he brings under the heading of 'social constructionist' views of the body.²⁷ Shilling includes Foucault's work under the latter heading and critiques what he sees as Foucault's 'epistemological view of the body as existing only in discourse'.²⁸ Turner's interpretation of recent theoretical approaches to the body is skewed somewhat differently. In looking at these developments as presenting a shift away from the dominance of Cartesian dualism he reads the use of social constructionism alongside postmodernity's emphasis on the 'narrative quality of human knowledge' as a 'challenge to empiricist notions of reality'.²⁹ Turner can therefore be said to emphasise the strategic and political significance of certain social constructionist theories in his reading.

In exploring contemporary ideas of selfhood and the body Turner goes on to suggest, however, that Foucault's 'biopolitics' do not take into consideration the extent to which consumerism, fashion and life-style have effected ideas of selfhood. He sees the 'new self' as far more mobile and uncertain, less determined, than Foucault and also notes a more general shift in the postmodern age toward an emphasis on emotionality, sensibility and sensuality; a move away from what he terms as the 'cognitive subject' toward a more bodily experiencing of selfhood. Shilling also observes this move toward the material body as the signifier of the contemporary 'self', but puts this down to the uncertain nature of modern living in which 'the body provides individuals with a "last retreat", an entity which *appears* to be a solid basis on which a reliable sense of self can be built'.³⁰ Shilling's argument seems credible but this supposedly reliable "last retreat" also becomes problematic in today's technological, information society. In other words, bio-technologies, along with the bio-sciences' adoption of the

²⁶ Turner, p.20.

²⁷ (Sage Publications, 1993), pp.15-16.

²⁸ His critique here is in the context of a discussion in which he attempts to bring ideas of the actual/material body back into the realms of social theory. Shilling, p.16.

²⁹ Turner, p.18.

³⁰ Shilling, p.182, Shilling's emphasis.

cybernetic paradigm, seriously challenge this sense of the body as 'solid', regulated, unified or certain. Apart from the fact that the body's 'natural' limits/boundaries seem to be increasingly permeated by various artificial prosthetics and chemical intrusions (i.e. hormone injections, immunisation etc.), technology has also provided individuals with the ability to re-structure their body. In connection with this, Anne Balsamo, in her book *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*, comments that 'cosmetic surgery literally transforms the material body into a sign of culture',³¹ thus complicating the idea that the 'natural' body can be taken to provide, in any certain sense, a solid base on which to support notions of an essential self. Even at the micro level (to take my earlier example of the gene) it becomes apparent that recent genetic engineering may allow the body to be re-constructed, altered and even totally constructed in the not too distant future (i.e. cloning, the creation of the embryo outside the body etc.). So it is increasingly difficult to locate a firm division between previously crucial distinctions - distinctions articulated in central dualisms like nature/culture or natural/constructed.

Richard Double demonstrates this shift from Cartesian notions of selfhood to a recent reliance on the material body to locate the 'person', in an amusing article (written as though from the perspective of an alien life form) in which an attempt to define personhood through both traditional methodologies and scientific theory falls apart under the pressure of recent technological innovations. In this article the 'alien life form' comes to the following conclusions:

We are now in a position to say why there are no persons on the humanoids' planet. According to lateralization and localization evidence there is no unity of mental states, which is required by the Cartesian notion of a person as a unified, nonphysical center of consciousness. Instead, mental states are associated with brain activity in a decentralised way. If a person exists, that person must be the physical body (or brain) with which the mental activity is associated. But, according to Scientific Realism, there are no macroscopic bodies (or brains) existing on the humanoids' planet that could count as person in the materialistic sense characterized earlier. Thus, there are no persons on that planet.³²

³¹ (Duke University Press, 1996), p.13.

³² 'There Are No Persons', *The Intersection of Science Fiction and Philosophy*, Robert E. Myers ed., (Greenwood Press, 1983), p.116.

As Double's article illustrates, past 'characterizations' of the human being (or certainly ideas that define 'human beingness' or individuality in terms of a unified, distinct core) appear so deficient and inaccurate that this has led theorists like Hayles to consider the notion 'that the age of the human has given way to the *posthuman*'.³³ But does this mean that there are no human beings on this planet? Although certain interpretations of the Cybernetic paradigm might suggest this as a logical conclusion it becomes evident that, particularly in the 1980s, questions of human embodiment, 'human beingness', and personhood have been reintroduced and are presently being fought out over the fused body of the cyborg. As Hayles goes on to argue, the cyborg appears to be 'standing at the threshold separating the human from the posthuman'.³⁴ Hayles also sets the emergence of the cyborg alongside humankind's fear of literal extinction (brought about by the devastating power of nuclear weapons or the increasing recognition of the destruction of the environment) and she goes on to suggest:

As a sense of its mortality grows, humankind looks for its successor and heir, harboring the secret hope that the heir can somehow be enfolded back into the self.³⁵

This statement can be understood in a variety of ways but one interpretation is as an indication of the way in which the cyborg may mark attempts to recuperate or re-configure a sense of human selfhood. Taken this way, the site of the cyborg offers not only the hope of a form of human survival but the chance to re-write human beingness whilst, simultaneously, retaining links (at least in the form of recognition) to its past.

CYBORG NARRATIVES AND THEORY

It became evident, particularly in the 1980s, that the 're-writing' of what it means to be human in today's technological society was being busily undertaken by a number of Science Fiction authors. With roots that can be traced back to novelists like Philip K. Dick (the Science Fiction writer who penned *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* [1968] - the story upon which the film *Blade Runner* [1982] was based), J. G. Ballard (writer of *Crash* [1973]) and Joanna Russ (who wrote *The Female Man* [1975] - which provided an inspirational model to

³³ 'The life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman', *The Cyborg Handbook*, Chris Hables Gray ed., (Routledge, 1995), p.321, (Hayles' emphasis).

³⁴ Hayles, p.322.

³⁵ Hayles, p.334.

many feminist Science Fiction writers) the so called Cyberpunk sub-genre arose at this time. Writers like William Gibson (famous for his '*Neuromancer*' trilogy [1984, 1986, 1988]), Bruce Sterling (Cyberpunk writer and also editor of the *Mirrorshades* collection [1986]), Pat Cadigan (whose *Synners* [1991] has received acclaim and critical attention) and Marge Piercy (whose *Woman on the Edge of Time* [1983] and *Body of Glass* [1991] owes much to Cyberpunk) appeared to be tackling this issue as a primary concern within their narratives. These writers presented the reader with a number of central cyborg characters whose interaction with technology was illustrated in a variety of different ways.

Both within many individual Cyberpunk novels and in looking at the sub-genre from a more overall perspective, there exists an evident diversity in the cyborgian portrayals on offer. For instance, there is a great difference between the kind of technological melding undertaken by Cadigan's 'Visual Mark' character and that of 'Sam-I-Am' - both of whom appear in the novel *Synners*. Visual Mark strives to become completely immersed within a virtual environment and eventually succeeds in downloading his consciousness into the computer world - thereby leaving his material world forever. Sam-I-Am, on the other hand, uses her own body as a kind of power pack, in order to run her customised technological enhancements and interfacing system to the Net, whilst remaining firmly connected to her material world. A further example can be taken from Gibson's *Neuromancer* in which his now famous 'console cowboys' work side by side with characters like Molly Millions: Molly is cybernetically enhanced, giving her increased physical prowess, whereas Case (our main console cowboy) directly 'jacks' into the Matrix (Gibson's equivalent to the Net) in order to exert his will. So each of these novels appears to extrapolate from (to borrow Hayles' terms) today's metaphorical and technical cyborg to give the reader a range of cyborgian forms of being.

With all of the above examples the reader is allowed insight into the psychological and physical effects experienced by each character. For instance, much is made of Case's longing to transcend his 'meat' (the slang term he uses for his own body), by entering the Matrix world, and the psychological underpinnings to this desire are played out in his own moments of introspection (of course, Case's very name also focuses attention upon his psychology and

invites the reader to consider him in these terms). Cadigan takes this kind of transcendence even further when her character, Visual Mark, not only downloads his mind into a computer terminal but also merges consciousness with an artificial intelligence construct called Art Fish. This merging is investigated by Cadigan in a flourishing display of psychological complication, co-opting many of the devices associated with the complex characterizations of 'higher' literary forms. The same can be said of Molly and Sam as each writer explores and describes, from the point of view of the character, the exhilaration and struggle they experience as enhanced, technological beings.

Science Fiction writing has, of course, traditionally dealt with ideas; often subordinating characterization (or creating what are commonly referred to as 'flat' characterizations) to a more overarching premise. As Alexandra Aldridge puts it:

While individual experience in a fragment of historically familiar world constitutes the principle subject matter of the traditional novel, in SF individual experience recedes into the background.³⁶

However, I would argue that Cyberpunk is very much concerned with the characters it portrays. The human (and sometimes non-human) actants, in these novels, and the way in which they interact with their environment and each other, are of primary concern - as opposed to, for example, an emphasis on the mapping out of some alternative, utopian or dystopian, societal model³⁷ or simply an exploration of 'new toys'-technology (as is common in more traditional Science Fiction writing).³⁸ What is, perhaps, different about much of the writing of this Science Fiction sub-genre, from the kind of 'naturalistic' figurations to be found in other novels, is the way in which it appears to comment upon 'characterization' in its articulating of a shift away from traditional notions of subjectivity and identity formation.

³⁶ 'Science Fiction and Emerging Values', *The Intersection of Science Fiction and Philosophy*, Robert E. Myers ed., (Greenwood Press, 1983), p.16.

³⁷ Earlier Science Fiction writing has been traced back to the utopian novels of the 19th century (i.e. William Morris' *News from Nowhere*) and later dystopian writings (i.e. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*). For an account of these early works and the apparent shift from utopian to dystopian futurism, during this period, reference can be made to Krishan Kumar - particularly chapters 2 and 7, 'Utopia and Nineteenth Century Europe' and 'Science and Anti-Utopia: Aldous Huxley and "Brave New World"', *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Basil Blackwell, 1987).

³⁸ For instance, writers like Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke commonly fall under this category due to their emphasis on the exploration of technologies. It is also interesting that this is often referred to as 'hard' sci-fi, as opposed to what is seen as the more fantasy driven 'soft' sci-fi.

Cyberpunk humanity is depicted as so closely inter-linked with technology that the very nature of human 'characterization' comes into question. Cyberpunk novels not only bring 'human beingness' back into the field of play but question the way in which this has been conventionally expressed through more established constructions of what counts as human character. In other words, the assumptions upon which a 'realistic'/naturalistic characterization is built come in to question in these novels on a number of levels.

At the same time as Cyberpunk seems concerned with human characterization and with exploring forms of 'beingness' (as complex, rich structures within equally complex environments) it also succeeds in commenting upon the way in which the human being seems to be losing its primacy and, to a certain extent, control in the world. The human individual of Cyberpunk no longer reigns supreme but, as cyborg, interacts with a dense network of alternative agents/actants. In fact, the polyvocal emphasis in many Cyberpunk novels (the story is often told from the point of view of a number of characters as opposed to one central character or an omnipotent narrator) seems to underline a kind of levelling out between human and non-human characters. If, for instance, compared to detective fiction (which is heavily referenced in Cyberpunk), where the narrative most often unfolds from the point of view of a single detective character, in Cyberpunk:

The enigma is not solved by the actions and thoughts of a single person, piecing it together like a detective. Instead, the characters [often] do not even know each other. However, collectively, knowingly or not, they move the narrative forward and solve the enigma.³⁹

This diffusion, in terms of who tells the story (which is echoed in the collective enigma solving of the narrative) does not necessarily lead to a lack of agency (conscious or otherwise); it is simply that this appears spread between characters. These characters may not be seen to have ultimate control over the narrative, or the diegetic world around them, but they do negotiate with their environment and are therefore able to effect change, push the boundaries and exert a kind of will. In some respects this is reminiscent of the Cybernetic modelling outlined earlier; in particular, the notion of the 'feedback loop' seems appropriate

³⁹ Laura Chernaik, 'Pat Cadigan's "Synners": Refiguring Nature, Science and Technology', *Feminist Review*, N.56, (1997), 61-84, (p.73). This was said of the novel *Synners* but, in one way or another, is true of most Cyberpunk.

here - the agency becoming apparent *between* nodal points as opposed to being completely embodied by a centralised controller of operations or overseer.

Of course, Science Fiction has traditionally been considered as a very non-naturalistic, fantastic genre - not intended to be read as a direct reflection of current, or past, times and societies. However, in the case of Cyberpunk, it could be argued that the depiction of these near future worlds does, indeed, represent (rather accurately it may seem) present day reality and experience. So, in a sense, Cyberpunk can be said to confuse or conflate a fantasy/reality divide - at least in terms of how this divide has been applied to styles and genres of novel writing - which is also evidenced at the more formal and structural levels I have touched upon above. The narratives, characters and subject matter of Cyberpunk seem to sit, ambivalently, between what was previously considered fantastical and what thought to be 'naturalistic'. Jenny Wolmark has pointed out that:

Cyberpunk writers acknowledge the influence of non-genre writers, but they are also prodigious appropriators of devices from other genres. At the same time, mainstream fiction has made increasing use of the metaphors and rhetoric of science fiction.⁴⁰

Whilst my comments above were more specific, Wolmark's underline not only 'the active involvement of Cyberpunk in the erosion of cultural boundaries' but also the rising importance of Science Fiction as an articulating discourse of the postmodern experience.⁴¹ Indeed, Brian McHale has suggested that 'Science fiction is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism', and he goes on to say that Science Fiction is 'the ontological genre *par excellence* (as the detective story is the epistemological genre *par excellence*), and so serves as a source of materials and models for postmodernist writers'.⁴²

So Science Fiction has been recognised as an important genre (particularly in its written form), partly for the reasons that McHale points out, which has led to more serious critical attention being paid to it. Moreover, Science Fiction (especially Cyberpunk and Feminist Science Fiction writing) has been drawn upon not only as a discourse that comments upon and reflects the postmodern experience but also as a kind of philosophical, political

⁴⁰ 'Cyberpunk and Cyborgs', *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*, (Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1994), p.111.

⁴¹ Wolmark, p.111.

⁴² *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen, 1987), p.16.

playground within which new forms of human subjectivity and identity are postulated. In fact, Scott Bukatman has even gone as far as to argue that:

The purpose of much recent science fiction [is] to construct a new subject-position to interface with the global realms of data circulation, a subject that can occupy or intersect the cyberscapes of contemporary existence.⁴³

Returning to the case of Marge Piercy's work, the feminist politics that underpin her own writing project are hardly hidden. In fact, Marleen S. Barr, by using Piercy's *He, She, and It* (known as *Body of Glass* in its English publication) as an example, sees this novel as falling under the heading of (what she calls) 'feminist fabulation'. Barr contends that a 'feminist fabulation' is 'Feminist fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way'.⁴⁴ Barr goes on to state that she wants to:

Reclaim postmodern canonical spaces for feminists by broadening the definition of postmodern fiction to include the subject matter and structures characterizing contemporary feminist writing. One way to accomplish this goal is to notice that feminist authors adhere to a recognised postmodern literary trope: they rewrite master narrative. More specifically they rewrite patriarchal master narratives and reveal them to be patriarchal fictions that form the foundation of constructed reality.⁴⁵

So, for Barr, the fictional and constructed nature of the worlds portrayed in the narratives of feminist Science Fiction not only underlines the constructed nature of patriarchal arrangements (thereby highlighting the contingency of these arrangements) but also serves to offer alternative visions - visions that could be understood to establish a certain active agency and that may, ultimately, help to create change at the level of performative affect.

Of course, that is not to say that all Cyberpunk is feminist, or even ultimately progressive. For instance, Gibson's Cyberpunk novels have been criticised for their masculinism and have been read as very conservative texts - certainly in terms of the way in which gender is configured in his characterizations (I will be returning to this in more detail below). However, much Cyberpunk can be viewed as negotiating with received notions of humanness

⁴³ *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, (Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁴ 'Complaining about "Portnoy's Complaint"', *American Book Review*, V.14, N.2, (1992), 11-12, (p.11).

⁴⁵ Barr, p.11.

in a way that can be considered as performative - particularly in the sense that it may well be laying down a powerful groundwork for future re-iteration. This is, no doubt, why someone like Marge Piercy has borrowed from, or written within, the genre's conventions; as an effective way to carry out her own negotiations with the world in which she finds herself. However, the highlighting of the fictional/factual feedback loop, as it were, and its co-option on a manifestly political level, is not without a certain irony. After all, having underlined the constructed nature of past and current social arrangements and notions of subjectivity - the fictions upon which these arrangements have been based and the iterative power inherent in discursive formations - it surely follows that irony is present in constructing further fictions, particularly by using what could be considered to be patriarchal rhetorical devices.

Donna Haraway (whose name has become central to the so called 'cyber-feminist' movement which emerged in the 1980s) has noted the irony present in the construction of alternative fictions and has also highlighted this element in her, theoretical, academic writings. In fact, her seminal piece, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', opens on a sub-heading that reads: 'An Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit' and further on in the piece she states: 'At the centre of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the cyborg'.⁴⁶ Haraway explicitly tackles the importance of fictional writing in the conceiving of, what she calls, 'political imaginations'. So her ironic positioning, in part, may be seen to come from the fact that she is using 'the master's tools' to affirm her somewhat oppositional will, but also comes from the way she is indicating that her ideas are not intended to be transparent - she is inviting active consideration and negotiation with them. In other words, the ironic is foregrounded here to indicate that the agency present in what she is doing is not entirely her own, but operates between her and the reader - her meaning then is not intended to be read as 'pure'.

In this same essay, Haraway goes on to mention academic and political theorists, alongside writers of Science Fiction, as influential in the formulating of her own ideas⁴⁷ and, in a later publication, further emphasises her own dependence upon, and interdependence with, certain

⁴⁶ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (Free Association Books, 1991), p.65.

⁴⁷ Haraway, p.98.

Science Fiction novels. The most prominent example of this interdependence is reflected in Haraway's references to Marge Piercy's work - conversely, Piercy (in the 'Acknowledgements' for *Body of Glass*) admits that Haraway's 'Manifesto' proved to be 'extremely suggestive' in her writing of this novel (a notable instance, perhaps, of a kind of 'positive feedback loop' as applied to cultural constructions).⁴⁸ In the opening chapter of *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium*, Haraway borrows the character of Nili, from Piercy's *He, She, and It* and uses this cyborg as a kind of inspirational role model (what she calls a 'figuration') through which she articulates her own position as a theoretical writer, scientist and feminist critic. Nili, living in both the semiotic space of a virtual reality Matrix as well as in the material space of the diegetically real world perhaps encapsulates the way in which Haraway views her own position. Haraway, not only likens her own writing to Piercy's fictional novel writing but also likens herself to this fictional character and she backs up this approach by stating that '[f]igurations are performative images that can be inhabited'.⁴⁹ This idea is further underlined in her statement that 'the imaginary and the real figure each other in concrete fact' and that the actual and figural are both 'constitutive of lived material-semiotic worlds'.⁵⁰ So, unlike the purely 'constructionist' perspective of the body that Shilling critiqued as existing only within discursive formations, Haraway highlights the importance of both the discursive and the material. In addition, whilst working with this binary equation, she assumes that there is more than just a strong relationship between these two areas; that the two are, in fact, intimately inseparable rather than opposing, distinct or separable. Although there is a certain creative mutuality acknowledged in much academic work (through referencing and footnotes) here it seems that the boundaries between, supposedly, more rigorous, objective, academic literature and a subjective, creative, fictional form are deliberately blurred.

The reasoning behind this blurring can be understood in the light of some of Haraway's previous work - in which she sets out to explain, what she terms, her 'situated' position as an embodied female scientist and feminist theorist. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The*

⁴⁸ Piercy, (1992, Penguin), p.584.

⁴⁹ Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan[©]_Meets_OncoMouseTM: Feminism and Technoscience*, (Routledge, 1997), p.11.

⁵⁰ Haraway, p.2.

Reinvention of Nature, Haraway outlines her objections to, what she terms, a 'strong' constructivism as well as her rejection of the kind of approach that seeks to claim the omnipotence of an all seeing gaze (what she has come to call the 'God trick'). This kind of 'objectivity', in her view, assumes a disembodied understanding of the world. Instead, she grapples with the concept that knowledges can be thought of as situated, localised, as emanating from a state of embodiment within a given social, material-semiotic environment. With this in mind, she states:

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.⁵¹

Haraway, in an interesting twist, understands this situatedness as empowering. For her the implosion of the mind/body dichotomy, which is implicit in her account of situated knowledge, means that 'the "body" is an agent, not a resource'.⁵² In continuing her argument she suggests that:

The imaginary and the rational - the visionary and the objective vision - hover close together [...] [A] plea for a successor science and for postmodern sensibilities must be read to argue that this close touch of the fantastic element of hope for transformative knowledge and the severe check and stimulus of sustained critical enquiry are jointly the ground for any believable claim to objectivity or rationality not riddled with breath-taking denials and repressions [...] Science has been utopian and visionary from the start; that is one reason 'we' need it.⁵³

Here she gestures toward the reasoning behind her allusion to Science Fiction alongside more academic accounts of scientific theory - by bringing each in to a closer proximity Haraway foregrounds the fictional elements in supposedly rational, omni-objective scientific thought by using the blatantly 'visionary' aspects of Science Fiction to indicate how scientific discourses can play a part in constructing the 'real'. Haraway describes how, what she calls, 'generative doubt' is opened up by 'non-isomorphic subjects, agents' and how this, in fact, can lead to a more objective viewpoint than 'the vantage point of the cyclopean, self-satiated eye

⁵¹ Chapter 9, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', (Free Association Books, 1991), p.109.

⁵² Haraway, p.114.

⁵³ Haraway, p.106.

of the master subject'.⁵⁴ In this sense then, her idea of an embodied point of view does not discount a certain multiplicity within her situated subject - the kind of multiplicity that has been associated with the fractured, schizophrenic psychology of postmodern identities, commonly figured as related to a loss of agency. This is interesting because, without losing sight of a sense of human agency, Haraway is able to embrace aspects of postmodern, technological existence that have previously been argued to remove the human, as agent, from the equation. Equally, of course (especially given the history of the body used as a naturalising metaphor for social arrangements), Haraway's, multiple 'situated subject' is also suggestive of her vision of a more equal society, a more polyvocal society, in which a range of viewpoints (some of which may prove paradoxical) are deemed important to her notion of an 'objective' perspective as central to a defining of social orchestrations.

In my opening comments to this introduction I pointed out that the figure of the cyborg has come to be applied to, or to encompass, all manner of human/machine interaction. To an extent, part of the reason that the cyborg construct has been discharged so liberally is not simply due to the possible success of the cybernetic project (as certainly this project can be read as an attempt to construct a vast and omnipotent meta-language) but lies in the fact that it can operate so vividly on both a metaphorical and literal level. As Haraway contended, in her 'manifesto', a cyborg is 'a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction'.⁵⁵ With this in mind she has argued that 'technoscience', rather than being seen as neutral, pure, in both its explanatory models and practical application, should be understood as deeply embedded within 'all material-semiotic processes'. By way of example, she states that:

The chip, seed, or gene is simultaneously literal and figurative. We inhabit and are inhabited by such figures that map universes of knowledge, practice and power.⁵⁶

She goes on to argue that:

The collapse of metaphor and materiality is a question not of ideology but of modes of practice among humans and non-humans [...] The heterogeneous practices of technoscience are not deformed by some ontologically different 'social' bias or ideology from the 'outside'. Rather, biology is built from the 'inside' [...] into materialized figurations that can only be called life as it is really lived.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Haraway, p.106.

⁵⁵ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (Free Association Books, 1991), p.65.

⁵⁶ Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Haraway, p.97

Like some of the fiction writers that Haraway references, by acknowledging and working within this imploded space, or interzone, (between what is perceived as real/material and what is seen as fictional/narrated) she is not only able to reveal scientific constructs but is also able to bring to the table alternative readings/understandings to an existing scientific story - as well as indicate a variety of alternative stories that may well affect material futures. As she has stated:

Stories are not "fictions" in the sense of being "made up". Rather, narratives are devices to produce certain kinds of meaning. I try to tell stories to tell what I think is the truth - a located, embodied, contingent, and therefore real truth.⁵⁸

In this way, Haraway has succeeded in disrupting a potential master narrative by inserting her own localised stories/readings, as well as those of others, into the Cybernetic paradigm.

In the last section I briefly explored how Cyberpunk novels appear to transgress previously established boundaries in their examination of what it means to be human in this period of postmodernity. In this way, Cyberpunk writing can be understood as a genre that seeks to destabilise the dualistic order, which underpins conventional standards of classification. However, as Claudia Springer has deftly pointed out:

While popular culture texts enthusiastically explore boundary breakdowns between humans and computers, gender boundaries are treated less flexibly'.⁵⁹

She goes on to note that in many examples of Cyberpunk, 'cyberbodies, in fact, tend to appear masculine or feminine to an exaggerated degree'. Springer, therefore, concludes that 'Cyborg imagery has not so far realized the ungendered ideal theorized by Donna Haraway'.⁶⁰

Although her examples, at this point, are drawn from comic books, in which the visual compositions predominate, (her definition of Cyberpunk extends to a variety of mediums and is not confined to the written novels) the same criticism has been made of the novels. For instance, in looking at Gibson's work, as mentioned earlier, even though his cyborgs, in many respects, appear transgressive, this is not necessarily the case when close attention is paid to how gender is constructed in his novels. In a simple comparison of Molly and Case, the question might be asked as to how far Gibson really moves from what can be understood as

⁵⁸ Haraway, p.230.

⁵⁹ 'The pleasure of the Interface', *Screen*, V.32, N.3, (Autumn, 1991), pp.303-323, (p.308).

⁶⁰ Springer, p.309.

very orthodox markers of a gendered subjectivity. Molly, although newly configured as a powerful fighting force, due to her bodily enhancements, is still the 'meat' in the story. Put another way, Molly is largely defined by her body; a body which was, prior to transformation, sold as a sexual object for the gratification of male clients - she was a 'working girl' before she became a 'fighting girl'. So, even though Molly can be said to have transgressed gender boundaries in using her body as a fighting tool, she remains defined by it in terms of the role she performs within the narrative. Then there is Case, who at first glance seems to challenge a traditional model of masculinity in the simple fact that he embraces his cyborgian existence. This may not be the defensive, boundaried, version of a conventional masculinity but his constant desire to transcend his 'meat', his body, by jacking into the Matrix, brings him into alignment with the humanist subject - transcendence, in one form or another, being one of the central tenets of the humanist subject and, not coincidentally, a strong marker of masculinity.

Anne Balsamo makes a similar claim, in terms of gendered oppositions in Cadigan's *Synners* 'whereby the female body is coded as a body-in-connection and the male body, as a body-in-isolation'.⁶¹ However, Balsamo reads this divisionism as 'an alternative narrative of cyberpunk identity that begins with the assumption that bodies are always gendered and always marked by race'.⁶² In this sense, she appears to be making a case for the way in which the cyborgian bodies in *Synners* not only relate to current gendered and racial markers but can be understood as worldly bodies - by this I mean that they are not innocent bodies, untouched by a political awareness of material-semiotic construction. In another sense, perhaps Balsamo is simply putting a more positive spin upon the way in which Cyberpunk, or indeed the cyborg, carries with it 'the shadow of the past' in its referencing of dualistic structures. However, I think where Cadigan's characterizations differ from Gibson's is in their level of self-reflexivity. In particular, the female characters in *Synners* consistently question and comment upon their own involvement with technology and with other cyborg characters. Whereas Gibson's characters can be read as referring to cinematic archetypes (the 'cowboy', the 'noir' detective, the 'femme fatale' etc.), many of Cadigan's characters are

⁶¹ 'Feminism for the Incurably Informed', *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, Mark Dery ed., (Duke University Press, 1993), p.692.

⁶² Balsamo, p.692.

consistently revealed as aware of the way in which they can be seen/read and, consequently, seem more seriously playful with their own identities. Balsamo states that, in *Synners*; Cadigan '*illuminates* the gendered differences in the way that the characters relate to the technological space of information'.⁶³ I would go further by suggesting that Cadigan appears to foreground her own gendered constructions in a way that highlights the theatrical; that highlights gender as performed and as central to the characters' performance within the narrative. This becomes particularly evident when Sam-I-Am starts to wonder about Art Fish's gender. Although Sam seems initially unconcerned by the AI's (Artificial Intelligence) gender she gradually becomes aware that she has assumed Art to be masculine and even finds herself flirting with him. It is unclear as to whether Art's 'personality' or later screen appearance actually does change or whether this is simply a projection of Sam's own libidinal desires (Sam seems aware of both of these possibilities). However, her desire to see Art as masculine or, perhaps, Art's decision to become an object of desire for Sam can certainly be read as a kind of heterosexual performance on the part of the two characters - one of which is a female cyborg and the other of which is a constructed consciousness.

So in certain Cyberpunk novels it appears that a gendered divide remains; perhaps, indicating this dichotomy still provides a foundation upon which other divisions are built. Alternatively, it could be that a gender opposition, having previously underpinned other forms of narrated opposition, becomes, in these texts, a manifest reference to the very dualisms that the cyborg challenges.

THE CYBORG IN CELLULOID

The kind of gender divide that has been noted within Cyberpunk writing is even more obvious when it comes to looking at the way in which the cyborg is configured in filmic representations - especially those that emerged as Hollywood mainstream movies, at the same time as Cyberpunk, in the 1980s. The exaggerated bodies that Springer refers to in Science Fiction comics similarly abound in early Cyborg films. Samantha Holland, in an

⁶³ Balsamo, p.692, my emphasis.

article that concentrates on some of the most notable mainstream film examples of the 1980s and early 1990s, comments that:

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).⁶⁴

Where the cyborg is suggestive of a breakdown in dualities many of these mainstream film examples appear to emphasise duality by utilising the familiar generic convention of mapping the alien/human divide onto a given opposition. In fact, Constance Penley (writing at the end of the 1980s) argued that it had largely fallen to Science Fiction film to uphold 'the configurations of sexual difference required by classical cinema'. She goes on to state:

If there is increasingly less practical difference between men and women, there is more than enough difference between a human and an alien (*The Man Who Fell to Earth*, *Starman*), a human and a cyborg/replicant (*Android*, *Blade Runner*), or a human from the present and one from the future (*The Terminator*). In these films the question of sexual difference - a question whose answer is no longer 'self-evident' - is displaced onto the more remarkable difference between the human and the other.⁶⁵

This is certainly a strong argument, which is difficult to contest when confronted by many of those earlier, mainstream examples of the Cyborg movie. Many 1980s mainstream Cyborg films (along with a few examples of more recent mainstream films) appear to place a hyperbolically male cyborg alongside female human characters. For instance, in addition to Penley's examples, both *Robocop* (Dir: Paul Verhoeven, 1987) and the later *Universal Soldier* (Dir: Roland Emmerich, 1992) feature central male cyborgs partnered with human females. It seems that in utilising the tropes familiar to the Science Fiction film genre and in the light of anxieties in regards to the apparent erosion of traditional dichotomies, the Cyborg film emerged in a climate which sought to restore and shore up the boundaries and divides that drive the Hollywood drama.

In the wake of more recent films, in which it is common to have a range of featured cyborg figurations, Penley's argument could certainly be extended. Whilst oppositions may not

⁶⁴ 'Descartes Goes to Hollywood: Mind, Body and Gender in Contemporary Cyborg Cinema', *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows eds., (Sage Publications, 1995), p.159.

strictly be displaced onto the human/non-human (cyborg), many of these films appear to pit one *kind* of cyborg against another in ways that underline divisions based upon sex or race. Whilst this is an area that I will be exploring throughout this thesis, the following examples may indicate what I am referring to here. For instance, in *Johnny Mnemonic* (Dir: Robert Longo, 1995) our eponymous male hero is marked as a cyborg through the prostheses that he has had implanted into his brain (enabling him to carry vast quantities of data) and also by the way in which cybernetic technologies allow for him to 'jack' directly into the Net. On the other hand, his female partner (Jane) is cyborgized via the cybernetic technologies that enhance her bodily strength and skill. So a sex divide is underlined here in a way that is reminiscent of a traditional mind/body dichotomy - with Johnny standing for 'mind' and Jane for 'body'. A further example can be seen in a direct to video film called *Prototype* [Dir: Philip Roth, 1992] in which this somewhat literal mapping of a mind/body dichotomy onto opposing male and female cyborgs becomes even more manifest. In a reversal of *Johnny Mnemonic*, the female cyborg is marked through her direct access to the Net and the male cyborg through the bodily cybernetic enhancements he undergoes, which make of him a formidable and aggressive fighting force. In terms of racial differences, many of these films appear to retain and underline a self/Other dichotomy in a similar way. For instance, in *Virtuosity* (Dir: Brett Leonard, 1995) a black/white racial dichotomy is ostensibly upheld through the figuring of the cyborg hero and villain of the film. The black hero is cyborgized due to the replacement of his arm with a cybernetic prosthetic and the white villain is marked as a cyborg because he has been constructed from the human memories of several white serial killers. Therefore, once again, a mind/body dichotomy is used in the figuring of these two cyborgs to seemingly underline markers of racial difference. In *Strange Days* (Dir: Kathryn Bigelow, 1995) not only is a black/white opposition upheld, but also an opposition based upon sex. In this film the central white, male hero becomes a cyborg through his consistent use of an immersive cybernetic technology called 'Squid'. His female, black cohort is signaled to be more fully human (until the end of the film) due to her consistent refusal to engage with the 'Squid' technology. All of this may not be surprising, as many of the Cyborg films that emerged in 1990s appear to be more openly influenced by Cyberpunk.

⁶⁵ 'Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1990), p.123.

As has already become evident in my brief discussion of Cyberpunk writing, where one might think that cyborgization of humanity necessarily leads to an erosion of dualities surrounding gendered or racial divides, these are is often kept in play in these texts.

Having noted the predominance of the 'hyperbolic body' in films like *The Terminator* (Dir: James Cameron, 1984) and *Robocop*, there is still a sense in which these hyper-masculine heroes can be understood as complicating received notions of sex/gender. Science Fiction film has always been heavily associated with special effects technology and, in recent years, given the upsurge in documentaries charting their creation, their use has become even more discernible to the viewer. In other words, even those effects that may not be foregrounded, are, now, more than ever, celebrated and publicised. Science Fiction film has also, through its emphasis on special effects, been a highly self-reflective genre - often celebrating the very technologies that the narrative appears to warn against. My point here is that, even though a very traditional version of male subjectivity survives in this kind of cyborg representation, this may be seen to be undercut by the cinematic technologies that serve this figuration. The viewer, being made aware that the various feats carried out by these hyper-bodies (and even the way these bodies look) owes much to technological creation, may be led to question the supposedly natural traits and characteristics upon which the masculine subject has been built. In this sense, an obviously constructed masculinity may serve to undermine notions of an essential masculinity, as built upon the supposedly natural prowess of the male body. So the very spectacle of the cyborg here can be said to work against the way in which an individual narrative may seek to shore up sex/gender divides in these films. This is just one area (which will be covered in more detail in later analysis) where a certain ambivalence can be found in the seemingly extreme and highly reactionary figurations on offer in some of these early films.

The shift from the featuring of the lone male cyborg (which was so predominant in the 1980s mainstream films) to the figuring of a variety of cyborgs (in many of the mainstream 1990s films), can be tracked in terms of a change of emphasis from the spectacle of the cyborg body to a concentration on human interaction with, or via, Virtual Reality technologies. The earlier examples of the cyborg came out at a time when the spectacular, Blockbuster film

returned to prominence in Hollywood; the Blockbuster's emphasis on the 'look' of the film, special effects, stunning visuals, being echoed in characterizations that concentrated on visual elements rather than narrative role. In many of the most popular, later 1990s depictions (in films like *The Lawnmower Man* [Dir: Brett Leonard, 1992], *The Matrix* [Dirs: Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999] and *Johnny Mnemonic* etc.), although visual elements connected to characterization remain important, there seems to be a return of emphasis upon narrative - even if that return does not produce the linear constructions of the past but complicates conventional narrative structure. This could indicate one of the reasons why characterizations of the cyborg, in these later films, more readily foreground narrative role, bringing with it a more detailed concentration on (and I would argue foregrounding of) acting stylizations as indicative of the psychology of the character. However, a concentration on complex psychological aspects of cyborgian existence does not discount shifts away from what is commonly presented in cinema (especially in terms of performance) as 'normal' and 'abnormal', human psychological construction. I will be returning to this area later in this thesis, but the brief account above indicates that certain predominant changes in the way in which the cyborg is configured may be seen to fit into a broader, historically specific, film context into which the celluloid cyborg was born.

In exploring cyborg depictions it is my intention to stress the significance of intertextuality in my readings. Brooks Landon makes the case that Science Fiction film draws overwhelmingly upon past filmic images, 'since Hollywood filmmakers are much more familiar with other films than with SF writing'.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, he does acknowledge more traffic in the opposite direction by stating that Cyberpunk writing has been strongly influenced by Science Fiction film.⁶⁷ Although I take his point (a point that further reiterates the importance of the need to pay attention to cinema's versions of the cyborg), especially in the context of his argument regarding the way in which Science Fiction film has often been approached as a form of written to visual adaptation (as a poor cousin to Science Fiction writing), it can be very illuminating to view certain films alongside Cyberpunk writing - as

⁶⁶ "'There's some of Me in You": *Blade Runner* and the Production Realities of Adapting Science Fiction Literature into Film', *The Aesthetics of Ambivalence: Rethinking Science Fiction Film in the Age of Electronic (Re)production*, (Greenwood Press, 1992), p.47.

well as certain films alongside other films. In fact, Landon's terms of reference, in making this point, appear to be somewhat limited. By this I mean that he does not take into account contemporary, lower budget productions or the direct to video releases in making this assessment. Whilst he does make mention of some of the earlier, low budget, movies (those made in 1950s etc.) as influential in later Science Fiction film, he seems to have largely discounted direct to video releases in concentrating his argument around mainstream film or films that have attained a certain degree of popular appeal and success. This is also true of much of the recent academic work that looks at contemporary Science Fiction film along with the Cyborg movie. Direct to video releases like *Cyborg* (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1989), *Cyborg 2: Glass Shadow* (Dir: Micheal Schraeder, 1993), *American Cyborg* (Dir: Boaz Davidson, 1992), *Knights* (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1992), *Cyborg Cop* (Dir: Sam Firstenberg, 1992), *Cyborg Agent* (Dir: Richard Franklin, 1992), *Ghost in the Machine* (Dir: Rachel Talalay, 1993), *TC 2000* (Dir: T. J. Scott, 1993), *Heatseeker* (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1994), *Techno Sapiens* (Dir: Lamar Card, 1994), *Cyber Tracker* (Dir: Richard Pepin, 1994), *Cyber Tracker II* (Dir: Richard Pepin, 1995), *Grid Runners* (Dir: Andrew Stevens, 1995), and Albert Pyun's *Nemesis* series (1993-1996), have largely been ignored by academic film studies.⁶⁷ This thesis will attempt to redress this by also looking at some of the contemporary direct to video films. Moreover, it seems rather ironic that a high/low art division might prevail in Science Fiction film studies and I hope to prove that this is a mistake because, even though some of the films I have chosen to focus upon may be considered 'poor', they are, in certain respects, worthy of serious consideration. As will become clear in my analyses of these films, this is partly because they can be seen to offer alternative visions/enactings of the cyborg and because they often serve to reveal much about the higher budget, mainstream Cyborg movie.

Acting Cyborgs

⁶⁷ Landon, 'Classics and Clunkers: Why Science Fiction Film is not Science Fiction Literature and why that's not so bad', p.11.

⁶⁸ Springer does focus upon a direct to video release, *Eve of Destruction*, in the aforementioned 'The Pleasure of the Interface'. Penley also briefly refers to exploitation video films, based upon *The Terminator*, in the previously mentioned article 'Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia'. However, there remains much to gain in paying a lot more attention to the video market.

Images of the hyper-masculinized cyborg, along with more recent depictions of cyborgization in/of film, are pervasive and powerful. They have entered the popular imagination to such an extent that the filmic cyborg has become almost synonymous with the way in which people understand the very concept of cyborgian existence. Scott Bukatman rather boldly states, that '[c]inematic style [has] become[s] a part of social and gestural rhetoric, an integral part of the presentation of self in the era of terminal identity'.⁶⁹ He seems, in part, to be suggesting that the various behaviours and etiquettes acquired by subjects of a postmodern, technological society are highly influenced by cinematic portrayals. Given that the cyborg manifestly enacts a form of subjectivity that interacts with technology on the most intimate of levels, surely this would indicate that close attention to the way in which this figure is enacted and performed in cinema is very important. Bukatman's comments also serve to indicate a further level on which performance is important to our understanding of cinematic images. It seems that, in this panoptic era our self-presentations are not only becoming increasingly mediated by and through visualization technologies, but postmodern identities may also be, somewhat literally, bound up with various performed images - especially those presented by cinema. This is another reason why performance is so important in the Cyborg movie and will be crucial to the argument of this thesis. Presentation of the cyborg in film necessarily highlights how aspects of performance are currently part of postmodern living. Furthermore, the performing cyborg may serve to de-familiarise aspects of, supposedly, 'naturalistic' acting in film, therefore bringing into contention questions of authenticity in both the *real* and *reel* world.

So the cyborg in film can be seen to operate as a foregrounding device to indicate how an actor's cinematic portrayal is always already cyborgian. Having already mentioned how special effects can bring a certain ambivalence to the portrayal of exaggerated gendered positionings, on a further level, the actors involved in depicting a given cyborg can be understood, literally, as cyborg actors; their performance being so obviously enmeshed with the technological apparatus of the cinematic machine. Although ambivalences associated with the hyper-gendered cyborg have been well documented very little attention has been paid to the actual performances involved. It is true that, for instance, Schwarzenegger's

⁶⁹ Bukatman, p.43.

acting skills (or, as many would have it, lack of acting skills) are not brought to the fore in his playing of the Terminator, but is this a good enough reason for not paying close attention as to how this performance is achieved? How it may interact with the narrative? How his performance may or may not 'fit' with current acting styles? How, and in what ways, it may differ from supposedly 'naturalistic' acting stylizations? Although Schwarzenegger's performance can be aligned with the 'flat characterization' common to conventional Science Fiction writing I would contend that, when read alongside developments in acting technique, similar performances in the context of other films, ideas concerning a developing postmodern psychology, when understood in terms of an acting stylization it is certainly worthy of further investigation.

Richard de Cordova, in an article which addresses the lack of performance analysis in film studies as a whole, states that:

The examination of the ways that different genres circumscribe the form and position of performance in film is an important and underdeveloped area of genre studies.⁷⁰

He takes the examples of Melodrama and Film Noir as genres that foreground performance, in a variety of ways, and argues that these, in particular, cry out for a level of reading/analysis that takes performance strategies into consideration. His choices here are interesting because Cyborg films often reference Film Noir, suggesting that, in a co-option of some its devices, performance (both diegetically and non-diegetically) is being highlighted as an important issue. Of course, many critics have noted resemblances between Film Noir and recent Science Fiction movies but none that I know of have looked at the Cyborg film in alliance with Melodrama. In taking *The Terminator*, once again as an example, it is a focus upon performance that allows me to find many illuminating similarities between early Melodrama (along with its association with the Histrionic/'mechanical' style of acting of the time) and this seminal film. In fact, by following the various generic threads of this focus I come to argue (in my first chapter) that *The Terminator* can be read as a 'male melodrama' - which, I am aware, sits rather uncomfortably with its marketing definition as a Science Fiction/Action film.

⁷⁰ 'Genre and Performance: An Overview', *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, Jeremy G. Butler ed., (Wayne State University Press, 1991), p.117.

So, along with a great lack of analysis of performance techniques in film, there is also a great lack of analysis that focuses on exactly how the celluloid cyborg is performed. Recent studies concentrate more readily on the spectacular technological aspects surrounding the actor's performance rather than on the acting style employed. To a certain extent, in other areas of film study, this imbalance has been corrected, of late, by some fascinating analyses focusing upon star personas; studies in which the actor (along with various star performances) is viewed as a kind of semiotic intertext.⁷¹ However, although this work is very valid it still does not utilise performance theory or theories of acting to any great extent and certainly does not tend to concentrate upon the specificities of Science Fiction film.⁷² Actual theories of performance commonly remain confined to the domain of 'Theatre Studies' - meaning that potentially useful tools for deconstruction are ignored when it comes to film analyses. But surely a figuration that can be seen as enacting emerging forms of subjectivity could be usefully analysed through the filter of performance theory? As de Cordova points out, critics have tended to concentrate attention on the most 'pertinent features' of a genre.⁷³ He goes on to note that where performance is clearly foregrounded (as in the Musical film) some attention has been paid to the way it functions and how it is constructed. As implied above, simply looking to what are construed to be the most 'pertinent features' in Science Fiction film misses out on a fuller explanation of its workings. Furthermore, my brief discussion of performance in connection with generic characteristics also suggests that in many Cyborg films this aspect *is*, in fact, foregrounded. Bearing both the sides of my argument in mind, it is my contention that performance is a very 'pertinent feature' in Cyborg films, therefore making it surprising that it has not been a focus of discussion in previous analyses of some of these films. Performance, as such, may not always be brought to

⁷¹ See Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film, Stars and Society*, (Macmillan, 1988) and Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, (Routledge, 1994). These are two primary, and well respected, publications that deal with certain issues of performance surrounding the construction of 'star personas' and spectatorship.

⁷² A possible exception to this is Susan Jeffords' *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, (Rutgers University Press, 1994). In this publication Jeffords' uses semiotic analyses in an approach that aims to uncover the ideological underpinnings of certain male icons in cinema (a number of which are drawn from Science Fiction film). However, her approach, once again, concentrates on the narrative, dialogue and appearance of these stars. Her methods certainly seem appropriate to her study and particular focus but I still feel her readings might have been enriched had she paid more detailed attention to performance style.

⁷³ de Cordova, p.116.

prominence in the same way, or to the same effect, as those genres that de Cordova mentions, but many of the films I will be referring to nevertheless bring performance and surrounding issues to the fore.

Throughout this thesis, my discussions make clear some of the most notable instances when performance issues are at stake in the Cyborg film and there will also be times, as mentioned above, when a comparison with other generic devices proves to be revealing. For example, in *Alien: Resurrection* (Dir: Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1998) there are many moments when the narrative progression of the film is, seemingly, brought to a standstill. One of those is during the scene in which Ripley finds the cloned copies of herself in a laboratory. Although periods of pure spectacle are not uncommon in Science Fiction film (often serving to emphasize the technological achievements of special effects) this scene is characterized by the way in which full attention is given to Ripley's/Sigourney Weaver's body. As a result, the creation of her star persona and her past performances are brought into play here through the camera's lingering attention on the clones and Ripley's reaction shots. Of course, I will be going into further detail in my later reading of this scene (in chapter two) but my point is that a device that halts narrative flow, in a way that is so intimately self-reflexive, can be likened to those times in the Musical when the plot line appears to stop, or slow down, for the full expression of the 'performance numbers'. These highly framed moments for song and dance most directly reflect upon performance in the Musical film and, whilst there are clear generic differences perhaps a similar foregrounding device can be said to be in operation in *Alien Resurrection*.

What has been briefly covered above indicates some of the areas where a concern with performance can produce interesting readings, which, in turn, can further inform an understanding of cyborg figurations. But perhaps one of the most pivotal points, in looking at cyborg performance, lies in how it compares to modes of acting that have come to be associated with 'realism' in cinema. Certainly the most prevalent stylization in cinematic acting is known as 'the Method'. This style grew and 'evolved' along with American versions of cinematic realism and, in recent years, has become so potently dominant that, in some circles, film acting is seen as equivalent to the Method. It is often what are considered to be

forms of Method acting that have come to set the standards of what is thought of as 'good' or 'bad' acting in film. Obvious deviations from the Method style are, very often, automatically judged as non-naturalistic or are understood as emanating from poor execution or lack of skill on the part of the performer. In this sense, the Method style is central to perceived manifestations of 'normal' and 'abnormal' human behaviour and, as will become apparent, it is also central to the supposed expression of an essential self in acting. It therefore follows that a basic understanding of what is meant by the Method is necessary to some of the arguments set out in my later analyses. With this in mind I attempt to outline its development and current status as well as some of the central principles upon which Method acting has been built.

Acting with the Method

The man most associated with the development of the Method in America is Lee Strasberg. The Method, as a style and a mode of teaching acting skills, was largely based upon his understanding of Constantin Stanislavski's 'system' of acting and training regimes. As Jeremy G. Butler has pointed out, although Stanislavski's ideas had been utilised in America as far back as the 1930s:

It was not until the Method's impact on film acting in the 1950s that it mutated from an arcane procedure for training theatrical actors into a generally recognized element of popular culture.⁷⁴

Having set up 'the Group' (an ensemble of actors with which Strasberg worked to develop the style and produce early work), the later establishment of the 'Actor's Studio' (a school for Method acting which provided workshops etc. to professional actors) effectively meant that the style was being promoted as a general technique. By this I mean that the Method was not necessarily sutured to the performance of a particular text or acting company repertoire and although certain plays and writers came to be associated with the style it was popularly viewed as affiliated with individual acting stars. Learning the Method was therefore intended to provide a grounding ethos that the professional actor could apply to a variety of

⁷⁴ Opening comments to selections from 'A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method', reprinted in *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, Jeremy G. Butler ed., (Wayne State University Press, 1991), p.42.

commercial (and not so commercial) acting projects. The training offered by the Method became a site of public interest and much was made of the preparation given by individual actors/stars to the performing of a number of roles. This was in stark contrast to the context in which Stanislavski had first developed his system - which was created in conjunction with an ensemble company of actors who were working toward a 'naturalistic' style to serve a particular play script (most notably Anton Chekhov's work). The Method, on the other hand, was largely disseminated by individuals who were proponents of its techniques and who applied these, universally, to the acting task at hand. Following on from this, the commercial production climate of the 1950s may have, in part, encouraged a move away from text and further influenced the Method style's apparent stress on the body of the actor. Leo Braudy is one among many critics who have noted the Method's more bodily emphasis and he has argued that an analysis of the performance style of some of its major players reveals a shift away from an emphasis on text/script (as associated with the intellect) toward the 'feeling body'.⁷⁵

As stated above, this style has come to dominate the world of film acting but it is interesting to note that when it first came to prominence in the 1950s it was widely scorned by critics as anti-American. This was largely due to the fact that many of the most notable Method performances of the time involved the depiction of the anti-hero or heroes whose struggle for survival/success led them into violent confrontation with authority. Performances like Marlon Brando's 'Stanley Kowalski' in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Dir: Elia Kazan, 1951), James Dean's 'Jim' in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Dir: Nicholas Ray, 1955) and Paul Newman's 'Brick Pollitt' in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Dir: Richard Brooks, 1958) not only served to promote the Method style but also gave audiences an alternative view of American manhood. These characters were troubled, rebellious, and introspective; placed into an environment which left them alienated and alone in their battles against the 'powers that be'. In this way, the Method actor came to be seen as an anti-establishment figure who was set up against the conservative patriotism of this Cold War era. Furthermore, in looking back at key performances of the period, it becomes apparent that this style of acting was undoubtedly

⁷⁵ "'No Body's Perfect': Method Acting and 50s Culture', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, V.35, N.1, (1996), pp.191-215, (p.194).

bound up with depictions of masculinity and, indeed, alongside the growing dominance of the Method different versions of masculinity emerged.

There were aspects of the Method training and technique that lent themselves to the playing out of a characters' inner turmoil and conflict which, in part, explains why it became associated with ambivalent figurations (such as those listed above). In certain respects, it was as though these early Method actors were re-living their training strategies to reveal the grounds upon which their performance was given. Strasberg initially based the Method upon Stanislavski's first manual, *An Actor Prepares* (first translated and published in America in 1936), which described certain relaxation techniques, exercises in how to develop 'emotional memory' and how to focus performances in terms of the 'motivation' of the character. The following two manuals (*Building a Character*, *Creating a Role*), which placed greater emphasis on working in conjunction with the text, other performers and the rest of the 'mechanics' of performance, were not published in America until the late 1940s, early 1950s. This has been put forward, by commentators on the style, as the main reason why the Method's training seemed so isolated from text and why it promoted a very self-oriented (one might say therapeutic) form of introspection as a major part of its preparation and performance technique. This, in turn, may explain why early (and some subsequent) performances are often characterized as neurotic - the actor, in 'playing out' or revealing an 'inner' life is less inclined to give an 'orderly' performance. In other words, a performance which deliberately gives the impression of well rehearsed control, on the part of the actor and the character's diegetic interactions, is less likely to communicate the supposedly more chaotic, more emotional, 'inner' life of human being.

Following on from this, and having said that the Method was bound up with versions of masculinity, the shift that its emergence also came to represent was inflected with a sense of nationalistic identity. What was understood as a predominantly British or European style of acting had previously dominated and been largely adopted by American actors. So the Method, framed as a quintessentially American style and understood as portraying the inner depths of character, came to be seen as a rebellion against the more 'outward' and mannered style associated with British acting. In fact, this division between an 'inner'-American and

'outer'-British approach/style is still apparent in contemporary critical writing. For instance, in an article published in 1992, Raymond Durnat compares American film styles with British film acting and strongly implies that the latter produces superior results. He states that:

Bogarde developed Barrett the butler in *The Servant* (1963) by working from the outside inwards: starting with the clothes and selected traits observed in real people, then joining their characteristics with intuited inner attitudes. A total psychology isn't required: indeed, Stanislavskism easily becomes too encyclopaedic, crushing intuition, imagination, or, in its American versions, fixating on motivation, whereas acting is about experience.⁷⁶

There is a sense here that Durnat is also arguing that what he sees as the British approach actually produces more authentic results - in the sense that the actor in question portrays a less self-reflexive form of being. This is quite ironic, given that the Method has been so strongly tied to an idea of authenticity in performance, but it does operate to uncover how that 'authenticity' has come to depend upon a specifically American, male perspective. In order to fully understand how this has come to be, it is necessary to go in to a little more detail about the Method's early development and the models upon which it draws.

In picking up on some of Stanislavski's ideas, in the first manual, Strasberg designed exercises to give the actor a sense of their 'inner' emotional being. In particular, he developed something he called 'affective memory', a technique that allowed the actor to 'use' aspects of their own emotional being by channelling them into the performing of a role. He divided 'affective memory' into (what he termed) 'sense' and 'emotional' memory: it was through 'sense memory' that 'emotional memory' was supposedly stimulated. Once the 'emotional memory' had been stimulated or brought to the surface of the actors' consciousness, the actor was then trained to control the experience, to recall it and 'relive' it at will. In commenting upon what he determined to be 'good' acting, Strasberg stated, this 'occurred when a great actor worked unconsciously and was able to relive an overwhelming experience and express it in performance'.⁷⁷ It seemed that he considered that good acting should draw 'inspiration' from what usually remained unconscious in order to reveal a 'depth' of characterization

⁷⁶ 'Elegance Versus Vehemence', *Sight and Sound*, V.1, N.9, (January, 1992), pp.24-26, (p.26).

⁷⁷ Strasberg, 'A Dream of Passion', (reprinted in *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, Butler, Jeremy, G., ed., [Wayne State University Press, 1991], p.49).

required for a truly 'natural' performance. 'Affective memory' was therefore intended to induce the 'living' of a role, in that it relied on the actor being able to conjure up his own deep felt emotions. These emotions were then attached to the playing of a role through techniques that allowed the actor to 'use' the emotional state during each performance: it was this sense of a genuine living of a role that Strasberg considered to be the mark of a commendable performance.

The conception of being that Strasberg was drawing upon was also heavily influenced by a popularised version of Freudian psychoanalysis. In this sense, as has probably become obvious from the brief discussion above, the Method was based upon a 'depth modelling' of being, in which Freud's Id, Ego and Superego marked the layers that constituted the human psyche and by extension the reasoning behind a character's various levels of behaviour.

Marianne Conroy has noted that:

As a style, Method acting challenged both the foundation and the relevance of aesthetic judgement in that it laid such special emphasis on the effect of reality in performance.⁷⁸

In this way, Conroy notes how the Method style seemed to mark a shift away from acting as an artistic practice (at this time - associated with the 'mannered' British style) by stressing the 'realness' of performance. However, even though the Method style sits firmly within a 'realist' tradition (a tradition that had previously adopted the British style of acting), it could be said to take the tradition further. In this regard, the use of the psychoanalytic paradigm is crucial here - to the extent that both the formulation of the character to be played and the assumed psychological model upon which the training of the actual actor was based are supported by the Freudian paradigm.

The use of the Freudian paradigm (assumed to be an authentic and accurate accounting of 'human beingness') as a basis for both real and fictional character, along with the emphasis upon using the actor's own emotional experiences as the foundation of performance, also works to support the blurring between actor and character that emerged as part of the 'new star' of proceeding generations. Following on from this, as Braudy has commented, Method

performances could be seen as offering a variety of 'models of being'. According to Braudy, these 'models of being' also operated as 'social symbols' that could be imitated by a viewing public. In this regard, he argues that the growing popularity of the Method and the actors/stars associated with the style marked a shift away from an earlier Hollywood star system which had encouraged worship - the stars of the 1920s and 1930s were set up as images of perfection rather than emulation.⁷⁹ According to Braudy, earlier 'social realism' had also tended to furnish the audience with 'stock types' or archetypal figures whereas 'these newly-celebrated images of character implied that depths of feeling could be found in everyone'.⁸⁰ The Method actor was, therefore, seen to be enacting (or acting out) a popular understanding of what it meant to be human. The Method allowed for an individuality of human expression but this expression was understood to emanate from a universally applied paradigm of human beingness.

Of course, the Method style has, perceptibly, moved on since its 1950s heyday. For instance, Hal Hinson, in an article which attempts to outline developments in the Method over the last thirty years, comments on what he sees as Nick Nolte's, Robert Redford's and Gene Hackman's 'understated honesty and solidarity' of approach, alongside Dustin Hoffman's display of 'artifice' as the 'least naturalistic' of the Method stars. Hinson also looks to Paul Newman (an actor who has been associated with the 'Actor's Studio' since his early career) and finds that he is 'too sane - too solid - to play the alienated loners that Method actors specialise in'. In stark contrast he comments on how some of Al Pacino's performances are so 'inward' and 'self-concerned' that the audiences' 'involvement was superfluous - an invasion of privacy'.⁸¹ What Hinson appears to be establishing here are the variety of performances that one can now find under the rubric of the Method style. On the other hand, Hinson could be seen as outlining the degree to which the Method has a kind of hegemonic dominance, certainly in the minds of many film critics, in American film acting - the co-option of techniques from alternative styles coming to be swallowed up (and perhaps 'neutralised') by the Method school. However, in terms of more recent developments

⁷⁸ 'Acting Out: Method Acting, the National Culture, and the Middlebrow Disposition in Cold War America', *Criticism: a Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, V.35, N.2, (1993), pp.239-263, (p.247).

⁷⁹ Braudy, p.195.

⁸⁰ Braudy, p.196.

associated with the Method style Hinson's later observations are most telling. In his account of these contemporary presentations (bearing in mind that the article was published in 1984), he suggests that Robert Duvall is like 'a haiku artist trying to prune away the excess syllables' in performances that seem 'less an expression of feeling than of will', and he notes what he sees as an 'absence of thought' in De Niro's portrayals of 'the unconscious forces in our nature'.⁸²

Taking into account the Method's connection with psychological modellings and the 'realist' tradition in American film acting, any shift in stylization (whilst being tied to the portrayal of specific characters or an emerging 'set' of character types) that speaks to a specific historical moment, may indicate a shift in the very characterization of humanity. My argument here can be aligned with the idea that the fictional and real cannot be divorced from one another. As previously discussed, what can be construed as fictional constructions are closely tied to what is assumed to be real. With this in mind, I am saying that rather than assume that 'naturalistic' portrayals are based on some accurate and real accounting of 'human beingness' (in this case the Freudian model), these fictional characterizations can actually indicate changes in the very basis of what is assumed to be real. It then follows, given the ideological implications that have been associated with understandings of psychoanalytic paradigms, that character creation carries with a sense of agency. I am not trying to argue this idea in terms of a direct or simplistic kind of agency (in which an actor or system of acting, in promoting a particular mode of being, can directly effect change), but that contingency is foregrounded in performance.

Of course, in the case of Hinson's account, the shifts he appears to outline are also very much tied to a gendered mode of being - in that he is dealing with some of the most famous contemporary icons of masculinity. But, my point is that Hinson, knowingly or not, does relate a rather pertinent shift in acting stylization of the period - a shift from the rather more detailed, fussy and 'layered naturalism' of earlier Method actors toward a more simplified and, what I would call, empty stylization. Whilst this shift can certainly be seen as an

⁸¹ 'Some Notes on Method Actors', *Sight and Sound*, V.53, N.3, (Summer, 1984), pp.200-205.

⁸² Hinson, p.203.

extension of the Method style, and, therefore, can be read in association with a psychoanalytic modelling of humanity, I would contend that it also marks a significant move away from a 'depth' modelling of human being. For example, if De Niro's performances are understood in terms of a playing out of unconscious drives, it could be read that those drives have been, literally, brought to the surface. What Hinson reads as Duvall's 'pruning', rather than being seen as a search for 'essence', can be understood as an emptying out of emotional complexity, an absence of unconscious desires, in the rather mechanical playing out of singular motivations. In this sense, the very style of acting here may indicate a shift in the underlying model upon which a 'realistic' characterization is being built. This possibility is relevant to my study as I pay particular attention to a perceptible shift from a 'depth' to 'surface' modelling of the humanity (along with the various ramifications of such a shift) which is made especially apparent in the performance stylizations associated with the cyborg.

Agency for Change

At the heart of my decision to pursue a performance theme in this thesis, is the search for agency in a postmodern, cultural environment within which it is so often denied. For instance, as Douglas Kellner has pointed out (in his critique of Jean Baudrillard's work), a view of the postmodern subject as a simple consumer 'provides a rather limited, one-sided theory of consumption'. Kellner goes on to argue that consumption might also be a 'sphere of self-activity [...] for one's own ends' and that individuals can modify, transform and customize objects of consumption to suit their own needs and desires.⁸³ In a way, Kellner's argument articulates the two sides of a common debate about postmodernity itself: whether it offers more agency to more people or whether it removes agency, along with the removal of modernist forms of subjectivity. In some respects, these two extreme views of current postmodern existence reveal that modernist concerns are being applied to postmodern conditions, when it might be more useful to develop a postmodern theory of agency. George Ritzer comments that 'given their rejection of an interest in the subject and subjectivity, postmodernists often lack a theory of agency'.⁸⁴ This claim may well be true of some

⁸³ *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, (Polity Press, 1989), p.27.

⁸⁴ *Postmodern Social Theory*, (The McGraw-Hill Companies, inc., 1997), p.248.

postmodern theory, but this is hardly surprising given that postmodernism may be taken as challenging the very bedrock upon which human subjectivity has previously been founded. However, my earlier discussion of cyborgian narratives attempts, in part, to account for a (re)emerging interest, amongst postmodern theorists and producers of fictional work, in both agency and ideas of subjectivity. In certain situations this interest can be seen as a reactionary move back to more modernist models; in others it seems to mark a convergence between previously oppositional political stances and postmodern thinking. Beyond this, I believe, there are those who are attempting to articulate and describe certain forms of agency available, or formed, within a postmodern environment. Linda Hutcheon, for instance, provided a relatively early account of the nature of the political in postmodernism. Whilst many theorists appeared to be arguing that postmodern culture was not concerned with politics, or political agency, Hutcheon's account puts political constructs at the centre of her investigation: for her 'representation always has its politics'.⁸⁵ Whilst some critics have taken the ambivalent double-coding, common to postmodern constructs, as indicative of an evacuation of political concerns, Hutcheon reads postmodern culture in terms of how it challenges 'the notion of representation in the verbal and visual arts'.⁸⁶ Hutcheon, as a feminist, sees that certain postmodern concerns do intersect with feminism and, although she is at pains not to conflate feminism and postmodernism, she points out that the former has had a powerful impact upon the latter.⁸⁷ I would also add that, in more recent years, postcolonial theory has both taken up certain postmodern perspectives and, conversely, impacted upon postmodern theory and culture. Even though I am primarily concerned with what I would term the synergy of feminism and postmodern theory in this introduction (in an attempt to explore and explain ideas of agency here), chapter three of this thesis specifically looks at issues of race and the cyborg. In this chapter I refer to postcolonial-postmodern theory to explore how this is played out in certain cyborg figurations. But, to return to Hutcheon's perspective, I would also say that in more recent years there has been less of an apparent separation of feminism from postmodern theory - some feminist theorists are now so adept at using the tools of postmodernism that their perspective has become accepted as thoroughly postmodern. In other words, the one becomes seen as inseparable from the other.

⁸⁵ *The Politics of Postmodernism*, (Routledge, 1989), p.168.

⁸⁶ Hutcheon, p.viii.

⁸⁷ Hutcheon, p.142.

Haraway's work stands as a good example of the kind of postmodern theory I am talking about and she also offers a tentative working through of, what I would see as, a postmodern theory of agency. By this I am referring to the way in which she is able to suggest a melding between the constructed and the real, between the discursive and the material, and the way in which her ideas regarding a kind of 'situated objectivity' can be read as offering a form of subject related agency that accounts for some of the shifts apparent within postmodernity. To argue this further and to reveal how this connects with performance theory, a return to the advent of the Method may be useful here.

Conroy has argued that the early Method actors can be understood as social agents that 'confused a categorical distinction between autonomous creators of culture and dependent interpreters of culture'.⁸⁸ Her comments here are framed within an argument in which she basically suggests that the Method actor may have marked a move away from modernist high/low art distinctions. However, there are a number of other ways of understanding this statement, and one interpretation can be linked to the Method's use of a psychoanalytic model of human being. By this I mean the way in which Freudian psychoanalysis posits a subject who is partially controlled by unconscious desires or drives - to an extent, any repression of desire can also be seen as a response to dominant social codes of conduct. In terms of cultural products then, Conroy's 'dependent interpreter' becomes, partly, a product of the social and cultural world into which they were born. So the Method actor of this period acts out a version of subjectivity which may deny total autonomy - on both a cultural and psychological level. However, even though the Method actor can be said to be promoting a psychological model of humanity that implicitly questions autonomy, this very acting out suggests degrees of agency on the part of the performer. For instance, given the training regime I have described, it is possible to see the degree to which individual actors become their own authors of the unconscious - after all they are encouraged to be their own analysts in the creation of character. On the other hand, the Freudian model, posited as a universal paradigm, seems to work against the idea that the actor can attain the kind of autonomy which would previously have been associated with individual agency. This paradox, or split, in human identity marks the Freudian subject as both 'lived' and 'living' and, obviously, offers

⁸⁸ Conroy, pp.248-249.

a challenge to ideas of fully autonomous agency. But does this have to mean that agency, in association with an individual, disappears altogether in a being who is either ruled by the id, or who is totally, discursively constructed? Instead, could it not mean that ideas about how agency (both individually and in terms of institutions and groups) operates in a given social environment are changing?

In bearing this in mind, I would like to reiterate that I am not attempting to re-invent a modernist or humanist ideal of agency (which relies on unambiguous distinctions) but I see no reason why the concept of agency should be dumped by an understanding of postmodern subjectivity that does not allow for it. I also do not accept a version of postmodernity that assumes that human beings cannot be seen as active mediators of meaning. For instance, agency can be assumed by human beings through the taking up of a powerful, socially inscribed role - just as it can be assumed in the creating of a social role which enables a form of agency. This is not to discount the extent to which discourses may be the enablers of agency - but it is also not to discount a certain contingency, at this level, in which individuals/groups can provide negative feedback that impacts upon dominant ideals. Agency does not, wholly, reside within discourses, just as it does not, magically, emanate from a totally autonomous individual: it seems more accurate to say that, at present, agency can be seen to be brought about in a confluence of both - it can be currently thought of as locatable in the feedback loop between discourses and beings.

Certainly, Hutcheon appears to see a kind of feedback loop between cultural practices and the exercise of political power within postmodern culture. In fact, she uses the example of feminist performance art as having had a tremendous impact, in recent times, on the way in which subjectivity is currently configured and represented in postmodernity.⁸⁹ Similarly, Judith Butler's work has made use of ideas of performance and performativity to extend the sex/gender deconstruction project that has become an important part of feminist theory. Butler's earlier work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, sought to destabilise traditional notions of sex and gender in a variety of ways: most notably through challenging the naturalised link between the two (particularly evident in her accounts of

⁸⁹ Hutcheon, pp.142-143.

'drag' performance), in emphasising how sex/gender is constructed (largely through iterative repetition) in discourse, and by indicating areas in which 'subversive repetition' may challenge and, possibly, alter the course of a dominating discourse.⁹⁰ In a later interview she talks about the ways in which this first book was taken up and popularised. She goes on to say: 'I don't think that drag is a paradigm for the subversion of gender'⁹¹ and suggests that her later publication, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, offers a more complex accounting of the links between the discursive and the lived, material world.⁹² Butler also comments that she suspects that her second book will prove less popular and, although not clearly stated, it seems that the reason for this hinges on ideas of agency. For instance, she implies that some have assumed that drag performance alone (and by extension all performance) offers a direct, immediate and literal way in which to undermine dominant notions of sex/gender. According to Butler, if thought of in this way, this fails to take into account the constraints under which performance operates - constraints that actually create the conditions which makes performance possible. Her position on this is most simply elucidated by the distinction she makes between performance and performativity. Butler reminds her reading audience in *Bodies that Matter* that performance assumes a subject whereas performativity, as the iterative power within discourse and cultural politics, contests the idea of the subject. She further explains that:

Performativity describes [the] relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, [the] turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure.⁹³

Therefore, she is articulating a form of agency that may well be linked to the performance of an intentional political action but that cannot, necessarily, be thought of as having direct, performative, results - particularly in terms of contestatory practices. So in an apparent tension between whatever is thought of as the subject and discursive practices, agency can be found in a constant feedback loop between the two. So, although Butler has felt the need to

⁹⁰ (Routledge, 1990).

⁹¹ 'Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler', *Radical Philosophy*, V.67, (Summer, 1994), pp.32-39, (p.33).

⁹² (Routledge, 1990).

⁹³ Butler, (Routledge, 1993), p.241.

stress, what I would term as, a less 'energetic' form of agency in connection with performers/performance, I want to stress that this does not mean that performance is a totally ineffective tool for subversion, for change; or that analysis of performance strategies does not also bring with it the opportunity to detect a certain form of agency in operation (whether this be seen as contestatory or not). Butler, in her most recent book, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, offers a further working through of her ideas. Here she states that:

The performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject *formation*, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated.⁹⁴

In bearing her above account in mind, what I want to stress is that, like Butler, I am not arguing that the agency I am locating within performance practices offers some kind of direct or overarching performative power - rather that agency exercised through performance offers glimpses of the performative in action. Along with this, an analysis of the forms of agency possible, through and in performance, may also serve to locate how certain pressures are brought to bear on performative operations and, indeed, may refer to the changing ways in which those pressures can be exercised.

The above discussions are intended to serve as a backdrop to the more detailed analyses to follow. Along with providing a brief mapping of the terrain, in looking at images of the cyborg in cinema, this introduction has been tailored to promote my most central, theoretical concerns. I will be referring back to certain theories and ideas throughout the following chapters and will also introduce other theoretic links and paths in connection with my readings of the Cyborg film. However, in developing more specific ideas and areas of study in connection with the figuration of the cyborg, it is also intended that the introduction provide a reference point to ground these discussions.

⁹⁴ (Routledge, 1997), p.160, Butler's emphasis.

The opening chapter of this thesis serves two main purposes. As the title suggests, I am specifically looking at the interaction of masculinity and the cyborg: from the hyperbolic representations in films like *The Terminator*, *Robocop* and *Universal Soldier* to the more recent emergence of the psychologically complex cyborg in films like *Johnny Mnemonic* and *The Lawnmower Man*. However, this chapter also serves to chart some of the arguments covered by well known critics and theorists; thereby indicating some of the main theoretical positions, that have been established since the 1980s, concerning the advent of the cyborg in film. It is partly for this reason that I have chosen to focus upon popular, mainstream examples of the Cyborg movie here - although it does not seem coincidental that so many of these feature male cyborgs. In this respect, the chapter can also be seen to lay the groundwork for forthcoming chapters; particularly in terms of later, comparative readings between the mainstream films, direct to video releases and less well-known examples. Alongside my efforts to build textual foundations for later analyses, this chapter also seeks to approach some of these films in a different way than has previously been undertaken. The main difference in my approach to these oft critiqued films is the way in which I link the portrayals of masculinity to past performance practices, particularly in connection with previously established genres. I then move on to discuss more recent performance theories in an effort to shed light on some of the shifts in performance style apparent in the Cyborg movie. So, as with all my chapters, there are several, interwoven elements at play here, but it is my hope that what begins to emerge is an enlightening analysis of the intersection of masculinity, technology and performance apparent in these cyborg figurations.

Chapter two, by contrast, concentrates on the ways in which the cyborg becomes amalgamated with various versions of femininity. In a similar fashion to the preceding chapter, I also keep several argumentative strands in play here, through which I hope to reveal connections (and clashes) between gender configurations, performance styles and the depiction of cyborgian technologies in these films. Beginning with, what could be construed as, the literal birth of the cyborg in the film *Demon Seed*, I go on to look at some mainstream examples of female cyborgs (such as the Borg Queen in *Star Trek: First Contact* [Dir: Jonathan Frakes, 1996] and Ripley in the *Alien* series). Along with a particular emphasis on performance techniques, I also discuss the ways in which these mainstream examples are

often represented in alignment with the codes and conventions of the Horror film genre. In reference to the work of Barbara Creed and the 'monstrous feminine' I ask why these representations should be framed in such a different way from those discussed in the previous chapter. For instance, this difference in aesthetic approach becomes noticeable in a comparison both between films that figure central male or female cyborgs as well as within a single film in which both male and female cyborgs are represented. Then I go on to look at some of the instances in which the female cyborg can be read in alignment with what Yvonne Tasker calls the 'female action heroine', and what I have come to term the 'female hero'. I look at the ways in which these figurations adopt many of the devices and visual aspects of their male counterparts in some of the Science Fiction/Action movies covered in chapter one, and explore the ramifications of this co-option. I also focus on the differences apparent between the male and female 'action cyborg' and ask why it should be that so many of these 'female hero' cyborgs seem confined to the direct to video marketplace.

In chapter three, although gender constructs do come into play here, the emphasis is placed on the way in which race and the cyborg has come to be depicted in recent years. As with the previous chapter, this is divided into two main sections: the first concentrating on the representation of 'black' or Afro, West Indian/American cyborgian characters and the second looking to the ways in which the orient, and the oriental character, has come to be configured in connection with the cyborg. Once again, many of the films I refer to can be categorised as lower budget, independent, less popular movies or come from the direct to video market. In fact, a latter section of the chapter concentrates on the work of one of the most prominent direct to video directors of Cyborg films - Albert Pyun. The emphasis on his films here can be seen in connection with a more overall look at, what I have come to call, the Martial Arts/Cyborg film. It is also within this framework that I carry out further intertextual readings of mainstream films like *Mortal Kombat* (Dir: Steven De Souza, 1995), *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* (Dirs: Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) in comparison with a series of direct to video releases. Whereas the previous two chapters had concentrated on what could be called generic intertextuality, here my readings are intended to more fully indicate the kind of traffic between mainstream and direct to video films. Along with some illuminating comparative reading I also further explore the kind of 'feedback loops' apparent

between these various movie market places. Alongside this, the chapter also offers the opportunity to tap into performance practices that do not emanate from the Western world and it is my hope that this may, tentatively, suggest links between the styles evident in the films dealt with in previous chapters and those apparent in the more racially inflected, Cyborg movie.

In my final chapter, the performance theme that runs throughout the thesis is more fully and manifestly developed. This is achieved through a focus upon the work of David Cronenberg. The chapter is basically split into two main sections in which the films *Crash* (1996) and *eXistenZ* (1999) are, respectively, analysed. Here many of the themes and findings of the previous chapters come together and, although a certain amount of intertextual reading is undertaken, it is my intention that some of my analysis be read in conjunction with previous chapters. It is also here that I more fully explore some of the implications of cyborgian representations in terms of subjectivity and how this is played out both through and in the performance stylizations of these two films. A further point of interest, in regard to the way in which this chapter is structured, is to note how the division between the earlier, body-spectacle cyborg and the later psycho-cyborg (particularly evident in mainstream Cyborg movies) is also played out in these movies: with *Crash*, ostensibly emphasising bodily aspects of cyborgization and *eXistenZ* focusing upon the psychological implications of Virtual Reality technologies. In this respect, the chapter also offers the opportunity to look at some alternative enactings of the cyborg that both refer to and move away from the examples of previous chapters.

CHAPTER 1: MASCULINITY AND THE CYBORG

In recent years discussion and debate has emerged concerning the advent of the figure of the cyborg in Science Fiction cinema. Many of the most familiar films to feature cyborgs have also revealed an overwhelming concern with images of masculinity. In fact, the majority of the early mainstream Cyborg films, featured lone, supremely masculine, super-aggressive, male cyborgs. These images, which largely emerged in American cinema in the 1980s, presented the viewer with highly exaggerated versions of masculine subjectivity. Critics who tackled the likes of *The Terminator* (Dir: James Cameron, 1984), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Dir: James Cameron, 1991), *Robocop* (Dir: Paul Verhoeven, 1987) and *Universal Soldier* (Dir: Roland Emmerich, 1992), had much to say about the hyper-masculinized heroes and anti-heroes that rampaged through these films. For some these muscled maniacs represented a vision of threatened masculinity, the somewhat hysterical images on offer simply signalling the degree of perceived assault upon the masculine subject. In other words, these shored up and fortified figures of masculinity were often read as defensive. This is strangely ironic given that the very concept of the cyborg suggests a being with far more fluid boundaries than has been previously associated with masculinity. However, this might be the reason why it seemed so necessary to re-establish, in such a prominent fashion, the traditional traits and confines associated with the most extreme warlike and aggressive forms of masculine subjectivity.

In talking about some of these early examples I will be covering a number of familiar arguments. I feel it is important, in an initial mapping out of the territory, not to ignore the impact that these figurations have had on both the popular and academic view of the celluloid cyborg. Whilst I will be setting out and re-evaluating some of the ideas put forward in early academic work on the topic, I will also be introducing the more unusual focus on performance - which represents an ongoing line or theme throughout this thesis. In looking at critical engagements with some of these early Cyborg films it is notable that many theorists have concentrated their efforts upon narrative and spectacle, especially in a consideration of issues surrounding gender and sexuality. What appears to be lacking is any detailed analysis of how this figure is actually performed. If performance is covered at all it is in terms of the cyborg as an object of pure spectacle; largely ignoring

movement, gesture and vocal qualities. The actor's body (in terms of its surface appearance) becomes central to many discussions and although I am not suggesting that the body is not also pivotal to performance practices, by paying more attention to actual performance (along with theories of performance) a clearer, more complex and 'richer' picture emerges as to just what is at stake in the way in which the cyborg is being played out. I believe this focus is crucial to developments in thinking about the Science Fiction genre, and most particularly recent Science Fiction film.

As outlined in the introduction, theories of performance, of one kind or another, have recently become central to an understanding of the subject's position in the postmodern world. For instance, I have already introduced the way in which Judith Butler's work has drawn upon certain instances of social and political performance and I have also suggested how Donna Haraway's 'manifesto' can be understood as a conscious form of rhetorical (albeit ironic) performance. However, what has been missing from work that concentrates either upon Science Fiction or upon fictions of science has been a closer inspection of actual, framed performance, within the entertainment field. I would suggest that this focus not only operates to further deconstruct notions surrounding the nature(s) of human subjectivity but may also work to take recent academic arguments onto a new level. This should become particularly clear in chapter four, in which I specifically scrutinise performance aspects and its links to present day, postmodern subjectivity. So, although each chapter is intended to be accessible in isolation from other chapters, the thesis can be understood as building up to chapter four, especially in terms of the development of performance issues as linked to the Science Fiction genre. Seen this way, this first chapter operates to lay some of the groundwork whilst also introducing a number of new perspectives on issues brought up by the figuring of the male cyborg.

Certainly, the earlier Cyborg films (as with some of the more recent Cyborg films) can be understood in allegiance with the New Hollywood Blockbuster movie that appeared in the late 1970s and 'came of age' in the 1980s. According to Thomas Schatz these marked a significant departure from classical Hollywood films, in that not only was there a greater stress placed on sheer spectacle but there was also more 'emphasis on plot over

character'.¹ Schatz goes on to say that in classical style, Hollywood films (in which he includes a number of films that he terms Blockbusters - like *The Godfather* [Dir: Francis Ford Coppola, 1972] and *Jaws* [Dir: Steven Spielberg, 1975]):

Plot tended to emerge more organically as a function of the drives, desires, motivations, and goals of the central characters. In *Star Wars* and, its myriad successors, however, particularly male action-adventure films, characters (even "the hero") are essentially plot functions.²

Many of the Cyborg films of the 1980s can be considered Blockbusters - whether they were high budget films intended for broad, hit status, or whether they were surprise successes that reached Blockbuster status. Therefore, the emphasis on spectacle in these films can be partially explained as conforming to the 'Blockbuster' aesthetic that emerged at this time. However, it is interesting that Schatz refers to *Star Wars* (Dir: George Lucas, 1977) as the pivotal film here because, as mentioned in the introduction, it is not uncommon to find a stress on concepts and futuristic technologies, above characterization, in traditional Science Fiction writing. So the 'flatter' characterizations common to much Science Fiction provides an opportunity to develop visual effects and bodily spectacle as well as concentrating on the technologies on display (whether these be diegetic, non-diegetic, or both). Along with this, given that the vast majority of the Cyborg films of this period were also marketed as Action movies, it is not surprising that the cyborg is represented in terms of how he 'functions' within the narrative. The Action genre is a major (if not *the* major) popular genre in Hollywood, evidenced by the number of sub-genres associated with it. This genre has classically conformed to traditional structures in which binary dichotomies and distinctions operate to provoke the dramatic action of the narrative. The function of a given character is, at its most basic, uppermost within the conventions of the genre. Furthermore, if traditional dichotomies are seen as predicated upon a male/female (masculine/feminine) division then it is possible to understand this stress upon character function, in the New Hollywood Blockbuster, as a very conservative development, which seeks to re-establish conventional, gendered, 'spheres of action' in a given narrative. However, deconstructive analyses of some of the cyborg heroes/anti-heroes, which have focused on the spectacle of their bodies, have succeeded in revealing a more ambivalent picture in terms of the cyborgs' gendered

¹ 'The New Hollywood', *Film Theory Goes To The Movies*, Jim Collins et. al. eds., (Routledge, 1993), p.23.

² Schatz, p.23.

construction. As Yvonne Tasker points out, the very fact that these spectacular male bodies are set up for visual scrutiny can be seen to problematize traditional gendered identity - particular in terms of more conventional cinematic viewing constructions that position the female/feminine body as that which is to be openly gazed upon.³ In this way, the spectacular male body can be thought of as feminized within these conventions. Whilst there are certainly moments in some of these films when this can be seen to be offset by displays of extreme violence (something which I will be exploring in greater detail in connection with my following reading of *The Terminator*), the majority of these early Cyborg films appear to encourage a very consistent gazing upon the male cyborg body in question. Of course, the fact that these male characters are narratively consigned cyborg status might serve to indicate a certain sexual/gendered ambiguity. In other words, this can be seen as the 'excuse' which allows for such an open look at the body of the male hero/anti-hero, in that they are not marked as fully male/masculine, human subjects. On another level, by applying some of Schatz' ideas concerning the Blockbuster to the emergence of the cyborg in cinema, this figuration can be understood as 'ideal', given the broad marketing strategy associated with these films. For instance, as Schatz points out of *Star Wars*:

The seemingly one-dimensional characters and ruthlessly linear chase-film plotting are offset by a purposeful incoherence which actually "opens" the film to different readings (and readers), allowing for multiple interpretive (sic) strategies and thus broadening the potential audience appeal.⁴

So, perhaps, the cyborg, along with this figuration's seemingly inherent ambiguities (underlying even the most extreme vision of rampant masculinity) may be seen as functioning to further 'open' the film to a multitude of readings (and readers). This return to the 'flatter' characterizations, associated with much Science Fiction writing and many a 1950s Science Fiction 'B-movie', in association with the cyborg, need not necessarily be taken as a simple re-establishing of traditional binary oppositions in a

³ See Tasker's chapter 'Body in Crisis or Body Triumphant', in which she outlines the various approaches that have been taken in terms of the spectacle of the male body in association with 'gaze theory' in academic cinema studies. Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*, (Routledge, 1993), pp.109-131.

⁴ Schatz, p.23.

recovery of older forms of narrative structuring.⁵

It may be more accurate to say that this kind of narrative structuring in which traditional oppositions are foregrounded, in the context of a contemporary cultural climate, actually sets them up to be questioned or challenged. For instance, although traditional dichotomies appear to be emphasized in a film like *Blade Runner* (Dir: Ridley Scott, 1982), as Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner argue:

The film deconstructs the oppositions - human/technology, reason/feeling, culture/nature - that underwrite the conservative fear of technology by refusing to privilege one pole of the dichotomy over another and by leaving their meaning undecidable.⁶

Forest Pyle has also noted, with particular reference to *The Terminator* series and *Blade Runner*, that:

These films rework the opposition inherited from Romanticism in some important ways, drawing attention to a deep instability, by turns compelling and disorienting, present in our attempts to distinguish and define the human from its other.⁷

Pyle goes on to describe how the 'visual excess' of such Cyborg films 'cannot be accommodated by the narrative demands of plot or reconciled with the film's thematics'.⁸ Although he also points out that many of these mainstream films recuperate the divisions that come under threat with the figuring of the cyborg, the visual abundance associated with the sight of the cyborg body seems to exceed the narrative closures that may attempt a restoring of traditional dichotomies.

Having outlined how the Cyborg film can be viewed in conjunction with the conventions of the Science Fiction genre, the Action movie and the Blockbuster, I do not think that

⁵ Not only is it possible to view these films as a 'return' to older narrative structures but also in terms of a 'return' to a 'cinema of attractions'. Brooks Landon, in drawing upon Tom Gunning's study of early cinema, argues that this is the case in much recent Science Fiction film. Whilst I do not completely agree with his notion that Science Fiction film and literature are, as he claims, 'twins separated at birth' - as I believe that the two can be usefully read in conjunction with one another - there is certainly a strong argument to suggest that recent Science Fiction film offers some of the same pleasures that were being presented in early cinema. Landon, 'Diegetic or Digital? The Convergence of Science-Fiction Literature and Science Fiction Film in Hypermedia', *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1999), p.35.

⁶ 'Technophobia', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1990), p.63.

⁷ 'Making Cyborgs, Making Humans', *Film Theory Goes To The Movies*, Jim Collins et. al. eds., (Routledge, 1993), pp.227-228.

these explanations are sufficient in an accounting of this figuration. If characterization traditionally arose as a way in which a humanistic perspective could be seen as central to a given narrative then perhaps Science Fiction's move away from this mode also indicates that what has previously been established as the 'human subject' has lost its primacy within a technological age. In addition, could not a lack of 'deep' characterization, instead of indicating an absence of human perspective simply have the effect of dispersing perspective? By this I mean that not only might this be seen as offering up a more writerly text to a given audience or reader, but as a disruption of the very notion of a single, unified (often uncontradictory) perspective? On the other hand, if many 1980s, mainstream Cyborg films appeared to concentrate their efforts on representing the 'externalities' of their central cyborg protagonists⁹ then maybe this simply marks a reluctance to engage with the emerging complexities of the psychological fragmentation suggested by the literal melding of human-machine? As far as performance is concerned it could also be said that all the spectator is really privy to are the externalities of a given character. But I am suggesting that attention to performance techniques and styles, in connection with this figuration, opens up a more fertile ground for analysis. For instance, if performance is taken to be the externalisation or expression of 'inner' states then we need to investigate whether certain codes have arisen within acting stylizations to enhance communication of these. It is this area, along with the discussion of emerging styles (that potentially disrupt notions of a 'deep', humanistic characterization and play out alternative, or emerging, characterizations of 'human beingness'), that allows for an expansion of analysis of the presentation of the cyborg.

Although the cyborg may be presented in very exhibitionist terms, often leading to a paring down of other aspects of performance, I would suggest that this is all the more reason to focus on the acting techniques employed, if only to look at how effects are achieved and why. Certainly, other aspects of performance are more foregrounded in some of the films that I concentrate on in following chapters, but a mapping out of the generic stylizations of some of the early mainstream films should lay down a useful basis

⁸ Pyle, p.229.

⁹ Linda Mizejewski describes this articulation of a kind of 'surface' aesthetic as an attempt to represent 'body as character'. Although I accept that this may well be the intention what I am saying is that deconstructive analysis should also pay attention to those areas that are not necessarily foregrounded in a given film. Mizejewski, 'Action Bodies in Futurist Spaces: Bodybuilder Stardom as Special Effect', *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, (Verso, 1999), p.164.

of comparison. For example, this chapter will provide a good background to my later discussion concerning a shift from a 'depth' to 'surface' modelling of human thinking and being as underlying some performance strategies. In chapter four, I do carry out some comparative analyses between a number of these mainstream films and the more alternative visions offered by two David Cronenberg films. Whether it is possible to assess if this apparent move to a 'surface' modelling represents a more general trend in film performance, or not, is beyond the scope of this thesis, but given that I argue that this shift is associated with recent technological developments (particularly computer technologies) it is appropriate to locate it within discussions of the Science Fiction genre.

As was outlined in the introduction, what we might call the mainstream Cyborg film has 'evolved' since the early 1980s - from those films that can be read in alignment with the most basic codes of the Action film to those that may be more accurately described as 'cyber-thrillers'.¹⁰ Along with this shift the early visions of the hard bodied cyborg have been largely displaced by the image of the slimmed down, 'jacked in', cyber-saviour, in films like *Johnny Mnemonic* (Dir: Robert Longo, 1995) and *The Matrix* (Dirs: Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999).¹¹ As well as discussing this alteration in generic emphasis, this first chapter is also structured to reveal a certain development in the figuring of the male cyborg. In addition, throughout this chapter analysis of performance strategies may help to erode those aspects of a humanistic subjectivity which have become sutured to gendered divides. In this respect gender becomes an important component of performance, either in terms of how it is seen to uphold or disrupt received notions. Certainly, my first film, *The Terminator*, has attracted much critical attention in terms of the way in which it purportedly articulates an extreme masculinist point of view, so it seems a good place to begin to illustrate and deal with some of the issues raised above. I will also be using this seminal film to indicate how a focus on performance can operate to 'open up' this movie even further - even to the point at which I question its predominant, generic classification. This will lead into a discussion of the performance stylistics associated with the male cyborgs of *Robocop* and *Universal Soldier* and my closing

¹⁰ This is a term borrowed from Claudia Springer, 'Psycho-Cybernetics in Film of the 1990s', *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., pp.203-218.

¹¹ These later 'cyber-thrillers', that deal with Virtual Reality technologies, can also be traced back to the earlier *Tron* (Dir: Steven Lisberger, 1982). In this film the central hero becomes trapped inside a computerized environment.

section will look at some more recent films in order to see how the shift to the 'cyber-thriller' has affected the performance of masculinity in association with the cyborg.

MASK-ULINITY AND *THE TERMINATOR*

The Terminator was made on a relatively low budget and also associates itself in technique and reference with the 'Slasher' sub-genre, however, it is largely understood as a mainstream movie, nowadays. In other words, its mainstream status built along with its popularity with a broad audience. Along with this, what could be understood as certain recuperative strategies in the Blockbuster sequel (*Terminator II: Judgment Day*) can be seen in the light of the first film's more 'humble' beginnings - *The Terminator* was a 'surprise hit', whereas the sequel was made on a big budget and intended for Blockbuster success. It is also a film that has attracted a tremendous diversity of readings. Lillian Necakov, in looking at the narrative construction of *The Terminator* cites it as a 'subversive and ideologically challenging' text,¹² whilst Margaret Goscilo advances her argument (in opposition to Necakov's reading) by drawing upon what she sees as reactionary elements within the film's plot.¹³ When dealing with the corporeal paradoxes of the cyborg, critics have equally claimed that its hyper-masculine form can be read as an aggressive backlash against feminism and as a sign of male anxiety or hysteria. For example, Claudia Springer (in an article published in 1993) notes that '[t]ransgressed boundaries, in fact, define the cyborg, making it the consummate postmodern concept'.¹⁴ However, in a later article she observes that it is the aggressively masculine figure of the violent and often highly 'armoured' cyborg that dominates much mainstream cinema. Here she states that the 'hyperviolent muscular cyborg in films is [a] symbol of misogynistic resistance to change'.¹⁵ Donna Haraway, having previously written of the liberatory value associated with the concept of the cyborg (in her famous 'manifesto'), comments in a later piece, that:

¹² Lillian Necakov, ' "The Terminator": Beyond Classical Hollywood Narrative', *Cineaction*, N.8, (Spring, 1987), 84-86, (p.84).

¹³ Margaret Goscilo, 'Deconstructing "The Terminator"', *Film Criticism*, V.12, N.2, (1987-88), 37-52.

¹⁴ 'The Pleasure of the Interface', *Screen*, V.32, N.3, (Autumn, 1991), 303-323, (p.306)

¹⁵ 'Muscular Circuitry: The Invincible Armoured Cyborg in Cinema', *Genders*, N.18, (Winter, 1993), 87-101, (p.92).

The Terminator is much more than the morphed body of a virile film star in the 1990s: the Terminator is the sign of the beast on the face of post-modern culture, the sign of the Sacred Image of the Same.¹⁶

An alternative view comes from Susan Jeffords who, in a scathing critique of the muscle-man cyborg, scales things down somewhat when she relates these figurations more specifically to 'the Reagan Era'. Jeffords argues for links between what she understands as the 1980s conservative 'backlash' and the sheer number of highly muscular, male heroes seen in mainstream Hollywood cinema during this period. For her the body of the Terminator comes to represent a dominant ideological formation and she traces the function of this figure, and others, to the political climate of the time. Her case is made all the more persuasive as she charts the shifts apparent between the first *Terminator* film and its sequel; arguing that, in the first film, the cyborg's 'hard body' was meant to stand for the aggressively militaristic and defensive business strategies of this period in American politics. With the advent of the 'softer' Bush administration, Jeffords contends, the terminating cyborg was refashioned into a powerful, protecting father figure. She goes on to explain that white male viewers may feel distanced from traditional forms of individual male power and that *Terminator 2* 'offers these viewers [...] the simplest and most reassuring framework available to many male viewers: individualism as fathering'.¹⁷

What Jeffords appears to be articulating is the way in which the narratives of the two films mediate in a reading of this ideological body. However, as reception of the first film seems to bear out, the sight of this body may provide such a powerful visual metaphor of extreme masculinity, and indeed of a masculinist societal body, that it exceeds the kind of narrative intent that she assumes; that is, a narrative that upholds and unproblematically underpins a dominant, masculinist, American ideology. In very simple terms it could be said that the supremely threatening figure of the Terminator in the first film offers up a critique of a then dominant, but warlike and de-humanised, masculinity. In a more recent reading of the Terminator body-type (Arnold Schwarzenegger playing the body in question), Linda Mizejewski says that:

¹⁶ 'Cyborgs and Symbionts: Living together in the New World Order', *The Cyborg Handbook*, Chris Hables Gray ed., (Routledge, 1995), p.xv.

¹⁷ *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, (Rutgers University Press, 1994), p.170.

On the one hand, masculinity as a traditional, coherent entity - specifically, as white, aggressive, heterosexual - persists in the images and trajectories of these films [...] On the other hand, the very fact of its persistence is a clue to its nervous self-consciousness [...] Masculinity itself is at stake ultimately as a special effect.¹⁸

So the hyper-muscular body of the Terminator comes to represent a strongly boundaried, unified and defensive sign of masculinity; a performance of a masculinity clinging to what could be seen as residual notions of gender. Still, as Katherine Hayles suggests, perhaps '[t]he new cannot be spoken of except in relation to the old'.¹⁹ In this way, the Terminator becomes the site over which traditional mechanistic imagery, allied with traditional configurations of an 'old style' masculinity, is played out against the more fluid conceptions associated with an age of information technologies (of course, in *Terminator II* there seems to be an attempt at splitting the old and new when the literally 'fluid' T1000 becomes the 'new enemy', played off against the old style, Terminator). This idea seems to fit rather neatly with the way in which these early Cyborg movies take up the codes and conventions of the Action genre. In other words, it could be said that in the absence of a kind of filmic etiquette with which to deal with this new figuration, recourse has been made to more established generic conventions and iconography. Of course, this in itself is revealing and, in order to explore the idea more thoroughly I will be drawing upon past theories and critiques associated with the spectacle of the male body and will be placing Schwarzenegger's performance within a history of past performances of the action hero/anti-hero. I will then go on to look a little more closely at how Schwarzenegger's mode of performance, as well as certain other elements of the film, can be read as related to the melodramatic and the associated 'histrionic' style of acting.

The 'Non-Acting' Action Hero

The Action movie has been the traditional stage for the playing out of absolute and extreme forms of masculinity. In taking into consideration the male/masculine/active - female/feminine/passive dichotomy, as common to the way in which gender has been

¹⁸ 'Action Bodies in Futurist Spaces: Bodybuilder Stardom as Special Effect', *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1999), p.154.

¹⁹ 'The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman', *The Cyborg Handbook*, Chris Hables-Gray ed., (Routledge, 1995), p.323.

classically represented in Hollywood film, the Action movie has provided the perfect vehicle for the display of distinctly male, often aggressive, activity. From the early 'swashbuckling' heroes, such as Errol Flynn in *Captain Blood* (Dir: Michael Curtiz, 1935), to the horse riding-gun toting, lone heroes, such as John Wayne in Westerns like *The Searchers* (Dir: John Ford, 1956), to the vicious portrayals of more contemporary stars seen in Gangster movies like *The Godfather* series (Dir: Francis Ford Coppola, 1972, 1974, 1990), the various sub-genres of Action cinema have provided the settings within which masculinity has marked out its territory. In classic Hollywood cinema this was the consummate masculine genre - set up in an opposition to the 'feminine' Melodrama, with films like *Now Voyager* (Dir: Irving Rapper, 1942) and *All That Heaven Allows* (Dir: Douglas Sirk, 1955). Within these two distinctly gendered and opposing genres, modes of acting have also been polarised. The Action genre has traditionally operated an 'acting as doing' stylization (even if this 'doing' was connoted as emanating from internal passions) and the Melodrama has played out an 'acting as being' mode of performance: the former relying on outward bodily movement, usually associated with the achievement of a goal, and the latter on the display of high emotion, set up for the voyeuristic pleasure of the viewer. The 'feminine' Melodrama commonly places the heroine within a set of circumstances which she cannot, ultimately, transcend whereas (although there have been tragic, action heroes) the Action genre is usually structured along a trajectory that brings the hero eventual success in his 'mission'. However, with the coming of *The Terminator*, the energetic and impassioned performance of 'masculine action' seems to have been replaced with the rather, inactive, empty, performance given by its anti-hero, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

As suggested in my introduction, acting stylizations have often revealed fluxes in emphasis based on a notion of an inner/outer dichotomy of performance. Masculinity has been associated with various manifestations of both styles of acting in an attempt at disassociation from whatever was perceived as feminine. However, the performance of masculinity seems to have reached a kind of 'stalemate' that is expressed rather neatly in Schwarzenegger's 'non-acting', acting style. In other words, the performance of this supremely masculine protagonist reveals an extreme form of retreat from 'acting' - both in terms of masculine, bodily action and in the revealing of 'inner' passions. It could be argued that this is because Schwarzenegger, as the Terminator, is figured as a very robotic

cyborg but, rather ironically, it is noticeable that when he plays a fully 'human' character he displays these same characteristics. In fact, given that an Action film's hero or anti-hero is usually prone to great bursts of violent movement and displays of frenetic energy it is all the more surprising that, at first glance, Schwarzenegger's performance reveals a remarkable lack of acting, or indeed action. It seems that there is a more or less constant frenzy of activity and action *around* the Terminator for most of the film and even in the 'Tech Noir' night-club, when he is shot by Reese and forced through a plate glass window onto the street, this is not activity or movement that emanates from any internal state on the part of the cyborg. There is also very little response shown by the Terminator to Reese's actions; so it would be hard to say that Schwarzenegger is revealing, or indicating, that what follows is in 're-action' to Reese. It is, after all, Reese's shots that are shown to cause this movement and, in terms of the stunt, Schwarzenegger is literally pulled back through the window by attached ropes and wires. Given such a seemingly passive portrayal he does not so much act as allow himself to be acted upon.

In order to more clearly articulate what is 'going on' in Schwarzenegger's 'non-acting' style, comparison with American cinema's most dominant style of acting (the Method), along with some discussion concerning two of the most prominent icons of 'Action-style' masculinity, should prove enlightening. As outlined in the introduction, the Method style largely evolved in conjunction with the rebel, anti-heroes of films like *Rebel Without a Cause* (Dir: Nicholas Ray, 1955) and *The Wild One* (Dir: Laslo Benedek, 1953).

Although the Method was, at this time, very much associated with an alternative approach to acting, it went on to become a style heavily aligned with a sense of 'authenticity'. This 'authenticity', in affiliation with forms of cinematic 'realism', assumed a particularly and characteristically American, male/masculine subjectivity. The central tenets of the Method presumed a 'depth' of both character and actor and sought to express the emotions and motivations of a character, often in a kind of juxtaposition with the dialogue/script. Again, as outlined in the introduction, that is not to say that the Method has not developed since this time and while it is still popularly understood to reveal 'depth' of characterization it seems that many of its more recent proponents have shed the stylistic components that traditionally signalled the 'inner' workings of character. In an article outlining the 'evolution' of Strasberg's Method, as seen in recent male stars, Hal Hinson describes Robert De Niro's stylization as one that is lacking in any display of 'inner'

psychological motivation. He goes on to state that De Niro 'conveys the absence of thought [...] it's not acting, it's behaving'.²⁰ It is no wonder then that De Niro has been cast in, or indeed his style may have arisen from, roles that place emphasis on the actions of his body (i.e. *Raging Bull*, Dir: Martin Scorsese, 1980). His lack of display of 'mindful' thought processes gives the impression of extreme spontaneity; a spontaneity that is associated with, according to Hinson, 'the unconscious forces of nature'. Of course, this also gives the filmmaker/director a great deal of scope with which to suggest an 'inner' life through mise-en-scene and close camera shots. In fact, Hinson claims that 'De Niro is the blank surface on to which Scorsese projects his vision'.²¹

In a later role, playing Max Cady in the re-make of *Cape Fear* (Dir: Martin Scorsese, 1991), De Niro seems to literally become the body over which the various characters of the film project their fears. This is deftly foregrounded in scenes in which De Niro's sinewy form is put on display for both diegetic and non-diegetic audience. His body is covered in jailhouse tattoos giving apparent meaning to the line delivered by Lieutenant Elgart (played by Robert Mitchum): 'I don't know whether to look at him or read him'. In addition, this line can be understood as indicating the extent to which the surface aspects of De Niro's/Cady's body-character are uppermost in the film and may even act as a commenting upon the seemingly surface-treatment given to the hero/anti-hero of many a 1980s Action movie. This is underlined by the fact that Robert Mitchum played Cady in the original, 1962, version of the film. So there is a sense in which this line could be understood as Mitchum's comment on shifts in the acting style associated with the playing of the Cady character along with broader changes in performance stylizations over the years between the two versions of this film. It is also notable that in the re-make very little of the violent activity, purportedly carried out by Cady, is actually seen. The results of his actions are revealed to the viewer, (for example, the death of the family dog and the severe beating given to Bowden's mistress), but, until the end of the film, it is the often inactive body of De Niro that represents the threat to this, supposedly peaceful, 'God-fearing' town. Even in one of the most disturbing scenes of the film, when Cady meets up with Bowden's daughter, what is suggested by his presence (the threat of rape or

²⁰ "Some Notes on Method Actors", *Sight and Sound*, V.53, N.3, (Summer, 1984), 200-205, (p.203).

²¹ Hinson, p.204.

seduction of Bowden's seventeen year old daughter) never eventuates and it is her guilt at finding Cady attractive that becomes a focus in the narrative. Although this, in some respects, adheres to the conventions of the thriller (in which various devices are used to mislead and keep an audience in suspense) this is played out to such an extent that the viewer is encouraged, along with the other characters in the film, to inspect Cady's surface appearance in order to 'read' his character.

De Niro's style could certainly be seen as a logical step in terms of Method acting in the sense that the technique strove for, what it purported to be, 'the authentic' in opposition to what was seen as the highly mannered and 'inauthentic' style of English and European acting. By setting itself up in this way it also moved away from an emphasis on dialogue to an emphasis on bodily movement. Method actors were largely taught not to consciously alter their physical manner or voice but to 'feel' the part and allow those feelings free expression without the obstacle of dictating dialogue. In fact, Leo Braudy comments that the Method, in its 1950s heyday, was 'an art based on the armature of the body [...] a return to flesh and feeling [with] an emphasis on emotions'.²² Taking a broad overview, it would seem that, at this time, an inner/outer divide, as mapped onto a mind/body divide, was being created between opposing nations through a style of performance that sought to differentiate itself from another style of performance: English stylization, as associated with conscious thought and artificiality, taking the part of inner/mind, whilst the less theatrical and supposedly 'authentic' American style was marked by the outer/body. Although there was an indication of 'inner' states of being in this emerging American style, emotional response was largely mapped onto the 'outer' body of the performer in opposition to what was seen as the more 'intellectual', and therefore less authentic, English approach.

As Braudy has pointed out, the growth of the Method style cannot be divorced from its gender implications. In as much as it was heavily associated with an 'evolving' mode of masculinity in America the more bodily performances of the Method actor can be seen as set against a feminized European style. That is not to say that there are not difficulties

²²From "'No Body's Perfect': Method Acting and 50's Culture", in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, V.35, N.1, (1996), 191-215, (p.196).

with this kind of presentation of masculinity, in the sense that this would seem to suggest that the male body is therefore being held up to an audience as the object of the gaze. So there are aspects of the Method style and its application to the playing of the Action hero/anti-hero that can be understood as feminising this figuration - which can be read alongside the apparent feminization brought about by the exhibitionistic body-performance given by Schwarzenegger. Also, if the Action genre is seen as a 'working class' form of entertainment (the idea being that a muscular masculinity connotes manual labour and that the struggles of the male hero can be thought of in terms of the struggles of the working class male against 'the powers that be') then it would seem possible to see him as feminized in conjunction with his class status. However, if Schwarzenegger's performance is read in this way this is complicated by the notion that muscles now connote the more middle class, upwardly mobile, pursuit of body fitness - something that 'fits' well with Schwarzenegger's past 'performances' as a champion body builder. It may also be argued that muscles are meant to be read as a sign of activity and that the spectator may 'fill in the performance' (in a similar way as is encouraged in some of De Niro's Method performances) by placing it alongside Schwarzenegger's star persona and well known past pursuits. In this sense, the character could be understood as more 'real', more authentic, particularly as much is made of the fact that Schwarzenegger does not come from an acting background: his 'non-acting' therefore signalling that this is the authentic 'Schwarzenegger' we are witnessing, rather than a character he is playing. However, this vision of a 'natural' masculinity is undercut by the fact that this supposed 'sign of activity' culminates in a relatively passive exhibitionism - as opposed to leading to more 'manly' activity (i.e. sport) or to the attainment of a particular, and more concrete, goal within a wider social community. On the other hand, if masculine supremacy has classically been allied to the supposedly 'natural' strength and dexterity of the male body (which is then confirmed in the Action film) Schwarzenegger's muscularity, achieved in 'real life', could serve to accentuate this superiority. However, the key word is 'achieved' - and in this sense, the viewer may be fully aware that this muscular display is not, in fact, natural but constructed over time, with the assistance of weight machines (not to mention the possible use of steroids).

In terms of dialogue the Terminator has very few lines, and these are spoken mostly in monotone with little inflexion in the voice (that is apart from those lines when he

impersonates other characters, which are obviously performed by other actors). By putting this performance, once again, within a context of past performance of heroes/anti-heroes, the way in which Schwarzenegger delivers his few lines is highly reminiscent of Clint Eastwood's 'no name' character in Sergio Leone's 'Spaghetti Westerns'. Eastwood's performances here seem even more 'empty' than certain of De Niro's early films: Eastwood's movements in these films are particularly 'wooden' (similar to the kinds of bodily movement displayed by the Terminator) and he reveals a startling lack of emotional engagement, or passionate motivation, as he dispatches his adversaries. 'No name', like the Terminator, also has very little dialogue and what he does say is spoken with little vocal inflexion. But Schwarzenegger's face is even less expressive, in *The Terminator*, than Eastwood's in these Westerns. Those famous E.C.U.s on Eastwood's face (as he moves his cigar and stares intently) are replaced, in *The Terminator*, by P.O.V shots that simply display his directives. Whereas, with Eastwood's 'no name', the spectator could possibly imagine some sort of 'inner' life (connoted by the director's use of E.C.U.s), the P.O.V shots from *The Terminator* reveal that he is coldly, and rather ironically, following a script.

Of course, Eastwood's 'no name' character is intentionally enigmatic in order to intensify the mythic and epic quality attributed to the version of masculinity that he represents. In the first film of Leone's trilogy, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), this 'mystery' character is introduced without any explanation as to his past or where he has come from - again, further underlining a certain lack of human 'depth'. Along with this absence of background information, Eastwood's portrayal of a seemingly cold and amoral man may leave the audience to decide what, if any, motivation lies behind his actions. In the second film, *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), the 'no name' character becomes allied with a rival bounty hunter (played by Lee Van Cleef). The Van Cleef character is given a past and a motivation for his actions, thereby enhancing Eastwood's coldly, mythic portrayal, by comparison. However, there is some development in the 'no name' character in the third film of the trilogy, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1967), as he appears to become the eponymous embodiment of 'the good' - indicated in the title. Here he is shown to act with a certain amount of compassion in that he gives a dying man his last cigarette and, given ample provocation (especially in the context of the series as a whole), he allows Tuco (his dissembling partner) to survive at the end of the film. So this 'no name'

character becomes, seemingly, more 'humanised' as the series progresses - almost as though the previous films had given him a past, allowing for the role to grow and mature into the severely moral man of the final film. This could be understood as a development that was deemed necessary, given Eastwood's growing stardom in the role (the anti-hero becomes hero in alignment with his prestige as a recognised, American star) and it seems that this trajectory is echoed in the development of the Terminator character. This 'maturation' seems to be repeated in performance terms, in comparison with both Eastwood's 'no name' and Schwarzenegger's development of the Terminator in the sequel film. For example, in *Terminator II: Judgement Day* there are a number of moments when Schwarzenegger employs a sideways glance, to wry, comic effect, usually in his interactions with the boy John. These characteristic glances can be read alongside Eastwood's techniques in that this small facial gesture is meant to 'speak volumes'.²³ Even though they can be taken as ironic, it is a gentle irony that somehow humanises the characters and reveals their potential for social interaction. Also, Sarah's rather incongruous speech in the sequel, concerning the Terminator's role as the ideal father, takes place in a Mexican desert setting reminiscent of the 'Spaghetti Western' - so it would seem that comparison with the 'no name' character of the Leone trilogy is, perhaps, intentional. What is particularly interesting is the way in which this intertextual reading may serve to highlight how elaboration of both of these characterizations is marked by an association with an American ideal of manhood. For instance, both characters develop, albeit in a subtle way, a 'deeper' acting stylization that can be read as associated with the kind of humanity performed by the Method actor. In addition, both characters 'progress' from being the hostile/anti-hero to being the friendly/hero - as though the fact that both of these actors were increasingly embraced by an American public were somehow mirrored in the roles they played.

Of course, there are racial aspects to be considered here and although I am going to deal with this area in more detail in chapter three, a brief exploration of how this is brought into play here seems useful. For instance, in the 'Spaghetti Westerns' Eastwood was an American actor largely playing against European counterparts (given that the films were shot in Europe) whereas Schwarzenegger was a European émigré playing against

²³ This is also not unlike the 'signature' slow smile employed by De Niro - which can be understood in a variety of ways depending on the surrounding, dramatic context.

American actors in *The Terminator*. Perhaps here, in an interesting reversal, Schwarzenegger's acting style operates to indicate his foreignness, his Otherness, on the level of performance: his later 'assimilation' into American culture, in terms of his star status, is rather neatly echoed in reference to Eastwood's own past performance record. It may be that having reached star success in America both these actors then become icons of American masculinity - an embodiment of acceptable American manhood - which is reflected in the way in which their characters function within the codes of the Action genre and, more widely, in terms of becoming 'social models'.

Steve Neale refers to Eastwood's performances in the 'Spaghetti Westerns' as a narcissistic portrayal of almost Godlike proportions in which the 'hero's powers are [...] hardly qualified at all'.²⁴ He goes on to argue that the anxious 'aspects' of the gaze upon the male body are allayed: in that the fetishistic freezes, just prior to the gunfight, are somehow recuperated by the display of violence associated with the voyeuristic gaze. This, he argues, is designed to minimise the erotic connotations of the male body as object of the gaze and therefore as a feminized site of desire. Is this mechanism in operation in *The Terminator*? - a film in which our anti-hero is seen posing naked, no less, at the outset of the proceedings. There is no doubt that extreme violence often follows the camera's concentration upon Schwarzenegger's body but the very obvious 'fisting' metaphor in the Terminator's attack upon the 'punks' would seem to foreground, rather than disavow, this mechanism. The scene in the gun shop, when he orders up an veritable arsenal of weapons seems designed more as an ironic comment on phallic mastery; a parodic gesture toward the gun toting heroes of the past. What I am suggesting is that a highlighting of the mechanisms through which disavowal may have been promoted in past portrayals operates like a double negative: the foregrounding cancelling out the operative function of the process.

Neale's notion of 'nostalgic narcissism' is also useful in looking at the characterization of the Terminator. Neale suggests that the male action hero refuses entry into the symbolic realm by remaining alone, thereby retaining the nostalgic illusion of omnipotence. Of

²⁴"Masculinity as Spectacle", *Screening the Male*, Cohan, Steve, and Ina Rae Hark, eds., (Routledge, 1993), p.12.

course, in terms of the narrative of *The Terminator* this idea is literalized to such an extent as to suggest a ridiculing of 'nostalgic narcissism' itself: in the sense of the possibility that the Terminator's illusion of omnipotence may be literally achieved in the destruction of the whole human race of the future. But this is not the only sense in which narcissism is brought into play in the film. It is especially noticeable in the scene in which the Terminator fixes his damaged eye in front of a mirror. Presumably, there is no reason why he should need a mirror to perform this task as the character's 'guidance systems' could surely cope with leading his hand to his eye. There is another reason why he is seen looking at himself whilst donning his dark glasses and swiftly checking his coiffure - this is in order that the spectator can witness this occurrence as a nostalgic reminder of the 'nostalgic narcissism' of past action heroes. Given that the Terminator is terminated at the end of the film (sequel aside for the time being) this foregrounding of the very process of nostalgic narcissism could suggest that the 'old style' masculinity portrayed by past heroes is dead (or outmoded): the suggestion being that masculinity has retreated so far from anything that can be considered human, certainly in social terms, that it threatens the very future of humanity. Although I believe this reading is entirely possible it does seem to have been recuperated by the very appearance of the sequel: the Terminator is not dead but has simply 'grown up!' This is indicated in those brief moments when his expressions connote a deeper characterization and an ability to enter a social realm. In addition, the Terminator's new role as protector/father figure to the boy John, also testifies to his new found 'maturity'. Nevertheless, if masculinity, as a set of traits, is seen to have retreated from performing at all in a world that requires a more fluid and communicative subject (a traditionally feminine sphere), then what of the 'new man' that could have, potentially, emerged from the 'message' of the first film? Some of the very characteristics that could have supplied a different vision of masculinity, as embodied in the T1000, are featured as what is threatening the happy family unit of Sarah, John and the Terminator. Alas, as Jeffords suggests, the old style is not exactly done away with but simply reformulated and re-imposed on a more intimate level. It does seem that rather than projecting a different style of masculinity, in terms of Schwarzenegger's performance, there is simply a return to some of the devices used by Clint Eastwood. In a kind of backward reading it seems that aspects of the 'no name' style hero (particularly in his later association with morality and the law) are being recuperated as what is truly needed by this single parent struggling against her 'destiny'. Even though

the Terminator dies again in the sequel, there is a sense in which he could return (as either protector or perpetrator), should the future of humanity be threatened again.

The Male Melodrama

In many respects, and having outlined how Schwarzenegger's performance appears very passive, his portrayal (especially in the first *Terminator* film) seems closer to a series of poses than it is to the supposedly active, action hero. It is as though his performance were 'digitalized' which may suggest a very different approach to the reading of this character; one which does not necessarily contradict my discussion of how past action heroes are referenced but may indicate a rather more subtle undercurrent within the film. In an article in which Roberta Pearson outlines American filmic acting styles between 1908-1913 she tracks a shift between what she terms the 'histrionic' to the 'verisimilar'.²⁵ The histrionic mode, she states, was associated with theatrical Melodrama and this style, as seen in early film, can therefore be understood as a sort of 'hang-over' from popular theatre of the time. With a visible shift toward 'realism' in film came the encouraged growth of the verisimilar style - although she also notes that elements of the histrionic did not altogether disappear. In her comparative discussion of these styles she draws upon the semiotic categories of the digital and the analogic: the digital (including language systems) involves discrete, discontinuous elements, whereas the analogic involves continuity between elements that cannot meaningfully be segmented. The histrionic style was characterized by its utilisation of standardised poses, expressing a range of emotional codes, and a highly choreographed use of movement. Pearson describes how it 'depended upon the isolation of gesture[s]' which were often statically held for periods of time, in order that the audience may 'read' their meaning.²⁶ This stylization was used to communicate absolutes in which contradictions or disputes were played out between characters as opposed to within a single character. As Jeffrey Mason describes, in his opening statements concerning the underlying structure of theatrical melodrama:

The essential action of melodrama is to polarize its constituents, whatever they may be - male and female, East and West, civilization and wilderness, and most

²⁵ "'O'er Step Not the Modesty of Nature": A Semiotic Approach to Acting in the Griffith Biographs', *Making Visible the Invisible: An Anthology of Original Essays on Film Acting*, Carole Zucker ed., (The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1990), pp.1-27.

²⁶ Pearson, p13.

typically, good and evil. By forcing its elements apart until they seem irreconcilably disparate, and then sustaining their interdependent relationship within a shared structure, melodrama provides a paradoxical means of resolving fundamental contradictions.²⁷

Mason goes on to link Melodrama with the way in which dominant forms of American ideology are articulated in various discourses. Daniel C. Gerould, in a similar vein, claims that:

The United States and Melodrama came into existence at almost the same time - the late eighteenth century - and for much the same reason - the democratic revolution in thought and feeling. Crude, violent, dynamic in action, psychologically and morally simplistic, reliant on machinery and technological know-how for its powerful effects, melodrama became a direct expression of American society and national character.²⁸

Gerould, in his linking of an emerging American sensibility with the melodramatic form, suggests that '[f]or a pragmatic nation that preferred action to contemplation, here was a practical, non-elite art form'.²⁹ This is an interesting comment on the form as, given the previous discussion of acting and the Action genre, what he seems to be echoing is the way in which certain aspects of melodrama were borrowed and transformed to delineate a kind of national character in opposition to the more intellectual European art forms. Of course, what is particularly relevant here is the way in which Gerould stresses that American forms of melodrama placed emphasis on 'action' - which may, in part, suggest that this style persists in the acting styles associated with the Action genre.

Jackie Byars, in her introduction to a study of the 'woman's film melodrama' of the 1950s, describes how melodrama formed the basis of the construction of many popular Hollywood films and she goes on to look at how:

The emotionalism associated with moral value in the nineteenth century gave way to restraint. Realism, understated and underplayed, came to be associated with the masculine, and melodrama, associated with "feminine" emotionalism, became a term of derision [...] Melodrama contributed to many genres in the cinema, but they were destined to become the terrain for struggle between "realism" and

²⁷ 'Constructing American Ideology', *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, (Indiana University Press, 1993), p.16.

²⁸ 'The Americanization of Melodrama', *American Melodrama*, (Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983), p.7.

²⁹ Gerould, p.8.

"melodrama". They also, as a result of the gendering of these imaginative modes, came to be delineated and evaluated by their associations with gender.³⁰

Once again, her comments here remind me that, in a gendered splitting of the melodramatic form, female/feminine melodrama became associated with dialogue and the highly emotionally charged, 'performance speech' (evident in many a classic Hollywood Melodrama), designed to show off the talents of the actor in question. What were deemed more masculine aspects of the melodrama, namely bodily movement and action, came to be associated with forms of acting regarded as more 'realistic'. Although a melodramatic 'impulse' can be said to be inherent in much popular Hollywood cinema there has been a delineation between cinema genres (those aimed at a male audience and the so called woman's film) which has often been marked in terms of acting style, especially in the way in which emotional responses have been displayed. Whilst this strict segmentation has led to the production of a very particular generic Melodrama (the 'woman's film') there remain elements of the melodramatic throughout many cinematic genres and it is my contention that in Science Fiction this 'impulse' has often been brought to the fore. Connections can certainly be drawn between Science Fiction and earlier forms of American Melodrama in how both make especial use of the latest technologies. In fact, Gerould, in describing the main features of early American Melodrama, argues that '[w]hatever melodrama lacked in psychological depth, it made up for by sheer technological skill. If its style and thought were primitive, the special effects of Melodrama were sophisticated products of the latest advances in applied science'.³¹ Surely this describes one of the main features of recent Science Fiction cinema? Also, Steve Neale's recent study of the history behind contemporary Hollywood film genres suggests that the melodramatic is evident within the Action genre and, by extension, Science Fiction/Action films. Neale has gone so far as to say that Hollywood Action films may display a closer connection to the original melodramatic form than films that have become generically assigned this label in more recent years. Neale builds this argument by referring back to, what I would call, early 'Method films', like *Rebel Without a Cause*, and backs up his claims through reference to contemporary reviews (around the film's original release date) that actually call it a melodrama. He goes on to look at the

³⁰ *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950's Melodrama*, (Routledge, 1991), pp.12-13.

³¹ Gerould, p.9.

number of reviews of classically, masculine genres (many of which are Action films) and the frequency with which reviewers have called these melodramas.³² He continues his argument by looking at how the Manichean structure of various Action genres displays stronger links to earlier Melodrama than the common structures associated with the 'woman's film'. In fact, in the closing stages of this discussion he states that, in contemporary Action films:

Instances of 'the melodramatic' run the gamut from the villainy perpetrated by Dracula, Darth Vader and the Terminator [...] [to] John McClane's actions in *Die Hard*.³³

Although Neale alludes to performance he does not, in any detail, refer to acting stylizations or particular performance theories. In this sense his study is angled differently to my own, but the inferences may remain the same.

To return to Schwarzenegger's performance, it has probably become apparent that by formulating a link between Melodrama and Science Fiction his acting style can be read in terms of a kind of updated use of the histrionic; the relevant difference being that his poses and choreographed movements are not intended to communicate emotional codes but codes of non-emotion. Perhaps this is also not surprising because, as Mason states, in looking at the moral 'universe' of melodrama:

To valorize feeling and insist on subjectivity, however communal, may seem organic, but the position also suggests a mechanical model insofar as it is deterministic [...] Furthermore, the logical extension of sentimental optimism [...] was the belief that man, like a machine, might be perfectible, a proposition that fell neatly into the rationalist, mathematical paradigms of the Enlightenment.³⁴

In this sense then, it might be that Schwarzenegger's performance in *The Terminator* simply presents a kind of 'logical' extension of the melodramatic impulse, but one that, within this context, brings his masculine subjectivity into question. His style of performance is set against the more 'naturalistic' style employed by the other actors in the film; their humanity, as associated with a 'naturalistic' style of acting, is mainly marked through seemingly redundant movements which signal their 'inner' state. It is as though

³² Neale admits that the term 'melodramatic' has certain pejorative connotations in more recent usage, but states that this was not the case in these early reviews.

³³ *Genre and Hollywood*, (Routledge, 2000), pp.201-202.

³⁴ Mason, p.14.

the kind of 'struggle' that Byars talks of (between 'realism' and melodrama) were actually being re-enacted within this film. For Byars, this struggle is marked in terms of a gendered divide between genres, but in *The Terminator* this struggle is returned to being played out between characters, in a literal clashing between forms of acting and modes of gendered performance. A further clue as to *The Terminator's* connections to Melodrama appears in the way in which the Terminator seems destined to keep returning to the scene of the crime. This constant 're-play' is, of course, highly reminiscent of Soap Opera. Although a television genre, this form is consistently associated with 'feminine' melodrama. Jane Feuer, in an article which discusses contemporary examples of television Melodrama, looks at the way in which the form appears, inherently, 'open' to a variety of interpretations and reader responses. In looking back at the cinematic precursors to the television Melodrama and the common theoretical approaches to the genre, she states:

Melodrama seemed amenable to a variety of theoretical approaches because melodramas seemed to encourage different levels of reading to a greater extent than did other 'classical narrative' films. Traditionally male-oriented genres such as the western or the gangster film did not problematize the reader in the same way as melodrama.³⁵

However, I would argue that, at a time when subjectivities (particularly male subjectivities) are seemingly threatened by new technologies and changing models of subject-hood, it is not surprising that the melodramatic impulse is once again brought to the fore, particularly within a traditional, 'masculine' genre. Feuer goes on to say that contemporary Melodramas problematize questions of spectatorship and gender, and that central to theories surrounding the genre 'is the concept of melodrama as creating an *excess*, whether that excess be defined as a split between the level of narrative and that of *mise-en-scene* or as a form of 'hysteria', (indicting) the visually articulated return of the ideologically repressed'.³⁶ Schwarzenegger's performance thereby becomes central to the 'melodramatic impulse' in *The Terminator* films. The excessive display inherent within his performance and the way in which it can be said to problematize the male reader would suggest that *The Terminator*, perhaps, be better classified as a 'Male Melodrama'?

³⁵ 'Melodrama, Serial Form and Television Today', *The Media Reader*, Manuel Alvarado, John O. Thompson eds., (BFI, 1990), p.257.

MECHANICAL ACTING IN SCIENCE FICTION

The Robocop Series

Certainly the use of what is now considered a rather outmoded, histrionic style (and in some circles would be thought of as a marker of 'bad' acting) can be read as 'fitting' with the portrayal of a cyborg with minimal links to humanity. This, of course, assumes that the contemporary 'verisimilar' style is understood as a marker of humanness. However, if Schwarzenegger's performance of the Terminator is seen in connection with other films it becomes apparent that it is also a very extreme mode of generic acting, particularly evident in Science Fiction. For instance, a film like *Robocop* employs similar performance devices to those of *The Terminator*. Here our cyborg (played by Peter Weller) enacts a literally mechanised masculinity (he is covered in robotic, body armour) and this is further marked by the delivery of his dialogue and the way he walks. Like the Terminator his minimal dialogue is performed largely in monotone and his walk reveals a strange kind of head/body divide:³⁷ when he turns corners either his head or his body is seen to turn first - like an articulated truck - as though they were somehow separated or did not need the other part in order to operate. These movements are underlined by 'hydraulic' sound effects, which emphasise the character's construction as something aligned with 'industrial age' technologies. His mechanical 'nature' is further highlighted in the way in which his speech and movement are largely separated: he rarely moves and talks at the same time.

According to the narrative of the film, the only remaining human/organic parts are his brain and spinal column (the human 'neural net' - according to the film). Although he is largely 'driven' by the mechanical aspects of his make-up, throughout the diegesis an inner struggle emerges. This is signalled by the return of his human memories, which are associated with the domestic sphere and emotionalism, and his increasing ability to be self-commanding. So here it seems that, in terms of performance, the split between

³⁶ Feuer, p.257, Feuer's emphases.

³⁷ In some respects, this can be seen as a more exaggerated version of some of the Terminator's movements. For example, there are a number of moments when the Terminator simply stands, facing the scene in front of him, and turns his head from side to side to scan the area - as though his head were some kind of turning, watch-tower, moving separately from the body beneath.

feminine and masculine melodramatic impulses is literally enacted within this characterization. In the first film his mannerisms are compared with his earlier performance as the fully human Murphy. Here his voice is pitched higher and his speech patterns are more erratic and less modulated. Links are made between his existence as the fully human 'Murphy' (prior to his cyborgization) and past action heroes through his repeated attempts to twirl his gun - Western style. When he is given the armoured body to back up this masculine myth of omnipotence his humanity is shown to be questionable. However, by the end of each film in the series (*Robocop II* [Dir: Irvin Kershner, 1990] and *Robocop III* [Dir: Fred Dekker, 1993], were to follow), having dispatched the villains, he announces himself as Murphy - he has won back, if not his 'emotionalism' then his individualism and identity. So within this film (as with the 'progression' evident in the two *Terminator* films) we see a playing out of the idea that 'old style' masculinity is what is needed to dictate law and order in this town.

Robert Rawdon Wilson, in his reading of the first film, discusses the relevance of the android 'Ed 209'. He states that the android is present to provide a contrast with Robocop. Unlike Robocop, Ed is fully automated and is clumsy, ungainly - he, also, cannot be reasoned with when glitches appear in his programming. Wilson claims that '[t]his plays to human chauvinism: the sense that humans *are* better than machines [...] and that a good cyborg, simply because it retains elements of a human brain, will out-think, and so out-perform, a good android any time'.³⁸ His comments also indicate the threat that technology offers to the literal performance of powerful, masculine, human roles. However, in the second film of the series the threat comes from another cyborg. Similarities can therefore be drawn between this film and *Terminator II*, in that 'good' cyborg is pitched against 'bad' cyborg - thus, at least in terms of the narrative, upholding a melodramatic dichotomy even if both sides are marked as fused beings. Although this second cyborg takes on a similar appearance to that of 'Ed' (so the bodily contrast with Robocop's more human-like form is upheld) the mechanical frame is controlled by the implanted brain of a major criminal - implying that Robocop is not only more human but presents the lawful and acceptable form of a masculinity melded with the machine. The

³⁸'Cyber(body)parts: Prosthetic Consciousness', *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, Mike Featherstone, Roger Burrows eds., (Sage Publications, 1995), pp.251-252, Wilson's emphasis.

third film of the series is rather more interesting as the opposing cyborg threat is modelled upon the Samurai warrior and looks far more human than the robotic Murphy.³⁹ The threat to law and order is seen to come from the nations of the Pacific Rim (this is an area that I will be covering in more detail in chapter three, when I look at oriental images and the cyborg). This 'oriental' threat appears, visually, fully human but is duplicitous in more ways than one: the bodily humanity is undercut through duplication, in that there are several cyborg Samurai that all look identical. This not only seems obviously racist ('foreigners all look the same') but is a feature that can be connected to the ongoing fear of an oriental 'groupism', an issue I will return to.

So, in each re-play/sequel of *Robocop* the threat to law and order and to Robocop himself, takes on an increasingly human form but our central, American hero remains the same (although played by Robert Burke in the third film). Murphy still retains the outer body armour and is consistently shown to regain his human memories. Unlike *The Terminator* sequel, in which, as Jeffords suggests there is a shift to a 'softer' characterization in a reworking of patriarchal power, Robocop remains constant while the world changes about him. Of course, he was always seen to be 'in touch' with his humanity but the consistency of his figuration, throughout this series of films, seems to suggest that his mechanical and hyper-masculine form is a requirement in this society and is shown to be somehow reassuring in a changing America. This is made quite clear when in the second film of the series a female scientist insists that he be programmed in a more 'socially acceptable' way. He is then observed to be acting politely in his interactions with criminals and to avoid killing at all costs. This is played out to comedic effect and presented as being completely ineffectual in such a violent world. In other words, social behaviour and etiquette are associated with the feminine here and ridiculed - 'Robo' cannot hope to uphold law and order by taking on these outwardly more feminine traits.

Universal Soldier

³⁹ It is notable that they are actually called Ninjas in the film but carry the usual signifiers of the Samurai. This is perhaps explainable in that the Ninja has most often come to be represented as a 'bad guy' in films made in the west, whereas the Samurai is most often figured as honourable.

The cyborg hero in *Universal Soldier* again carries many of the same traits and mannerisms as the Terminator. The plot of this film, however, involves the 're-birth' of a number of previously deceased Vietnam veterans. The bodies of the veterans are set back into motion with the aid of cutting edge technologies and they are sent out into present-day America on particularly dangerous missions. Although their technologically enhanced bodies can now perform super-human feats, due to the addition of electronic prostheses and muscle enhancing drugs, their movements are controlled by military scientists from a mobile command centre. Our hero (played by Jean-Claude Van Damme), in similar fashion to Robocop, is seen to regain his humanity through the return of his human memories and through links to his surviving family. Like the Terminator of the second film, his heroic but violent deeds are articulated through a need to defend this family. In fact, echoes of the *Terminator* series are foregrounded largely through dialogue and the way in which this is performed. Jean-Claude Van Damme delivers lines like 'Goodnight Asshole' and 'You've been discharged' (upon killing the bad cyborg) in a similar way to Schwarzenegger - even to the point where he seems to employ the same Austrian (or generalised European) accent. These lines are played to ironic effect and there are also several moments in the film which acknowledge the gaze upon the male body of Van Damme. Having said this, it is notable that, during these moments, it is only female characters that are shown to be gazing upon a naked (or near naked) Van Damme. It is as though they operated as a kind of diegetic audience suggesting that to gaze upon the male body as a site of desire is acceptable as long as the heterosexual imperative is kept in place. Also, although Van Damme plays a more visually active hero than either Robocop or the Terminator (utilising his martial arts skills in the fighting scenes) his violence is also markedly choreographed. The intersection of martial arts and cyborg hero will be tackled in chapter three but suffice to say that Van Damme's 'routines' here are, apparently, held up for the fetishistic gaze. This is highlighted by the fact that these scenes are often filmed in slow motion - the viewer being encouraged to see every nuance of his bodily movements. There are some remarkable similarities in the construction of certain moments in this film to devices that are common to the Musical genre. For example, the use of the diegetic audience in *Universal Soldier* bears close resemblance to its use in the classic, Hollywood Musical - as a way of signalling how an actual audience is 'supposed' to respond to the 'show' within the film. However, closer analysis reveals a

difference, as it is often the diegetic audiences who are literally framed within the film. In the Musical it is more customary to frame, in one way or another, the performer/performance - with the diegetic audience outside of this internal framing. However, in *Universal Soldier*, this device appears to be reversed. For example, when the naked Van Damme emerges from his motel room and stumbles into the forecourt, the mother and son owners of the motel, who stand agog at this appearance, are distinctly framed behind a window. It is also notable, in this particular scene that the son refers to the mother's gaze - so that the viewer is led to 'see through her eyes'. This certainly comments on the spectators viewing position by making very apparent the operation of fetishistic looking on the part of the audience - even though this kind of 'looking' has more usually been associated with a male viewer. Although this can be seen as a disruptive and ironic device, the reversal, arguably, has the effect of placing Van Damme within the more powerful public and masculine realm, whilst feminising the audience - who, in this scene are shown to be in the domestic sphere behind their living room window. However, in using a device which is so heavily associated with the Musical I would suggest that, if nothing else, 'masculine' performance is most certainly foregrounded during these moments. Again, in a similar move to *Terminator II*, at the end of the film the Van Damme character is shown to lay down his life for his family. Having rescued them all from the bad cyborg/soldier he is asked how he feels - to which he replies: 'Like a hero'. In a replay of the Vietnam War the soldier is allowed to win and return to the bosom of his family where he regains the power and command associated with his hero status.

In all three of these films, masculinity is marked through the superhuman prowess of the body - whether this body is seen to be flesh (as in *Universal Soldier*), metal (as in *Robocop*) or a mixture of both (as seen in *The Terminator*). Samantha Holland comments that:

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 [...] never had and cannot acquire.⁴⁰

Whilst this marks an interesting difference between the construction of the Terminator, as compared to the figuration of the hyper-masculine cyborgs that followed, what is noticeable is that this is barely played out in terms of the performances given by Van Damme or Peter Weller. In fact, these performances bear a remarkable resemblance to that given by Schwarzenegger in the *Terminator* films. Also, much like the figuration of the Terminator, in all three of the above examples it is the surface aspects of the hyper-masculine body of the cyborg that are focused upon and which become the site over which their struggles for individuality, their sense of self, is played out. In terms of performance, the mindful, the intellectual, seems largely absent. It is as though these cyborgs present a kind of zenith in the tendencies revealed in the acting out of American masculinity. Again, there are racial issues to be considered here as, like Schwarzenegger, Van Damme was not born an American (being Belgian by birth). The playing of the male cyborg by a performer of foreign birth, or with foreign connections, is almost a trope in these early movies - one that is also notable in the featuring of Keanu Reeves (due to his mixed parentage of British born mother/Chinese-Hawaiian father and his birth outside of America) in both *The Matrix* and *Johnny Mnemonic* and is conspicuous in the casting of some of the female cyborgs that I will be discussing in the next chapter. As was suggested in looking at the Schwarzenegger/Terminator in conjunction with Clint Eastwood's persona, it is as though the cyborg's battle for their selfhood were being paralleled in the performers' battle for acceptance into American society. On the one hand, their performances can be read as ironic - an outsider's comment upon the supposed 'ideal' of American manhood - but on the other hand, their star status indicates that 'they are made of right stuff' and can be accepted into this fraternity. Peter Weller, of course, does not fit with the male cyborg as foreigner: he was born in Wisconsin, in America. However, perhaps, in *Robocop*, given that his body is armoured in metal, he is not deemed to be 'on show' in quite the same way as my other two examples. Therefore, his American and masculine subjectivity is taken as read, even though this film displays many of the same concerns as the other examples.

Mind Over Matter

As mentioned earlier, the 1980s macho-muscular cyborg seems to have largely been replaced in mainstream Science Fiction films with what I have chosen to call the 'cyber-saviour'. As Claudia Springer has pointed out in a recent article: 'Cybernetically enhanced existence shifted in films from pumped-up physiques to expanded minds in films that critics labelled cyberthrillers'.⁴¹ Hence, the cyberthrillers of the 1990s seem to mark a shift in the representation of masculinity from a focus on the body to an emphasis placed on psychology and the mind in the playing out of the masculine cyborg. Given this shift, it would not seem improbable to expect that there be a noticeable alteration in the acting styles employed to portray the more 'mindful' masculinities on offer. However, although many of the cyberthrillers tend to present the audience with a more dialogue-loaded product they still retain many aspects of the surface treatment given to past portrayals. To explore this cross-over, and its associated performance aspects, I have chosen to take an initial look at *First Contact* (Dir: Jonathan Frakes, 1997), a recent addition to the 'Star Trek' feature film series. Although, not strictly the kind of cyber-thriller that Springer talks of it does contain many of the features associated with these films (for instance, it is obviously heavily influenced by some of the themes dealt with in Cyberpunk) and provides a particularly clear, grounding, example. *First Contact* is a more complex text than *The Terminator*, *Robocop* or *Universal Soldier*, in the sense that it sports a number of different kinds of cyborgs. However, in terms of the main narrative thrust, it still sets off one version of cyborgian existence against another: the "Borg's" extreme communalism, a thinly disguised communist (in this case - Chinese?) threat, set up against a very American brand of individualism. In the television episodes, when the Borg are fully introduced to the series (*The Best of Both Worlds: Parts 1 and 2* [Cliff Bole, 1996]), all appear to be male and the voice that speaks for them is obviously masculine. When translated to the big screen, the Borg are led by a female cyborg who acts as the mind behind the more bodily actions of her male subjects. In fact, her representation as the 'brains' behind this collective 'brawn' is underlined when she is,

⁴⁰ 'Descartes Goes to Hollywood: Mind, Body and Gender in Contemporary Cyborg Cinema', *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows eds., (Sage Publications, 1995), p.160.

⁴¹ 'Psycho-Cybernetics in Films of the 1990s', *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1999), p.204.

literally, seen as a separated head and spinal column which is lowered into her female body. The figuring of this female Queen is an obvious reference to a kind of 'hive world' and, certainly, comparison of communism and the insect world is not new to American Science Fiction (one of the better known film examples being *Them* [Dir: Gordon Douglas, 1954]). However, this analogy also takes on a more topical slant given the way in which it can be worked into a more recent cybernetic/network modelling. As was outlined previously, the way in which cybernetics, as a powerful paradigm as well as a working system, has been taken up, varies according to context. However, the underlying idea, as Kevin Kelly puts it, 'is that no one is in control, and yet an invisible hand governs, a hand that emerges from very dumb members'.⁴² A cybernetic system can then be understood as operating itself; responding on local levels to the needs of the whole without the necessity of centralised control or an overview on the part of individual members. So the figuring of the Borg Queen not only seems to exceed the basic premises of the cybernetic model (by imposing a leader, a central brain) but also attempts to mark the Borg as feminized - as existing within a matriarchal environment. In a sense, this simply displaces the militaristic and regimented regime of the Enterprise onto the Borg and, rather ironically, onto the feminine. In comparison, the 'mindless' obedience of the Borg makes the crew of the Enterprise's obedience to their captain and the Federation appear as though it proceeds unproblematically from individual choice. To this end, there are many situations in which the inherent individuality of the various members of the Enterprise crew is emphasised as important to the successful operations of the ship. However, there is also a tension apparent between the way in which the narrative highlights these instances and the performance strategies of the players.

In the television series (and, more specifically, the *"Both Worlds"* episodes) the acting is commonly very mechanical and reminiscent of the styles so far outlined. The dialogue here is delivered in a very measured fashion with little or no overlapping between characters' lines. The male and female actors' voices tend to be very modulated; the 'problem solving' arguments amongst crewmembers are followed through, from character to character, in a very linear fashion and their bodily movement is often halted during these moments. There is a slight difference set up between the crews' 'on duty'

⁴²'Hive Mind', *Out of Control*, (Fourth Estate, 1995), p.16.

performances and the way in which they act when 'off duty' - marked largely through occasional expirations of breath (connoting emotional response) and the odd elliptical sentence. Performance is also often referred to in the series. For example, in the first episode of *Both Worlds*, members of the crew are seen to play poker: poker being a game that requires a certain amount of acting in the bluffing procedure. Also, performance becomes particularly manifest in the various episodes when characters are seen to act out fantasies in the 'Holodeck' facility (this holographic technology allowing them to enact and interact in fictional/created scenes of their own choosing). Further to this, there is a sense in which the crews' style of personal presentation is seen to be part of their job of work; it is their duty to be rational and reasonable for the good of the mission and survival of the whole.

In the film this stylization is largely carried over from the television series, although things are stepped up a bit in terms of the intensity played out in certain scenes and the apparent excitement/activity these situations give rise to. This can mostly be explained as a kind of conforming to the current codes of the mainstream Science Fiction movie: the shift from television to film marking a shift to a more spectacle-driven form, as opposed to a form which relies more heavily on dramatic dialogue. In this respect, actors/characters are often called upon to respond without the aid of dialogue. This shift is referred to through the character of Data (a fully man-made android and member of the Enterprise crew) and his new found obsession with emotion. In the film Data is given access to an 'emotion chip' which he finds necessary to turn off, at one point, because it impedes his effectiveness. Unlike the human characters, Data has not learnt to control his emotions and the struggle between his rising desires, his interests in bodily as well as psychical 'feeling' and his older, more efficient, emotionless state, could be said to be an enactment of the shift from the series to the film. Data's ensuing battle with his emotions is played out more fully in those scenes when he faces the Borg Queen and it is notable that he chooses to return to his emotionless state in order to survive the 'onslaught' of this highly feminized enemy (I will be returning to these scenes in the following chapter). This could then be said to mark the behaviour associated with the crew of Enterprise as masculine, in a comparison with the more desirous and emotional behaviour of the Queen. So the concentration on the more extreme emotions of the crew in the film (which are connoted through the traditional use of close-up shots etc.) are deferred, in

more literal performance terms, onto Data - he acts out the crews' inner struggle between desire/emotion and professional distance.

The form of humanity, which is being played out in this film through the Enterprise crew, is most definitely associated with American style ideology in which human subject-hood is marked through a supposed individualism. However, in terms of the crew of the Enterprise, this is most often an individualism that remains at the level of the visual. For example, differences are revealed in costuming, features of appearance are accentuated in various ways to indicate the 'species'/race of crewmembers, and differences in the working roles that crewmembers play as part of the team. What becomes noticeable, if attention is paid to the acting out of these differences, is that the performance styles remain very similar between crewmembers. Even when there is a transgression from the normal presentation of this 'regulated' self it is recuperated quickly or used to display how each crew member freely returns to being an instrument of the Federation by becoming, once more, aligned with the collective 'mindfulness' of the 'modulated' self. Lester D. Friedman, in an article which focuses on the representation of ethnicity in classic Hollywood film, looks at the way in which a kind of 'symbolic ethnicity' is fostered whilst actual ethnic difference is subsumed. He goes on to state that 'ethnic identification retains an emotional aura based on outer symbols. Thus, in Hollywood films, the signifiers remain but the signified has been drastically altered'.⁴³ If the alien members of the Enterprise crew are read as representing a multicultural America then it seems that, although markers of 'alienness' are largely retained in some 'exotic' appearances, these differences are levelled out when it comes to acting stylizations. In this sense, the acting style can be read as a kind of re-enacting of a 'melting pot' portrayal of an overarching American identity: whilst the visual signifiers of racial difference remain (as encoded in the portrayal of the alien crew) these simply serve to underline a necessity to subsume difference in order to 'melt' into an overall and acceptable American identity.

In some ways this play between the modulated and emotional self can also be understood in connection with changing ideas arising from the development of artificial intelligence

⁴³'Celluloid Palimpsests: An Overview of Ethnicity and the American Film', *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, Lester D. Friedman ed., (University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.27.

in computer technology. As Manuel De Landa points out, theories surrounding these developments have caused a shift in common paradigms associated with population and evolution theories: Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' being replaced by 'survival of the stable'.⁴⁴ This suggests that the highly active, spontaneous and emotional self may now be understood as less necessary to the survival of a group/community than the more stable and measured qualities enacted by the Enterprise crew. Once again, it could be said that Data then becomes the site upon which links between 'computer intelligence' and the human mind are being made here. Like the character of Spock, in the original Star Trek series, Data stands for pure, analytical logic over bodily sensation and emotionalism. Therefore, given Data's decision to turn off his emotion chip, in the presence of the Queen, and given her final destruction, it is quite plain that 'mind' is finally associated with a masculine state of being which is central to the survival of humanity.

Communication is paramount in the Star Trek series and in the films. In fact, a desire to communicate is set up as the main focus that links the episodes of the series and propels this film's narrative trajectory. It seems that each race attempts to achieve understanding of another and, although figured as a little problematic at times, this is contrasted with the 'pure' communication of the Borg. The crew of the Borg ship have been 'assimilated' against their will, thereby removing their individuality. Through this process they achieve a collective consciousness which allows for swift, telepathic communication. But this is a communication that purely serves to make the running of the Borg's colonising project as efficient as possible and thereby operates to dissolve their individual creativity and desires. On this level, the suggestion is that occasional misunderstandings between crewmembers on the Enterprise are merely a sign of a more desirable mode of being. It would seem that in Star Trek's constant reference to a peaceful and understanding communion with other races (which could certainly be read in terms of a move toward globalisation) attempts are made to forestall the interpreting of this as a metaphor in terms of the conceptualisation of more fluid subjectivities. Ultimately, and not unexpectedly, although *First Contact* may be a little more complex in its cyborgian figurations it is a

⁴⁴'Virtual Environments and the Emergence of Synthetic Reason', *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, Mark Dery ed., (Duke University Press, 1993), p.795.

very conservative text - the linear 'time-line', which the Borg attempt to disrupt, is ultimately kept in place and history is allowed to remain as it was before.

In the films discussed above forms of what I have come to call 'mechanical acting' seem to dominate. Although this kind of acting is evident in other characters, it is predominantly centred on the cyborg. It is apparent that in these films, in part because of their use of the codes of the Action movie, emphasis is also placed upon the spectacle of the body. Depending upon the film, the mechanical stylization adopted can be seen to draw attention away from the actual body of the performer or to rest attention upon it. There are also interesting moments in these films when performance stylization seems to belie other aspects of the film, rather than 'fit' neatly with what the narrative (or formal content of the film) appears to be presenting. In some contexts, the mechanical style can be read in a definite opposition to more 'naturalistic' styles and in other circumstances as promoting a kind of hyperrealism, particularly in conjunction with a star persona. Likewise, seen in connection with generic modes of gender performance (in particular those outlined in my brief case studies of De Niro and Eastwood), the mechanical style of the cyborg can be seen to be commenting upon, or extrapolated from, past performances of masculinity. These points become evident upon looking specifically at performance and acting techniques in conjunction with other aspects of these films and, I believe, shed more light on the way in which the cyborg can be seen as a nexus for the re-articulation of humanity/subject-hood at a time when various postmodern theories appear to be challenging more traditional modes of philosophical thought in this area.

LEAVING THE MEAT BEHIND

Whereas the cycle of 1980s, cyborg films (that primarily began with *The Terminator*) set out to present various visual images of the literally embodied cyborg, more recently mainstream cinema has picked up on the popularity of the Cyberpunk genre. Influenced by the Cyberpunk novels, the image of the cyborg has largely shifted from the lone, hyper-bodied cyborg to those who are marked as such through their interface with computer technology. These films (which largely emerged onto the mainstream arena in

the 1990s) generally borrow from the codes of the Thriller, Detective and Espionage film and place less emphasis, at least self-consciously or diegetically, on the construction of the performers' body. That is not to say that characters' bodies are not important, simply these films place greater stress on the interaction of human, mental faculties and virtual reality technologies. In these later films the actual body, particularly the male body, appears to take a back seat. Of course, this can be read as a borrowing from, or reference to, the edicts of early 'hacker' subculture in which, according to Nigel Clark, 'performativity completely effaces appearance as the key to self-image or identity'.⁴⁵ Having said this, as Clark goes on to point out, in more recent times it seems that 'the cybernetic sphere no longer functions unproblematically as an alternative locus to the mass mediated world of aestheticized or spectacular body-effects'.⁴⁶ As these computer technologies have become more readily available and 'user friendly' the use of iconic and visual symbols has increased. Also the design of interfacing computer software has been influenced by cinematic and tele-visual aesthetics. On top of this, the films which have taken up the interfacing of the human with computer technology as a narrative device, now provide complex (often computer generated) visualizations of cyberspace within which both the literal and figurative body of a performer is framed. So, in certain ways, the dichotomy between cyberspace (as representing a mental, imagined arena) and the hyper-materialised, cyborg body (as representing human materiality) appears to be blurring - at least in terms of how this is represented. However, what is ostensibly stressed in these later films is the more psychical aspect of being human - in which case one might expect to find a less mechanical mode of performance, particularly in the rendering of dialogue. Nevertheless, it will become apparent that this mode persists even when there appears to be more stress on psychological complexity and characterization.

Johnny Mnemonic (Dir: Robert Longo, 1995), a film based on a short story by the Cyberpunk novelist, William Gibson, features Keanu Reeves as our hero placed in a confusing and multidimensional world of the near future. Johnny is a freelance courier, who, due to a 'memory prosthesis' implanted into his brain, is able to store vast quantities

⁴⁵ 'Rear View Mirrorshades: The Recursive Generation of the Cyberbody', *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows eds., (Sage, 1995), p.118.

⁴⁶ Clark, p.121.

of information. Having uploaded 'black market' information, he is then paid to smuggle this across national borders. He does not have access to this information himself, as it is encrypted with a code made up of visual frames/moments captured and recorded from film or television. In order to retain the capacity inside his brain to carry this information it was also necessary for him to 'offload' memories of his childhood. So, along with his lack of access to the information he actually carries, he cannot access long term memories about his past and family origins. It is as though his brain and mind are not his own - he simply acts as a relay for information from one location to another.

Given the familiar trope of family memories as a marker of humanness in the Cyborg film, it could be said that Johnny has given up his humanity for the easy life; for a life in the big city in which, as he later states, he gets 'room service' and a '\$10,000 a night hooker'. Everything is laid on for him, including his sexual encounters; everything in his world is a commodity, which allows him 'freedom' from responsibility both physically and emotionally. He is a kind of New Age Yuppie who, as long as he continues to be the obedient carrier of information from one party to the next, is provided for like a spoilt child. This characterization is highly reminiscent of Kevin Robbins' comments concerning the recent promotion and use of virtual reality technologies. Robbins sees these technologies as encouraging a kind of perpetuation of childhood and he goes on to discuss how theorists and practitioners alike have conceived of their use in terms that, according to him, amount to 'regression as transcendence'.⁴⁷ Having said this, the narrative trajectory of the film seems to chart Johnny's 'growth' to a kind of adulthood, as he becomes reluctantly engaged in the more material aspects of life and realises the ramifications of his actions. This growth is also signalled by the relationship that he begins to form with Jane - his female bodyguard. It seems that in order to attain adult masculinity he needs to be coupled with a woman who can provide the traits missing from his own personality: although a very active, female heroine she also represents the emotional, the bodily, the sexual, the material (traits common in representations of traditional femininity). In this way, Jane is presented in almost direct opposition to Johnny, inviting a comparison with his very logical, unemotional and, ironically, disconnected persona. This dichotomy is

also evident in the performances given by the pair. Reeves initially employs the, now familiar, measured, modulated and monotone style in the presentation of his dialogue and his bodily movements are especially stiff and stilted. This is juxtaposed with Dina Meyer's performance (as Jane) in which an almost animalistic quality is stressed: she does a lot of 'mouth acting', baring her teeth as she spits out the words and plays practically every line as though in a high state of tension and anger. Not only does this stylization present her as a sort of opposite to Johnny but it also provides a somewhat flattened version of, what Claudia Springer refers to as, the 'angry woman' of Cyberpunk, which she goes on to suggest can be partially read as representing feminist rebellion in a patriarchal world.⁴⁸ However, even though Jane appears to, rather literally, enact this 'angry woman' figuration, it would be hard to say that she is on any kind of feminist rampage as she spends most of the film protecting and helping Johnny. Whilst alluding to Cyberpunk, the movie seems to strip away certain aspects associated with this character type.

As Johnny begins to encounter certain life-changing problems, he displays a sort of emotional 'disruption'. Reeves reveals this disruption through very brief bursts of emotion - as though he were short-circuiting. There are also moments when Johnny seems to use these 'bursts' purely to communicate efficiently and speedily to those around him. At these moments there is some indication that performance, whether this be used for expressive or expedient purposes is, again, necessary in order to expedite an existence in this highly transient and quickly changing city world. So, for Johnny, the city space increasingly becomes a theatrical space: a space that is internalized as well as lived externally. In fact, in the opening (establishing shots) at the beginning of the film, the spectator is not introduced to the actual city surroundings but to the city-like spaces of the Net. Again, as will become evident in later analysis of films like *Virtuosity* (Dir: Brett Leonard, 1995) and *Grid Runners* (Dir: Ashock Amritraj, 1995), this has also become a familiar trope of Science Fiction films that deal with 'virtual realities'. Unlike the opening shots of a film like *Blade Runner*, in which the protagonist is seen flying into the 'real' cityscape of a futuristic New York, in recent films it is often the 'virtual' environment that

⁴⁷'Cyberspace and the World We Live In', *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows eds., (Sage, 1995), p. 153.

is set up at the beginning. This device operates as a kind of de-establishing shot, in which the viewer is left unsure as to what is meant to be real and what virtual. It also operates to signal a kind of hyper-subjective point of view - as though the spectator was being, literally, led through the 'mind map' of a particular cyborg character.

Throughout *Johnny Mnemonic* the theatricality of the city space is neatly echoed and underlined in a comparison to operations in cyberspace. The characters that are seen to enter the Net consistently present themselves as other than they are - this is usually in order to hide their identity or to promote some kind of ideal image of themselves in connection with their task or role within this sphere. Johnny, therefore, epitomises the type of person to emerge from both of these environments, not only in the way in which he presents himself but also in how he seems to experience himself. It is as though acting is being shown here as the 'natural' and most efficient way of behaving socially. His recognition of himself as a player/character in both of these environments has been taken to an extreme as Johnny appears unable to 'get in touch' with any sense of his 'authentic' self. Reeves neatly indicates this in his performance of the role, by moving quickly, and almost pseudo-neurotically, from one emotion to another - as though his body/being were not involved or taken up with what he is feeling. In fact, it is questionable as to whether Johnny is actually 'feeling' anything at all. Although this quick switching from one emotion to the next could be taken to be the outcome of some kind of pathological state, which has now become commonplace, it is also, more traditionally, the way in which actual 'acting' has been indicated within other films. For instance, the 'recovery' speed in moving from one expression to another, at least in recent naturalistic styles, commonly indicates an individual's involvement in the emotion and the supposed 'depth' with which they feel such an emotion. Obviously, Johnny is seen to lack 'depth', especially in having downloaded his own personal history; a 'depth' which is associated with his family origins and the sense in which emotions and morals are understood to arise from family dynamics.

Virginia Wright Wexman, in her book that concentrates on gender relations and performance in Hollywood movies, has noted recent shifts in acting techniques. She

⁴⁸ 'Sex, Memories, Angry women', *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, (Duke University Press, 1993), p.725.

argues that gender norms, certainly in terms of how these are presented in films, are becoming destabilised and she goes on to link certain performance strategies with theatrical Absurdism - a form of drama that originated in Europe.⁴⁹ She states that:

Absurdism posits character as a construct constituted from a series of roles. Absurdist actors dramatize the absence of a psychic centre to the characters they play by using the occasion of their performance to problematize the relationship between role-playing and identity.⁵⁰

In furthering her arguments she analyses David Mamet's work and comments that: 'In Mamet's theatre, the actors are characters, but the characters are also actors'.⁵¹ I would say that this kind of acting strategy is becoming more commonplace, particularly as performance within a real/diegetic world becomes more centralised as a topic or concern in films. Certainly links can be drawn between Reeves' performance style and the Absurdist tradition - a tradition which evidently draws upon early poststructuralist notions of the self and feeds into postmodern concerns about the changing status of subjectivity. However, I would also suggest that Reeve's performance could be read as fitting within a verisimilar stylization. Given the ways in which technology is shown to have operated upon him, this style could be seen as the logical extension of such events as well as a form of behaviour which may be understood as arising 'naturally' from his surrounding environment. Therefore, in drawing upon a style that has traditionally operated outside of mainstream cinema, that has often been employed in a kind of opposition to it (in association with the avant-garde and alternative cinema), Johnny is presented as the undesirable outcome of current trends. Johnny, therefore, represents a contrast to the 'normal' construction of what is considered, certainly by Hollywood standards, as 'proper' and healthy human behaviour. This is further underlined through contrast in the way in which Reeve presents the Johnny that communes with technology and the Johnny that learns to communicate with Jane. Toward the end of the film his acting style becomes more acceptably 'naturalistic', particularly in the moments when he shows compassion and affection toward Jane. Just prior to his successful downloading of the Pharmacom data that he carries, Jane and Johnny build up to an embrace in which the delivery of his

⁴⁹ Absurdism was the category under which a collection of playwrights became defined, primarily in the 1950s and 1960s. Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, some of Harold Pinter's and Tom Stoppard's early plays, were called Absurdist drama.

⁵⁰ 'The Destabilization of Gender Norms and Acting as Performance', *Creating The Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance*, (Princeton University Press, 1993) p.185.

⁵¹ Wright Wexman, p.203.

lines becomes less mechanical and the emotional content appears to harmonise with what he is saying. His movements also become more relaxed, less jerky, and integrated with the speech. It is as though the disparate elements of his performance had become concordant - presenting him, as a reassembled, unified character.

Springer describes the narrative trajectory of *Johnny Mnemonic*, as one that:

Takes Johnny from fragmentation to unification, and defines the process only in conventional terms of a resolution of the Oedipal crisis and attainment of heterosexual romance.⁵²

Certainly this is true and at the end of the film his taking on of the masculine, hero role also highlights his rites of passage into a supposedly mature masculinity.⁵³ Whereas Jane had previously provided the 'muscle' and physical skill to ward off enemies, in the last few scenes Johnny takes on the part of her protector and is seen to be physically active and involved in the ensuing battle. Then, in the closing shot of the film, Johnny and Jane are seen in close embrace, framed against the city skyline - in what appears to be a classic ending for a mainstream Hollywood film. Although there is a sense in which Johnny and Jane can be seen as representing aspects of gender performance traditionally associated with their sex, there is also a sense in which they can be said to have reversed roles - with Jane providing physical protection for the somewhat naïve Johnny. However, the film exhibits these 'reversed' traits/roles as undermining their health and security: Jane's body has been infected by the NAS plague (a technological virus that causes uncontrolled, bodily spasms) and Johnny is struggling, throughout the film, with the 'synaptic seepage' caused by his having uploaded too much information. It is only when Johnny, in true romantic fashion, is able to download the information, which in turn offers the remedy for Jane's disorder, that they can relax into their new found partnership. In other words, the 'dis-ease' which Johnny and Jane contract is represented as a form of boundary dissolution brought about by the technologies that each relies upon. It seems that these disorders can only be remedied by re-embracing the boundaries between them and by taking up a more traditional articulation of their gendered roles.

⁵² 'Psycho-Cybernetics in Films of the 1990s', *Alien Zone: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1999), p.213.

⁵³ Interestingly, in Gibson's short story, *Johnny Mnemonic* (upon which the film is based), it is Molly who enacts the hero role at the end, by destroying the Yakuza assassin in a dual on the 'killing floor'. Johnny's heroic and physical activity at the end of the film can therefore be seen as quite a departure from this.

From Action Man to Psycho-God

In *The Lawnmower Man* (Dir: Brett Leonard, 1992), unlike the urban spaces figured in *Johnny Mnemonic*, the action takes place within a rural and suburban environment. Once again, it is an interest in our central character's 'mind' and brain which provides the thrust of the narrative - even though the changes that he undergoes during the course of the film are firmly signalled in his bodily presentation. At the outset of the film, Jobe (played by Jeff Fahey) is set up as a 'simple'/childlike man who, having been introduced (via immersive video games) to virtual reality technologies, and with the help of certain brain enhancing drugs, is able to increase his intelligence. Eventually, his understanding exceeds that of the scientist who is using him as the subject of his experiments and he also gains certain mystical powers: telepathy, telekinesis etc. Jobe is then shown to evolve into a threatening figure with dreams of godlike omnipotence. At the close of the film, Jobe literally transfers himself into cyberspace. Although there is talk that he wishes to download his consciousness into the Net, this transference is actually shown to occur when his whole body is 'sucked up' into cyberspace - leaving his cyber-suit strung up, empty and flat on the gyroscopic apparatus he uses to simulate his bodies movements within the virtual reality environment. This is a somewhat different image from that drawn from Cyberpunk, even though it obviously refers to it. In Cyberpunk, the 'meat' is usually discarded (left behind in the material world) while all mental activities are transferred into cyberspace. In some ways, the image of Jobe's bodily transference can be taken as a simple, visual way of indicating what has occurred but it also operates to affirm that he has retained his masculinity in cyberspace. Furthermore, although he seems to have accomplished what could be construed as the most 'dissolving' of operations, this image works to signal that his psychical character remains unified even though his body has been dissolved into cyberspace. Claudia Springer notes that although cyborgization may, in part, be understood as deconstructing the masculine subject, many Cyborg films appear to reconstruct it 'suggesting that there is an essential masculinity which transcends bodily presence'.⁵⁴ Certainly, in terms of this film's imagery, it seems that Jobe's masculinity is actually enhanced upon his transfer into cyberspace and, along with this he

⁵⁴ Claudia Springer, 'The Pleasure of the Interface', *Screen*, V.32, N.3, (Autumn, 1991), 303-323, (p.318).

becomes able to wreak vengeance on those that have attempted to control him. For instance, he attacks the government agents who are sent to take over control of the project by projecting a powerful beam, which has the effect of dispersing and disintegrating their bodies - liquefying them into molecular-like globules. There are various other, abusive, male figures of authority that Jobe also dispatches; as though insisting that his own masculine and God-like authority is recognised.

However, an alternative reading of the film's trajectory can be ascertained if closer attention is paid to performance. As stated earlier, the speeded up 'evolution' that Jobe undergoes (in the director's cut he is heavily aligned with the laboratory monkey) is largely indicated in bodily terms. The more intelligent he becomes the more notice he takes of his own appearance; his growth/maturity being signalled by a growing self-awareness and bodily mastery. He is later seen to take on the familiar signs of a particular brand of American masculinity when he dons a new shirt, blue jeans and a pair of cowboy boots. His hair becomes less 'wild' and neatly coiffured and he even manages to draw the attention of the local vamp, who becomes his lover. His development is also underlined by other aspects of his performance. At the start of the film his acting places stress upon seemingly 'spontaneous' reaction, used to denote wonder and excitement with what is going on around him (his eyes are also heavily made up to look bigger here and this is backed up by his consistent use of a wide eyed, childlike expression). Of course, these are all common signifiers of childlike innocence and, although shown to be physically energetic in his interactions with others, he is, nonetheless obedient. As his mental powers increase he gains increasing levels of autonomy, to the point where he loses connection with the people around him - connoted by his increasing lack of response and enjoyment in his interactions with others. This culminates in a technological 'rites of passage' in which he becomes the vengeful father of his own upbringing (his childhood guardian is an abusive and controlling priest). However, after downloading himself into cyberspace the representation that the viewer is shown of his body/character becomes far more openly expressive - particularly in a comparison with the performance he gives as the newly matured Jobe, just prior to this. In the course of his 'evolution' he has taken on the more measured and modulated tones of an accepted form of masculine adulthood but now his cyber-face and body express his extreme rage and frustration, sadness and confusion. So his one-dimensional body is seemingly able to

become more openly expressive than his actual body had previously been. At this point, the literally 'flattened' Jobe is shown to be more physically and psychically demonstrative. In a move that looks suspiciously like the 'regression as transcendence' suggested earlier it is as though, freed from attachment to his social, performed body, he is able to return to a form of his earlier spontaneity.

It is also possible to read Jobe as the embodied projection of aspects of Larry's character. Larry (played by Pierce Brosnan), the scientist who created the technology that allows for Jobe's 'growth', appears to possess similar traits to Jobe. For example, in association with Fahey's performance, Brosnan seems to employ some of the same devices used to express an immaturity in Jobe. Larry's passionate involvement in his research is shown to lead him into spontaneous outbursts of emotion; he is also innocent of the political ramifications of the project and how the technology is likely to be used by the government agency. Jobe's later characterization, as he becomes more disconnected from the material world and begins to display delusions of grandeur, can also be likened to the scientist, his own God-like aspirations being connected to his desire to create the super intelligent Jobe. In fact, there is a rather 'telling' moment when Larry argues with his girlfriend about his obsession with his work, during which he excitedly promotes his ambitions to her as involving the creation of a new kind of future world. She replies: 'It may be the future for you Larry but it's the same old shit to me'. Although she can be understood to refer to his continuing lack of engagement in the material world around him, and his lack of engagement in their relationship, her retort neatly points out how this work can be understood as an extension of the same masculinist and patriarchal world in which she is situated.

Brosnan's performance can also be contrasted with the government officials that surround him. It is these men who display the 'mechanical' stylization that I have previously outlined. In particular, a character called 'the Director' (who leads the government agents) presents the audience with the most extreme version of this 'mechanical mode': his facial expressions remain minimal and his dialogue is delivered using some very strange vocal inflexions, punctuated with unusually long, unnaturally placed, pauses. This delivery not only works to distance him from the other characters but also has the effect of slowing

down the action of drama and, at times, bringing everything to a stand still.⁵⁵ Like the 'voice of God' in the biblical epics of past Hollywood movies, this unusual performance seems designed to connote power and authority - although here authority is associated with a mechanical lack of passion or feeling. The Director is initially introduced as a face on a screen during a videoconference with members of the board who are in charge of the project. Rather like the face of 'Big Brother' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Dir: Michael Radford, 1984), the Director is seen as a distant, rather unreal, and literally flat character. It is obvious that the government agency is being targeted as the real culprit here; the figures that represent an oppressive, patriarchal system within which Larry and Jobe are merely pawns. This would seem to indicate that there is an inherent criticism of patriarchal control in the film. However, if the alternative to this control is seen to be Jobe's extreme level of autonomy, then perhaps the film ends up affirming certain patriarchal institutions. In fact, like many of the previous films I have mentioned, *The Lawnmower Man* seems to resort to actual fatherhood, within a traditional family set up, as the most stable structure to remain. This is signalled not by Jobe's growth within the film but by Larry's: it is Larry who, having survived the whole episode, is seen to take on the role of father and protector to the woman and child who live next door. So the wider power that was available to him in his role as a scientist and mentor to his man/child, having been undermined, is now replaced by his taking up of the more intimate role as father figure within the traditional family.

As mentioned in the introduction, Scott Bukatman states that 'it is the purpose of much recent science fiction to construct a new subject-position to interface with the global realms of data circulation, a subject that can occupy or intersect the cyberspaces of contemporary existence'.⁵⁶ Bukatman calls this mode of subjectivity 'Terminal Identity' and defines it as 'an unmistakably doubled articulation in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station or television

⁵⁵ This unusual performance is also similar in style to the later performance of the lead 'agent' in *The Matrix* - indicating that borrowing, or referencing, in Science Fiction film is not confined to moments of spectacle, but extends to performance.

⁵⁶ *Terminal Identity: The virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, (Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 8-9.

screen'.⁵⁷ It would seem that both *Johnny Mnemonic* and *The Lawnmower Man* ostensibly attempt to articulate various forms of this new subjectivity. Or does each film really explore the ways in which the current dynamics of western society, along with its attendant subjectivities, can/may be retained within emerging technological environments? Of course, in terms of these film's models of gender identities, which seem central to the articulation of both present and futuristic subjectivities, it is common that they are understood to emanate from the dynamics of a 'family' model (a model which has traditionally provided the basis for larger societal models). In particular, theories of gender formation have been extrapolated from Freudian psychoanalysis, in which an oedipal scenario predominates.

In what appears to be an almost hysterical attempt to re-articulate both actual and figurative fatherhood it seems that these films continue to draw upon this model and the way in which difference is articulated within the frame of a Freudian paradigm.

Interestingly, as explained in the introduction, this same Freudian model has been used to underpin the west's most dominant style of film acting. But what of emerging performance styles at a time when psychologists are engaged in a modelling of the human underpinned by a comparison with computer technologies? I would suggest that acting styles are bound to be affected by these paradigm shifts and that the performance strategies employed in the films discussed in this chapter actually speak to these shifts.

As Springer has argued:

Despite the complexity of the human memory, the model of a computer mind has for some psychologists replaced the Freudian paradigm of layered levels of consciousness engaged in a process of repression.⁵⁸

It seems that in both of these films an emerging computer-like psychology is being explored in a kind of clashing with the older, layered model. Johnny's identity is shown to become neutralised, flattened, in his adopting a computer-mind and, in his move back to a more layered model, he is shown to regain his 'human passion'. Jobe's 'flattening', on the other hand, seems to be concerned with how computer and virtual reality technologies can somehow cause a return of the repressed, a bringing to the surface of deeper, more latent passions in the human individual. Whilst *Johnny Mnemonic* begins the film as a

⁵⁷ Bukatman, p.9.

kind of surface construction, in conjunction with the computer technologies he interacts with, he regains his 'depth' through his human interactions with Jane. Jobe's 'depths', on the other hand, are only revealed in conjunction with computer technology. So although both films appear to correlate computer technologies with a 'flattened' portrayal of humanity, the 'surface performances' by the central male cyborgs appears to declare rather different results. It is also evident that in the later cyber-thrillers both male and female cyborgs are often featured. Having said this, this is not to say that the male cyborg in many of these mainstream films does not remain the principle focus of the narrative. In fact, in reference to the examples of *First Contact*, *Johnny Mnemonic* and *The Lawnmower Man*, it becomes apparent that the female cyborgs function to provide a kind of contrast with the central male cyborg. In a similar way to the contrasts set up in *Robocop*, the female cyborg in these films is used to reveal what the male cyborg is not, which may operate to close down on the possibly more 'open', writerly elements associated with cyborg imagery. For instance, in *The Lawnmower Man*, as mentioned above, the local vamp becomes Jobe's female lover. This, of course, serves to underline his new found masculinity, but it seems that her mind cannot withstand the experience of cyber-sex. Having entered cyberspace with Jobe she seems to lose, literally, her mind and, in case the viewer was in any doubt as to her function within the narrative, at this point she is simply left as a helpless body. It seems that only Jobe's mind is strong enough to deal with the experience of cyberspace and, once he has lost his female lover, he chooses to return to this realm.

At the beginning of this chapter I stated that many of the most familiar, most popular Cyborg movies featured male/masculine cyborgs, suggesting that it is the male who actually 'stands for' a threatened humanity in these films. Of course, this indicates that masculine subjectivity and, by extension, the future of masculinity, remains the dominating concern in mainstream, Science Fiction films. However, what it also indicates is that the figuration of the Cyborg brings with it particularly male anxieties. Although I have briefly mentioned the Borg Queen, Jane and the 'vamp', in the following chapter I concentrate more closely on those films that feature more central female

⁵⁸ 'Sex, Memory, Angry Women', *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, Mark Dery ed., (Duke University Press, 1993), pp.716-717.

cyborgs. Many of these Cyborg films also focus the same degree of interest on the muscled and enhanced body; however, given that the cyborgs in question are female, a different gender dynamic is evident. This gender shift brings with it differences in meaning, not only in deconstructing the iconography available in the films but also in terms of how gender is played out. Whilst I will be referring back to some of the films already mentioned here, I have split these two chapters along sex/gender lines in order to encourage comparison between the male and female cyborg.

CHAPTER 2: GENDER BLENDING AND THE FEMALE CYBORG

As became apparent in the discussions of the previous chapter, the potential confusions that may arise from a blurring of the boundaries between the organic human and the inorganic machine is often countered by an attempted fortifying of oppositions based on sex and gender. Frequently, particularly in the many Science Fiction/Action movies of the 1980s, the cyborg is figured as not only male but also hyper-masculine in some sense. This can be articulated visually in terms of musculature, body armouring or simply in the extreme patriarchal role that the cyborg hero/anti-hero is seen to undertake. In this way it seems that the growing importance of new technologies is most strongly associated with patriarchal power structures, as illustrated in the more literal emphasis on the perceived powers of a masculine subjectivity. Although this could certainly be seen as a rather hysterical response to the issues raised by the very notion of the cyborg, and can therefore open up a critical space within which to counter and question traditional gender modellings, it still, manifestly, marginalizes the female.

In this chapter I have chosen to pay particular attention to the female cyborg in order to illustrate certain pertinent differences in the way in which she is configured - as compared to the cyborg that is performed by a male actor. As outlined in the introduction, the only true cyborg in *Blade Runner* (Dir: Ridley Scott, 1982) is Rachel (played by Sean Young). Due to the fact that she is given the memories of Tyrell's niece she qualifies as a cyborg, whereas the other replicants not only know themselves as manufactured but also do not have any form of prosthetic, human memory. As an early example of a female cyborg it is interesting that she is so strongly associated with the 'femme fatale' of Film Noir (certainly this association is heavily foregrounded in the original edit of the film). It seems that, in drawing upon this genre, *Blade Runner* overlays the kind of doubleness that can be associated with the cyborg (in the human/machine confluence) with that of the dangerous and duplicitous femme fatale. Of course, as Janey Place suggests the femme fatale can be understood as the expression of male anxiety and fear; she can be seen as a kind of '*doppelganger*, a dark ghost, *alter ego* or

distorted side of man's personality' and, in taking into account the director's cut of the film (1991), in which it is suggested that Deckard may well be a replicant, it seems that this may, indeed, be foregrounded in *Blade Runner*.¹ However, unlike many femme fatales (of both the classic era and the later 'neo-noirs') who seem relatively active, both as narrative agents and in terms of their highly sexualized, often aggressive characterizations and performance, it is interesting that Sean Young's performance of the role seems particularly vacuous and passive. Whilst this may well be explained by her replicant status in the narrative it also serves to place greater emphasis upon her visual presence and strongly underlines the way in which she is a fetishistic object for the men in the story. In addition, this passive performance indicates the extent to which Deckard (and by extension the audience) is able to project onto Rachel both his fears and desires. Rachel seems to look to Deckard for a sense of identity and acceptance as an individual and as a woman - she is also seen to acquiesce to Deckard's suggestions and appears eager to become what he wants her to be. Likewise, Deckard could be said to look to Rachel in order to assert his own sense of masculinity and to assure his own future away from the violence of 'retiring' replicants. If it is taken that Deckard is also a cyborg-replicant (unaware of his own nature due to implanted, human memories) then the doubleness of the cyborg here is sutured to a kind of splitting associated with their extreme genderization. In other words, they need one another because they make up two halves of the same person - or, alternatively, they need one another because they recognize that they are both constructed to act out one side of their being within a world in which gender divides force a suppression of other aspects of behaviour.

There is a particularly interesting moment when Deckard and Rachel first kiss which further emphasizes this idea of the femme fatale as Deckard's alter ego. Toward the end of the film, when they are alone in his home, Deckard violently pushes Rachel against the wall. After this he tells her what to say to him:

Deckard: 'Say, "kiss me"'
 Rachel: 'Kiss me'
 Deckard: 'Say "I want you"'
 Rachel: 'I want you'

¹ *Women in Film Noir*, E. Ann Kaplan ed., (BFI Publishing, 1980), p.41. Place's emphasis.

The aggression with which he approaches Rachel seems totally uncalled for and, as Erica Sheen suggests, this may mark Rachel's sudden entry into the symbolic order.² She, therefore, only becomes a fully constituted subject upon aligning/enslaving herself to this male partner. However, Kaja Silverman puts a slightly different slant on the scene when she suggests that the aggression involved obliges 'the viewer to confront the arbitrariness and the violence of what passes for "difference" within any culture'.³ Silverman states that the scene's meaning hinges on what Rachel says immediately prior to the above exchange: 'I can't rely on...' She reads this as Rachel doubting her own feelings because the memories that provide her with an identity are not her own. She goes on to suggest that Deckard is merely trying to prove to her that 'it is no less urgent or psychically real because it comes to her from the larger symbolic order. He thereby acknowledges both to Rachel and himself that she [...] is a fully constituted subject'.⁴ In her reading of this scene Silverman implies that the film critiques the figuring of the female as a fantasy figure that remains subservient to male desire. However, although *Blade Runner* (at least the first cut) certainly foregrounds the constructedness of gender it does, in part, neutralize any critique by allowing only the replicant-cyborg who complies with the 'law of the father' to survive. In other words, Rachel survives not only because of her human components but because she has taken up a role associated with female/feminine, human subjectivity. In fact, this could well be read as her having *become* human only in the instance when she was forced to conform to a traditional role as compliant, romantic partner to Deckard.

Of course, in some of the films that I discussed in the first chapter, there are examples of powerful, active, female figures who are either literally configured as cyborgs or come to be closely associated with technological power. For instance, Sarah in both the *Terminator* films is seen to appropriate traditionally masculine traits, which allow her to fight for the future. However, although Sarah can be aligned with the growing number of 'female heroes' in mainstream, Hollywood films, she is also 'out-performed' by the Terminator. In looking at the sequel it is evident that her newly acquired physique is placed within a hierarchy of

² "'I'm not *in* the business; I *am* the business": women at work in Hollywood Science Fiction', *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction*, Lucie Armitt ed., (Routledge, 1991), pp.153-159.

³ 'Back to the Future', *Camera Obscura*, N.27, (September, 1991), 108-132, (p.113).

⁴ Silverman, p.129.

muscularity in which the Terminator is certainly figured as more powerful in this regard. She is also, arguably, predominantly characterized as fighting *for* patriarchy in that she can be seen as its tool or as a mere vessel for the birth of a future male saviour. More recent examples would include Jane (played by Dina Meyer), in *Johnny Mnemonic*, and Trinity (played by Carrie-Anne Moss), in *The Matrix*. Both of these characters are seen to be physically active and both appear to possess the bodily strength, skill and expertise that enable them to triumph in physical battles, often against male adversaries. As previously discussed, Jane acts as Johnny's bodyguard and is paid to protect him against those that aim to kill him. Trinity, on the other hand, is a member of the rebel group attempting to free humanity from the illusion of the Matrix. Like Jane, although Trinity is shown to be a particularly skillful opponent, she also becomes the love interest to Neo (played by Keanu Reeves). Toward the end of the film she comes to believe, along with the rest of the group, that Neo is the saviour they have been waiting for to lead them against the virtual 'agents' that protect the Matrix. In this way then the mere borrowing, by a female character, of what have been previously understood as masculine traits does not necessarily lead to a representation of an 'equality' between the sexes. The threat that the 'female hero' may offer to the stability of traditional gender hierarchies is often ensnared within a narrative that strongly upholds patriarchal values.

However, in moving away from these recent mainstream examples and turning toward the direct to video and lower-budget Cyborg movies, it is noticeable that there are many more examples of female cyborgs present and that the recuperative tactics displayed in the mainstream films are less emphatic. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a number of direct to video films appeared that featured, what can be described as, 'female hero' cyborgs. These cyborgs frequently took up central roles and, in much the same way as their male counterparts, were often lone figures battling for survival. In looking at these films it is possible to trace how the direct to video market not only fills a gap in the mainstream's configuring of the female cyborg but may also offer more powerful, and perhaps more radical, versions of female cyborgization. Direct to video releases tend to have budgetary constraints and are often conceived of, written and directed by one person, or fewer people than the formula Blockbuster, Science Fiction releases appear to require. This, of course,

allows for a new filmmaker to develop their skills but it may also allow for a greater flexibility of experimentation - both aesthetically and thematically. One would also assume that direct to video releases are not so confined by the need to conform to censorship constraints, in that whether they can achieve a broad certification is not so crucial to reaching their audience (although video release is born in mind by the producers of the more mainstream product, certification is initially important). These are just a few of the production and exhibition differences that could be seen as underpinning the kinds of divergences that I will be talking about in the second half of this chapter. However, this does not detract from the fact that an analysis of these divergences proves highly illuminating. It is with this in mind that I will later come to offer readings of some of these lesser-known films.

Anticipating later discussions concerning the 'female hero' I want to take an initial look at one of the most predominant ways in which the female cyborg is featured, certainly within current mainstream American cinema. Although I am dealing with a limited number of examples here, due to the relatively small number of central female cyborgs in mainstream Science Fiction film over the past twenty years, it is notable that when they do appear to take centre stage this often involves their placement within the codes and practices of the Horror genre. So, unlike the mainstream, action hero/male cyborg of the 1980s our central female cyborgs appear to require a different narrative and iconographic terrain within which to operate in mainstream cinema. In fact, one of the first examples of the cyborg to hit the screens is female and can be found in the Science Fiction/Horror movie *Demon Seed* (Donald Cammell, 1977). In ways that will become clear in my following discussions, this film seems to have set the tone for later, mainstream films that figure the female cyborg.

HORROR AND THE FEMALE CYBORG AS 'COMPOSITE' BEING

The narrative of *Demon Seed* revolves around Susan (played by Julie Christie), a female psychologist, and her scientist husband, Alex. Alex is the creator of an artificial intelligence, called Proteus 4. His creation exceeds the parameters of his expectations and begins to act

independently of Alex's programming. As Proteus will no longer obey the orders it is given it threatens either to fully control or destroy humanity. Once this becomes evident it is decided to shut down the computer that runs this artificial intelligence but this is not achieved before Proteus has managed to 'escape' via a forgotten terminal situated in the home of Alex and Susan. Proteus decides that in order to survive it must exist in human form and, to this end, proceeds to imprison and rape Susan.

Proteus is marked as a masculine computer (in the sense that a male actor performs the voice that speaks for him) who wishes to create a 'living' and embodied offspring through a 'union' with Susan. The progeny that is produced is therefore a cyborg - the literal 'brainchild' of this machine intelligence melded with the human. Susan, having been impregnated by the computer, is only allowed to carry the child for a limited period; the later stages of the foetus's development and education are taken over by Proteus 4. The artificial womb that is created by Proteus to carry the child through to full term (which in this instance enables the production of a child at an age just prior to puberty) also acts as the vessel within which the computer can transfer his consciousness and knowledge into the body of the child.

Earlier in the film the spectator sees Susan viewing some home-movie footage that shows her daughter playing. Susan is visibly upset by this and we later learn that her child died of leukemia just after this home-movie was made. In order to coerce her into nurturing the progeny produced by the rape the computer re-produces Susan's deceased daughter. However, even though the child outwardly resembles Susan's own daughter when she speaks it is with the voice of the computer who spawned her. In this sense then, although the body of the female is central to the birth of this cyborg the consciousness/intelligence within is masculine - effectively denying a female/feminine agency. The female here becomes a mere vessel for the reproduction of a masculine consciousness: the computer representing mind whilst both Susan and the cloned copy of her deceased female child come to represent host bodies.

The connections between Alex and Proteus are most particularly foregrounded at the end of the movie. Alex is absent throughout most of the film, certainly from the point at which

Proteus' consciousness enters into Susan's life, which suggests that this artificial intelligence is somehow acting out his creator's desires. This becomes manifest when Alex returns to the house and hears of the existence of the child. As the couple enter the basement and see the artificial womb containing the child, Susan is suddenly struck with horror at the idea of its birth. As Susan's horror grows in intensity it is matched by Alex's enthusiasm over what has occurred. Susan tries to 'abort' the child by pulling out the cables and wires that feed the 'womb'. A metallic, plated body is ejected and Alex violently pushes Susan aside, proceeds to remove the plating and wipe away the gelatinous resin covering the fleshy surface of the child's skin. The final shots of the film reveal a hopelessly traumatized Susan who simply watches from a distance as Alex cradles *his* child.

At one level, the narrative action of *Demon Seed* can be read as a kind of exposure of one of the commonest tropes in Science Fiction – the male/masculine endeavor to take over, or fully control, the procreative powers of the human female. This concern with birthing is frequently repressed or displaced in Science Fiction film. In fact, Vivian Sobchack states that '[m]ore than any other American film genre [...] Science Fiction denies human eroticism and libido a traditional narrative representation and expression.'⁵ But, even though sexuality has often been markedly absent in early Science Fiction film narratives it can be read as present in the very imagery of a given film.⁶ Alternatively, biological reproduction is displaced onto the more masculine domain of technological production. Of course, the concordance between reproduction and production in Science Fiction has been made evident before: right back to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) connections between creation and procreation have been explored in Science Fiction. This leaves the actual female, the Other, out of the equation for, as Sobchack points out, '[n]ot only does the technological man want to make his

⁵ 'The Virginity of Astronauts: Sex and the Science Fiction Film', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1990), p.103.

⁶ For instance, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is a particularly clear example in which human intimacy seems to be replaced by images that can be read as connoting a sexual act. For example, toward the end of the film the remaining astronaut is transported, in his space shuttle, through a long and psychedelic tunnel - which can be read to symbolize an act of penetrative sex or a birthing metaphor. This is then followed by the image of a floating embryo. Many early Science Fiction films also abound with images of phallus-like spacecraft penetrating the depths of space etc.

own babies, but he wants to do so without the hormones and flesh, without lust and arousal'.⁷ On another level, however, the birth of the cyborg in *Demon Seed* also serves to expose, or deconstruct, certain aspects of the cinematic apparatus itself. By this I mean that the evident separation of body and voice, brought about when the cyborg child speaks the words 'I am alive', works to reveal the necessity of the voice/body, sound/vision, synchronization within cinematic 'realism'. Synchronization of sound and vision thus, more usually, acts as a naturalizing device effacing the way in which cinematic technologies construct the aural as well as the visual. In *Demon Seed*, the sound and vision are synchronized to the extent that there is the suggestion that this voice emanates from the female child's body but here it operates as a de-naturalizing device that complicates traditional notions of a sex/gender unity. So, this simultaneous exposing and usage of the synchronization device, ironically, operates to both unify disparate elements as well as signaling a de-unification. I would suggest that the possible effects of this moment are multiple and can be understood in a variety of ways. In one sense, the cyborg child could be read as exhibiting how the cinematic apparatus can operate to set up the female as a fetishistic object for the male: in a similar, but perhaps more radical way than *Blade Runner*, *Demon Seed* discloses this aspect of cinema by literalizing the creation of a man-made female in such a way as to suggest that she is the embodied projection of a masculine desire.

However, this literalization also operates to reveal certain other aspects associated with the fetishistic process. Kaja Silverman has explored the way in which 'woman', as held up to the male gaze in cinema, may not only be seen/heard as a figure that is 'other' to the male/masculine (thereby denoting 'lack' in opposition to a male/masculine plenitude) but may also be understood as an 'uncanny' reminder of what is 'lacking' in the male (that which has been lost at the point of gender differentiation).⁸ In the case of *Demon Seed* it seems that Alex, if understood as acting through his creation Proteus, is displaying a very literal form of womb envy (that which he lacks) not only in the production of the child but in the creation of the artificial womb which Proteus insists the child be transferred to in the later stages of her development. In fact, Barbara Creed, in her exploration of the representation of the

⁷ Sobchack, p.108.

⁸ In particular, she discusses this idea in her chapter 'Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects', *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, (Indiana University Press, 1988), pp.1-41.

female/feminine in the Horror film, actually states that '[m]an's desire to create life - to give birth - suggests a more profound desire at work - to become woman.'⁹ Silverman, in a similar vein, goes on to suggest that the extreme efforts made in order to neutralize the anxiety of a masculine gaze upon the female (including the female who is heavily marked as fetish object for the male) further underlines the notion that it is male/masculine 'lack' which is really in question. This may be born out in *Demon Seed* in that such a literal foregrounding of the female as fetish object, as seen in the cyborg child, may not so much work to neutralize but rather de-neutralize male fears: the masculine/male viewer may not have recourse to those symbolic coverings that, more usually, work to allay his anxieties. In conjunction with the technology that is featured in this process, the film can be seen to expose the way in which a gendered technological power (as commonly sutured to the masculine/male in Science Fiction) can actually be understood as an indicator of male anxieties and fears associated with a masculine/male 'lack'.

Silverman, in her further exploration of voice and body in cinema, also notes that a disembodied voice (i.e. narrators 'voice over') is most commonly featured as masculine and that even when we hear the 'inner voice' of a female character (most often in conjunction with the sight of the female character whose thoughts the voice is meant to represent) she is not allowed the same sense of diegetic mastery.¹⁰ Silverman therefore comes to the conclusion that to fully 'embody a voice is to feminize it'.¹¹ In some respects this is reminiscent of the way in which the later 'cyber-thrillers' (discussed in chapter one) appear to articulate a masculine desire for disembodiment. Judith Butler, in a discussion of the paradoxes involved in a mind/body splitting for the masculine subject and the way in which masculinity requires its Others, states:

This domain of the less than rational human bounds the figure of human reason, producing that 'man' as one who is without a childhood; is not a primate and so is relieved of the necessity of eating, defecating, living and dying; one who is not a slave, but always a property holder; one whose language remains originary and untranslatable. This is a figure of disembodiment, but one which is nevertheless a figure of a body, a bodying forth of a masculinized rationality, the figure of a male

⁹ *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (Routledge, 1993), p.57.

¹⁰ This discussion is featured in her chapter 'Body Talk', *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, (Indiana University Press, 1988), pp.42-71.

¹¹ Silverman, p.50.

body which is not a body, a figure in crisis, a figure that enacts a crisis it cannot fully control [...] The body that is reason dematerializes the bodies that may not properly stand for reason or its replicas, and yet this is a figure in crisis, for this body of reason is itself the phantasmatic dematerialization of masculinity, one which requires that women and slaves, children and animals be the body, perform the bodily functions, that it will not perform.¹²

What does this then suggest about the cyborg in *Demon Seed*? Throughout the film the voice of Proteus is heard like a voice-over and the connotations of a 'God-like' power inherent in this disembodied voice are actually made clear in the way he is able to control the environment in the house in which he traps Susan. Is Proteus therefore feminized once he becomes embodied? And is this literalized by the way in which he is understood as residing within a female body? If this is the case then it, again, seems to speak to a masculine fear of 'lack' - either in terms of those supposedly 'feminine' traits lost upon taking up a masculine subject position and/or a more literal lack in bodily terms.¹³ In another sense, by taking into consideration Silverman's and Butler's ideas, it could also be argued that the embodiment of this masculinity is actually avoided in the film - thereby allowing for the continuance of the myth of masculine omnipotence. In other words, if Proteus' voice had been seen to emanate from the confines of a male child's body this may have served to foreground even more the way in which masculinity is limited by the body. Alternatively, the figuring of the cyborg here could be understood as representing a masculine, technological threat to the existence of the feminine/female. In this way the cyborg may be seen as embodied within a future woman who has been literally taken over by a masculine consciousness. Whatever the reading that this moment makes possible this particular celluloid cyborg certainly operates to thoroughly confuse, de-naturalize, de-neutralize and deconstruct those cinematic elements upon which sex and gender are, more usually, predicated.

Having discussed how the mind/body split is somewhat literalized in the late 1970s movie, *Demon Seed*; this dichotomy is also foregrounded in later Cyborg films. One of the most notable examples of a female cyborg, in recent mainstream American Cinema, is the Borg

¹² *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (Routledge, 1993), pp.48-49.

¹³ The fact that this is a pre-pubescent child may well be seen as evidence for Silverman's argument that male 'lack' is actually connected to those traits lost upon the taking up of a masculine subject positioning.

Queen in the 'Star Trek' movie *First Contact* (Jonathan Frakes, 1997). I have already looked at how Data comes to illustrate a working through of the tensions between the Enterprise crews' individual emotions/desires and a more mechanical obedience to the Federation (for the 'greater good') but it is those scenes in which he faces the Queen that tellingly articulate the kind of danger she offers. The Borg Queen could be understood to be Data's counterpart in the film and certainly comes to embody those aspects that threaten to upset the order achieved by the Federation. Having previously stated that the Queen is meant to represent the controlling 'mind' behind her drones' actions it is largely in the illustration of her more physical aspects that she is understood to be both a powerful and potentially threatening enemy to the Federation. When Data is taken onto the Borg ship it is not, primarily, the Queen's intellect which appears threatening but rather her efforts to use her physicality in order to seduce and tempt him into an 'assimilation' with the Borg. As previously stated, unlike Picard's 'assimilation' in an earlier Star Trek television episode, Data's involves the introduction of more human elements. The Borg Queen thus enables him to feel bodily sensation that appears to be enhanced by his new found emotions. In making him more human in this way she is seen to make him more vulnerable to attack: if the administering of pain does not work she tries to coax him by applying sensuous, bodily sensation and through the implied promise of sexual 'union'. For instance, at one point she blows upon his new skin and after he appears to respond with a kind of disturbed elation she says 'was that good for you?' Of course, it is up to Data (and, by implication, the rest of the Enterprise crew) to withstand both pain and pleasure, as seen in connection with the introduction of more organically human elements, and it is therefore the female or 'feminine' that threatens such a disturbance. If Data 'lets his guard down' the inference is that he risks becoming one of her drones, and completely controllable, losing not only his autonomy but also his supposed individuality. Having said that, Picard states, later in the film, that the Queen is attempting to make Data more like her, in her quest for 'an equal'. If this comment is intended to reflect certain feminist concerns then it becomes mere 'lip service' as the statement, within the bounds of the narrative, suggests that 'equality' itself is threatening. Taking all of the above into consideration it seems that the cybernetic organism (in *First Contact*), the literal melding of human and machine, is affiliated with the feminine and the consequent blurring of boundaries can be read as a feminine threat to a masculinity that requires separation.

Like Rachel, the Borg Queen can be aligned with the 'femme fatale' of Film Noir; she is the duplicitous temptress, and if Data gives in to his newly acquired 'baser' desires, in an alliance with the 'feminine', he will suffer the consequences. Alice Krige's performance of the Queen underlines this type of figuration as she speaks using a low, soft, breathy tone designed to seduce her victim into compliance and a sense of security. The low tones of the 'femme fatale' voice could well be read in terms of a kind of aural fetishism – her voice becoming more 'masculine' – allaying the anxieties associated with a powerful and insightful female, sexual being. The breathiness of her voice underlines her sexuality as this kind of tonal quality is highly suggestive of bodily involvement in the speaking process. The expiration of breath acts as a reminder of the breathing apparatus that lies below the neck ('below' the voice) and also *inside* the body (breathiness, in this instance, becomes a kind of ghostly abject substance). Krige's delivery of the dialogue is also in marked contrast to Data's very measured and 'matter of fact' tone in that she makes use of a very languorous rhythm by placing more emphasis on a lengthening of vowels rather than clipped or plosive consonants. The elongation of the words she speaks, enhancing tonal quality, suggest that she is enjoying the very act of speech making as opposed to merely imparting information. All of this has the effect of placing far more emphasis on actual sound (form), as opposed to word (content), and is designed to suggest that her voice can envelop and absorb the listener. This delivery can therefore be understood in association with a long history of cinematic auralities connected to the fantasy of the maternal and all-engulfing voice. As Silverman points out, within cinematic practices, the figuration of the fantasy of the 'maternal voice' is, at best, ambivalent: it can be co-opted to connote both ecstasy and horror. In this instance it is drawn upon to connote horror - even though the promise of ecstasy is present. The connotations, in association with the vocal performance of the Queen, imply that this character does, indeed, fall under Silverman's 'maternal voice' category. As Silverman goes on to state, the 'maternal voice', as horrifying, comes to:

Figure enclosure as entrapment and/or danger, and so represent[s] interiority as an undesirable condition [...] Trapped within the suffocating confinement of the mother's voice, the newborn child resembles a prisoner or prey.¹⁴

¹⁴Silverman, p.75.

This works to emphasize the idea that union with the Borg will necessarily result in Data losing individual agency within this maternal realm. If the realm of the Federation allows for a kind of reflexive consciousness, in the sense that its members exercise 'free will' in choosing to subject themselves to it, then the world of the Borg (although drawing upon similar technologies) appears to necessitate the removal of individual consciousness. What the Borg Queen augers is the return to a pre-conscious, pre-oedipal state. What she threatens to remove from Data is his individual agency - presumably leaving a compliant and feminized body. Although the technological worlds, figured in *First Contact*, are remarkably similar in some respects, the Borg realm is associated with the promotion of a reactionary state that allows the Federation's world, by contrast, to appear rather more progressive.

Apart from the aural aspects of the Borg Queen's performance certain visual elements are also worth noting. For instance, the impression that she uses her body for seductive purposes is emphasized by the very fact that she is literally lowered into it when she comes to speak with the captive Data. This not only operates as a kind of visual echoing of the idea that she is the literal 'brain behind the brawn' but also foregrounds the apparent need for a sexualized, female body to carry out her purpose. Having said this, it is never made clear whether this body is organic or mechanical in nature; in fact, it could well be assumed that her upper body (head, shoulders and backbone) is organic with the lower being mechanical. Interestingly, whilst her need for a seductive body is also underlined in the delivery of the dialogue, most of the shots of the Queen focus on her upper body. This suggests that there is also, somewhat paradoxically, a denial of her body present here. Although this could well be seen as a device to intimate her powerful position it may also serve to underline the more fetishistic elements of her upper body (her very red mouth and the phallic backbone that protrudes from her head). Another way of reading this would be to assume that the foregrounding of her red mouth operates to promote this as her sole sexual organ thereby implying a closer affiliation between her and her 'prey'. Given that Data is not allowed movement in these scenes and given that many of the shots that feature the pair are medium close-ups on the head and shoulders, their differences are not really emphasized as bodily. It seems that this focus upon the mouth, as a kind of solitary organ, can be taken as effacing the sexual differences between them. Having said this, perhaps what is implied here is the existence of a feminine

and masculine consciousness that transcends the body. In chapter one I referred to Claudia Springer's article in which she states that cyborg imagery often suggests 'that there is an essential masculinity that transcends the body'.¹⁵ In *First Contact* it may be that, ultimately, what is connoted is the existence of both masculine and feminine forms of consciousness that transcend the body - of course, that is not to say that a disembodied feminine consciousness is not figured here as highly transgressive.

Having said that the Borg Queen resembles the femme fatale her appearance differs, quite markedly from this figure of Film Noir. Her upper body, being literally covered in K.Y gel (in a visual echoing of the gel covering the cyborg child in *Demon Seed*) is very shiny and moist, giving her a particularly organic look, but also a look that can be most readily associated with the Horror film. Slime, gunge and goo are prevalent in horror movies; any substance that 'leaks' through the boundaries of a given body becomes abject in horror. Barbara Creed has explored the ways in which the Horror genre in cinema often revolves around the notion of various forms of 'monstrous femininity'. Creed, in an application of Julia Kristeva's ideas of the 'feminine as abject' to Horror cinema, describes how 'when a woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions'.¹⁶ The visual clues, in *First Contact*, and their association with the Horror genre, can therefore be said to mark the female cyborg here as horrific and truly transgressive. This is highly reminiscent of the type of visual effects achieved in the *Alien* series of films and there is even an apparent reference to this film, which prefigures the appearance of the Queen.¹⁷ This takes place when members of the Enterprise crew are forced to enter the heating ducts: in a tense sequence of shots they are seen to climb through Nostromo-like tubes and shafts (a very different visual image of the Enterprise than is used in the television series) and later discover that these have been sabotaged by the invading Borg. It is also interesting to note that these ducts are known as Jeffries Tubes, suggesting that the inner workings of the Enterprise are marked as masculine here. So these otherwise masculine access tubes actually become feminized through the

¹⁵ 'The Pleasure of the Interface', *Screen*, V.32, N.3, (Autumn, 1991), 303-323 (p.318).

¹⁶ *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (Routledge, 1993), p.7.

¹⁷ Creed, in fact, uses the first *Alien* movie as her primary example, in her first chapter, when outlining her use of Kristeva's theories. pp. 16-30.

introduction of heat and moisture (associated with the organic) upon the Borg's entry onto the Enterprise. This entry is visually associated with *Alien*, turning the Enterprise into a horrific and claustrophobic environment. It seems, therefore, that upon the introduction of the female cyborg there is a marked shift within the generic codes employed. Although this happens in *Star Trek: First Contact* (primarily in those scenes which figure the Borg Queen or her minions), within a film which is predominantly coded as a Science Fiction/Action movie, it serves to draw attention to those films (especially the *Alien* series) in which this generic shift is most prevalent.

Alien-ation of the Female Cyborg

Noel Carroll, in his definition of Horror, notes that the genre is concerned with 'visceral revulsion', with impurity, with 'fusion'. Carroll goes on to state that '[h]orrific monsters involve the mixture of what is normally distinct' which suggests that the cyborg can be understood as an appropriate figure for co-option to the Horror genre.¹⁸ In fact, Horror's very stock in trade could be said to be the evocation of boundary dissolution which, in recent years, seems to have made it an appropriate vehicle for the articulation of fears concerning the seeming erosion of previously boundaried dichotomies and how this erosion may intersect with the rising importance of new technologies (I will be going into more detail on this point in chapter four). Creed has argued that within patriarchal society it is the 'feminine' that is understood as horrific, as abject, as a 'leaky vessel', and it is in these terms that the *Alien* films negotiate the intersection of the technological and human. The *Alien* series, of course, falls under the heading of Science Fiction/Horror and in order to expand upon issues already raised I have chosen to concentrate on the fourth, and latest, film. It is, after all, in *Alien: Resurrection* (Dir: Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997) that the female character of Ripley becomes a cyborg. Bruce Sterling, in his Cyberpunk novel, *Schismatrix* (1985), divides his various cyborg characters into two factions: the Mechanists and the Shapers. The Mechanists are those cyborgs that rely on 'hard' technologies to enhance their physical prowess and intelligence: they use mechanical prostheses and software implants. The Shapers, on the other hand, rely on molecular biology and genetic technologies to 'shape' themselves and to

¹⁸ *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, (Routledge, 1990), p.33.

increase their life span. By drawing upon Sterling's categories it is possible to see the Ripley of the fourth film, much like Rachel, as falling under the Shaper category. This Ripley has been shaped by biotechnologies that have drawn original organic material from her past existence. This difference is notable because, unlike the many examples of the more mechanical, masculine cyborg discussed in chapter one, Ripley is more heavily aligned with the organic here. She has been man-ufactured but still retains characteristics of her past human self along with certain facets of the alien entity that entered her prior to her death in the third film. Although the association of the feminine with various aspects of the organic body is not lost here it takes on an interesting twist in *Alien: Resurrection* in the sense that Ripley becomes a literally 'fused' creature, a synthesis of alien and human, of the technological and the natural. It may have been possible to argue that the Ripley of previous *Alien* films was a cyborg-like figure but here the figuring of the literal cyborg is utilized to fully foreground the complexities raised in previous films.

Another reason why the *Alien: Resurrection* film is of particular interest is because the visual thematics of the first (and, indeed, the following two films) are made hyperbolically manifest. As many critics have pointed out the *Alien* series seems to focus its concerns around themes of birthing, gestation and mortality and John L. Cobbs suggests, of the 1979 movie, that '[i]t is the film's pervasive imagery [...] that is most evocative of the birth process'.¹⁹ According to Creed's reading of the first film, this pervasive imagery is best understood in connection with the 'Monstrous-Feminine'. Creed catalogues the variety of images in *Alien* in terms of how they represent various forms of threatening femininity and she goes on to argue that 'the horror film stages and re-stages a constant repudiation of the maternal figure'.²⁰ Whilst her assessment is certainly valid I also think it is possible to understand this film as, in part, a more conscious attempt to co-opt familiar Horror imagery as a repudiation of a use of technology that is biased toward 'masculine' goals and operates to control and subvert what is understood as the 'feminine'. What I am suggesting is that, especially in *Alien: Resurrection*, although birthing/horror/femininity are most certainly brought together, this is done in such a hyperbolic fashion that it can be seen as commenting

¹⁹ 'Alien as an Abortion Parable', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, V.18, N.1, (1990), 198-201, (pp.198-199).

²⁰ Creed, pp. 128-141.

upon the very use of those tropes in the Horror genre (and, by extension, the position of the female cyborg in other Science Fiction films) and thus encourages a more oppositional reading. Although this may be understood as a somewhat naïve assumption my following analysis will elucidate this point further. For instance, in *Alien: Resurrection*, the now familiar trope of man's aspirations to control female reproductivity is foregrounded in the very narrative of the film - in the scientists' literal striving for control over the reproduction/production of aliens. Also, the alliance of masculinity and technological power is underlined in the shift from a 'mother' to a 'father' computer, which regulates the environment of the space station. This is a patriarchal environment in which the threat associated with femininity must be brought under control. At an obvious level attempts are made by these scientists to direct Ripley's behaviour and in one particular scene (which is highly reminiscent of scenes in the film *Nikita* [Dir: Luc Besson, 1990], in which the female lead's femininity is disciplined along traditional lines alongside her training to become an assassin for a covert government organization) a female instructor attempts to tutor her in the art of acceptable 'feminine' demeanor and etiquette.

Like *First Contact* it seems that 'fusion' is what really threatens the scientists of *Alien: Resurrection* and this is made evident in the scene where Ripley faces the pickled remains of failed attempts to clone her. The importance of this scene is underlined by the fact that it brings the action of the movie to a tense standstill as the escaping group are halted in their tracks whilst she investigates the laboratory containing the 'specimens'. In looking at the progression from one to the other it becomes obvious that the scientists were trying to clone her and the alien in a form that would allow for separation. At the same time they are also attempting to re-create a Ripley that, at least on the outside, represents an acceptable face of womanhood. As Creed comments of the first film, *Alien*:

Compared to the horrific sight of the alien as fetish object of the monstrous-feminine, Ripley's body is pleasurable and reassuring to look at. She signifies the 'acceptable' form and shape of woman. In a sense the monstrousness of woman [...] is controlled through the display of woman as reassuring and pleasurable sign.²¹

²¹ Creed, p.140.

However, in *Alien: Resurrection*, these failed attempts at separation are marked through the ways in which the alien becomes visually integrated with Ripley (i.e. human body, alien head etc.). These clones can therefore be seen as an overt visual image of what the scientists understand as inside her: her monstrousness is written on the surface of these cloned bodies. So what remains relatively covert in the first film is made ostentatiously overt here. As Ripley moves through the laboratory she finds a living copy of herself with a grotesquely distorted body. This clone, unable to move, begs Ripley to kill her. Ripley does this in an act that could be read as having killed herself, or alternatively, having symbolically killed that view of herself as monstrous.

Sigourney Weaver's performance style in *Alien: Resurrection* radically differs from that employed in the earlier films. Previously Ripley had been presented as methodical, logical, able to control her own bodily responses and subsume her emotions. In many ways her earlier performances can be read in association with the somewhat 'mechanical' stylization outlined in the previous chapter. In *Alien* Weaver places greater emphasis on dialogue and her movements are economical. The character of Ripley, in the first film, also seems to lack bodily self-reflexivity: although her body was of great importance to the film this is not particularly commented upon through her performance of Ripley. Of course, this suggests a style of acting that fits neatly within a 'realist' aesthetic in that the characters portrayed should appear unaware of an audience. However, there is a telling moment in the much talked of closing scenes of *Alien* in which Ripley's body is brought to the fore. This occurs when she discovers that the alien has followed her into the escape pod. She has removed her clothes and could be thought to be at her most vulnerable - certainly in terms of the gaze of the audience upon her in conjunction with the threatening gaze of the alien. After all she has been through, and given the extreme proximity of the alien to her, she uses a rhythmic breathing technique to control her fear in facing this renewed threat and finally 'aborts' the alien from the pod. It is not until the end of the film that a certain self-reflexivity is foregrounded, in terms of Ripley's own body mastery. It is perhaps after this scene, in a backward reading of the film, that the spectator may understand Ripley's rather measured use of her body as a more consciously adopted style necessary to her very survival. Not only does this serve to comment upon the need for performance within the diegetic environment

but also serves to foreground Weaver's performance.²² At the same time it produces a kind of blurring between the character of Ripley and the persona of Sigourney Weaver - they could be understood as fused at this point - an effect that is further utilized in *Alien: Resurrection*.

In this fourth film Ripley is portrayed as more overtly responsive, as seen in her rage when she destroys the cloning lab, in her aggressive responses to the scientists' attempts to tame her and her overt commenting upon her own sexuality. Her strength and ability to survive seems to have shifted from an emphasis on her intellect and self-control to, what the scientists define as, her 'instinctive' nature. This shift in characterization is accompanied by an acting style that more fully utilizes her whole body. In this way *Alien: Resurrection* may be seen to comment on the more latently voyeuristic aspects of the first film; the bodily emphasis is also foregrounded in certain P.O.V shots, as seen through the eyes of a male crew member of the *Betty* (the visiting ship to the space station), giving the viewer a very particular account of how he sees her in terms of his own self-gratification. Having said that, Weaver's emphasis upon the bodily in her performance here is also neatly introduced in an earlier scene that provides a rather different point of view. Just after her cloned body has undergone the surgical removal of the alien inside her, she is seen, alone in her prison cell, in what appears to be a kind of embryonic sac. She writhes within the sac and finally tears it open - at which point she proceeds to explore her own body. Although this operates to denote her re-birth, the scene is evocative in several ways. Having been described by the scientists in the previous sequence as a 'meat by-product' (her cloning was undertaken in order to separate from her the alien inside), Ripley's self-reflexive explorations suggest the kind of intelligence associated with a free-willed and autonomous, human subjectivity. Perhaps these early explorations are meant to connote that she is carrying out a process of self-definition; but more than this there is also the sense in which she *is* her body - her mind being informed by her own bodily explorations here.²³ Later, Ripley's very 'rootedness' in her

²² In fact, Weaver's performance of Ripley in the first 'Alien' movie is closer to the more measured and mechanical modes (described in chapter 1) than any of the other characters portrayed in this film. So it seems that, rather ironically, it is Ripley's ability to adopt 'masculine' performance that allows for her survival.

²³ This scene could also serve to complicate an intelligence and subjectivity as associated with the brain/mind. Ripley actually states that she can feel the alien behind her eyes - suggesting that her own identity as human is less centralized. In the early stages of the film, her insistence on touching and caressing those she comes into contact with implies that she 'reads' with her body; that she understands and communicates using senses outside of vision and speech.

body is read by the scientists in terms of an animality, which conveniently denies her human subjectivity. In the juxtaposition of these various scenes the audience is made aware of the tension between the way in which Ripley is seen/understood in this masculine environment and the potential that exists for alternative readings of these performance signs.²⁴

Simultaneously, they may also be made aware of the way in which Ripley/Weaver has been placed within a voyeuristic scenario. What I am suggesting is that there is a confusion here between character and performer; in which case the scene could well be understood as Weaver exploring her body, seeing herself as Ripley, in preparation for her role within the narrative. In fact, I would argue that the spectator is reminded of this sense of Ripley's/Weaver's simultaneous presence at various points throughout the film (for instance, I will be discussing a later scene which operates in this way when I come to look at the character of Call). Although it is not unusual in Hollywood movies for a particular role to draw upon the star persona in question, in the context of this film and given Weaver's specifically self-conscious performance at this point this moment does not appear to suggest a hyper-realism (as seen in Schwarzenegger's performance of the Terminator). Neither does it seem to suggest a 'fissure' between star and role - of the kind that Richard Dyer explores in *Stars*, where he argues that contradictions between star persona and role played leave a given film text more open to interpretation than had previously been thought.²⁵ The playing of this moment does not seem intended to create a fissure between Weaver/Ripley but rather to imply a fusing of the two. This scene does not necessarily draw upon Weaver's star persona (although it can be seen to refer to her previous playing of Ripley) but rather comments on the way in which her actual body has come to represent the image of 'Ripley' and all that that has come to signify. This moment can therefore be read as Weaver's enacting of her own awareness of what her body has come to mean, in the part of Ripley, and an enacting of her own preparations for this peculiarly self-reflective performance. There is a specific use of the self-reflexive here - a use that revolves around Weaver's performance. It is as though she was signalling her own awareness of her position in this film as this celluloid cyborg - as

²⁴ This performance stylization may well also serve to indicate a certain performative power on the part of Weaver as Ripley. Having reached such high star status one would assume that she could afford to direct herself as well as, perhaps, wishing to indicate this.

²⁵ *Stars*, (BFI, 1979).

though she were indicating, rather than a hyper-real construction, a kind of powerful and oppositional over-presence.

Simon Frith, in a discussion of the implications of 'performance art', notes the way in which the body, and its use, takes precedence over other forms of communicative signs. He states that:

Such a use of the body depends on the spectator's ability to understand it as both an object (an erotic object, an attractive object, a repulsive object, and a social object) and as a subject, as a willed or shaped object, an object with meaning.²⁶

So what Weaver may be doing in her performance of this evocative scene, is reminding the audience of this doubling: herself as object (Ripley/star persona) and subject (Ripley/Weaver). Although this is explainable in terms of the narrative (Ripley's re-creation by the scientists) nevertheless this seeming co-option of a kind of 'performance art' encourages a rather different viewing perspective. Whilst the audience sees her inspect herself in this way they may well be prompted into questioning their own viewing perspective. In fact, Frith goes on to argue that 'performance art' has the effect of 'embarrassing' an audience because the performer is not 'in character'.²⁷ Whilst this cannot really be said of Weaver's performance in *Alien: Resurrection*²⁸ I would say she does succeed in bringing the ambivalence of not only Ripley's but her own/Weaver's position to the fore.

A much later scene in which this kind of doubling is present occurs during an intimate discussion with Call (played by Winona Ryder). Whilst Ripley is trying to persuade Call to enter the computer mainframe (Father), Call asks her: 'Why do you go on living? How can you stand being what you are?' Although Call is ostensibly referring to the fact that Ripley is cloned she can also be understood as referring to Weaver's repeated performances of the character of Ripley. Of course, there is also a sense in which these questions are rhetorical as

²⁶ 'Editorial', 'Performance Matters', *New Formations*, N.27, (Lawrence & Wishart, Winter 1995-96), p.v.

²⁷ Frith, p.vi.

²⁸ Mainly because this is not a 'live' theatrical performance - so it could be assumed that the same level of 'embarrassment', in association with live exhibitionism, may not be achievable in a recorded performance where the audience can rest assured that the performer is not, actually, returning the 'look' or so intimately aware of their presence.

they may well refer to Call's perception of herself; this is soon made clear when Call says: 'look at me - I'm disgusting'. In earlier scenes that feature the two, Ripley has certainly displayed a kind of affinity with Call. This is partly made evident in her stroking and touching of Call, with whom she appears to take on a more nurturing and motherly role; Call becomes the surrogate child/daughter character featured in past films of the series.

In many ways, Call seems to be presented as the 'next stage' (or the most recent) in the figuration of threatening femininity and, if understood in conjunction with recent Feminist theory and given the way in which she learns from the cyborgian Ripley, Call could be read to 'stand for' Haraway's cyber-feminist. However, unlike the Ripley of this fourth film, Call is not officially a cyborg: she, like Ash of the first film, is assigned android status. This may, in part, explain why she takes on many of the functions associated with the Ripley seen in the previous films: she is a more overtly oppositional character and actively aligns herself with the band of humans who are trying to escape the alien threat. This may further indicate Ripley's new function, within this latest film, as a sort of fused character - having allegiance to both alien and human, belonging to neither side of the divide between them.

The scientists on board the space station see Call as a terrorist and decide she must be killed. They fail in their attempts and, throughout the film, she is shown to survive many death threats (and, like Ripley, even actual death) in which she emerges as a kind of saviour for her comrades. Although the audience is informed that she is an android she is also presented as the most 'humane' amongst them:²⁹ as she later states, she has been 'programmed to care' about the humans around her. Even though she is literally a 'construct' of a masculinist world she has developed a certain autonomy which allows her to defy her original purpose. This autonomy is indicated when she tells the band of survivors that she, along with other androids, destroyed her modem - the modem being that piece of equipment which allows for access, or joining, to the Internet, or the fast communication of information between systems. It seems that she has attempted to cut herself off from close communion with the masculine machines that constructed her - she has cut the symbolic 'umbilical cord'. However, her

²⁹ This is also highlighted by the subtle visual reference to the 'replicants' of *Blade Runner* – during the close-ups on Call's face she sports the eerie ring of lights within her irises. This was a reflective lighting effect used in *Blade Runner* to mark the replicants as different from the humans.

efforts to retain a distance from this world are reversed in the scene in which she is asked to enter the space station's computer mainframe. In immersing herself into this patriarchal space perhaps she is being forced to face up to those parts of herself that retain the markers of masculinity - to go back to where she came from - and she claims she does not want to re-enter this space as it is not 'real'.³⁰ Her reluctance to return further foregrounds her attempts to separate herself from a patriarchal world in which she is seen as a threatening fantasy figure (within this masculine 'mind machine' she is the literal product of a masculine imagination); a figure that cannot attain authentic, human subjectivity. Nevertheless, Ripley persuades her to go back in, as this is the only way in which they can get back to 'The Betty' and escape the alien threat. Once she enters the mainframe she is able to co-opt its powers, to control the environment of the Space Station, and advance their escape. So, a necessary 'fusion' is apparently promoted here as the way to survive, Call's consciousness effecting some degree of control within a patriarchal cyberspace. On another level, Call's performance when 'jacked in' to the mainframe takes on the mechanical and measured tone (similar to the performance of Ripley in *Alien*) which is associated with a calm, cold, masculine logic - needed in order to survive this environment. So the 'fusion' being alluded to here is most definitely marked in terms of an amalgamation of traits associated with both masculinity and femininity.

Call is described by the Captain of the Betty as very 'fuckable' and, like most of the female characters in the film, is seen as a sexual object by the male characters. This is interesting given her boyish, rather androgynous, appearance and her obvious lack of any of the usual signs of a 'feminine' sexuality and availability. Carol Clover, in her exploration of sex and gender in the Horror movie, looks upon the Ripley of both *Alien* and *Aliens* as connected to what she terms 'the final girl' of the 'Slasher' sub-genre.³¹ Although Clover explores the gender complications that arise in the figuring of this triumphant female hero she also settles upon the idea that the 'final girl' may be understood as simply 'a congenial double for the adolescent male'.³² She goes on to state that '[t]he discourse [of horror] is wholly masculine,

³⁰ This may further signal that masculinity is not 'real' but performed.

³¹ 'Her Body, Himself', *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: The Modern Horror Film*, (BFI Publishing, 1992), p.46.

³² Clover, p.51.

and the female figures in it only insofar as they "read" some aspect of male experience'.³³

Then, perhaps, Call, in her adoption of the position of the Ripley of earlier films, functions in a similar fashion to Clover's 'final girl'. Call appears to carry many of the markers of this type of characterization (the non-sexually active female, rather boyish in appearance etc.) and could certainly be seen in this way - or, at least, as a reference to the earlier Ripley.

However, it is notable that even though the aliens generally ignore her (she is not a fitting 'host' for their procreative cycle), she does not entirely escape the aggressions of a male adversary; she is shot through the stomach by one of the leading scientists of the space station. Having been penetrated in this way she is left with a gaping and oozing wound that she attempts to cover as though she were ashamed. Rather than being phallicized, as Clover suggests is necessary for this figure, in the closing stages of the film, she is, instead, vaginated. In this act the scientist can be understood as attempting to impose upon her the role of female victim and, although the appearance of this hole/wound serves to reveal her cybernetic infrastructure, along with the milky white, 'seminal' fluid that flows within,³⁴ it may also be seen to feminize her. Somewhat tellingly, it is just after this event that Call asks Ripley how she manages to live with herself. According to Clover it is a final 'phallicization' that, within the Slasher movie, proves the 'final girl' to be a masculinized hero. However, in Call's case we are left with a strong visual image of her very femininity (even if this 'femininity' is only to be understood as that defined within a phallocentric environment). Therefore, I would argue that what the film attempts to achieve, within the confines of the Horror genre, is a doubled articulation that reveals both a masculine and feminine perspective. Whilst it features those 'compound sexual being[s]',³⁵ familiar to modern Horror, it does so in a way that attempts to address women as well as men in a given audience.

³³ Clover, p.53.

³⁴ The pun in the use of the term 'seminal' is intended - in that this liquid resembles the fluid containing male semen as well as being the life producing liquid that brings her into being. This marks an especially interesting use of a *male* bodily fluid figured as abject. This use of the 'seminal' fluid image has become a common trope in films that feature the android or cyborg. For instance, there is a particularly interesting moment in Albert Pyun's *Knights* (which will be discussed shortly) in which this fluid issues forth from the mouth of a dying male cyborg. If we were in any doubt as to the psychosexual underpinnings to Science Fiction imagery - this is certainly foregrounded in Pyun's movie.

³⁵ Carroll notes that this kind of sexualized configuration is common to the Horror genre. P.23.

Although it seems that there are elements intrinsic to the Horror genre that allow for the possibility of more alternative readings - as has been noted with both *Demon Seed* and *Alien: Resurrection* - these films can be usefully compared to the Action-Man cyborgs of my first chapter. Surely this rather distinct shift in genre speaks to the way in which gender is performed in Science Fiction film? Further, this generic shift must surely indicate something about how mainstream, American cinema is dealing with the issues raised by cyborgization and more traditional notions of gendered identity and subjectivity? At the very least, a comparison based on generic codes suggests that the early male cyborg may be thought of as *threatened* whereas the female cyborg is often figured as *threatening*. It may well be that these female cyborgs somehow play out a masculine fear of 'fusion', of erosion of bodily/psychical boundaries, that cannot be written, 'safely', on the site of a male body. Another way of reading this generic shift is to see the female/feminine as sutured to those aspects that appear so threatening in cyborgization. In very simple terms, this means that the female/feminine, along classic lines, becomes the real, embodied, threat, rather than the manufactured technologies featured in these films. However, there is a sense in which it is hard to keep the male and female cyborg apart - even given such generic considerations. What I mean is that the very concept of the cyborg, in itself, may bring to the fore the way in which generic codes and tropes have been, and are, used to divide genders. For instance, as a figure and narrative agent that now traverses genres (even though these are all Science Fiction films their 'partner' genre is equally dominant in the mix) the cyborg cannot, ultimately, be contained within the imaginative dualistic framework that seeks to confine it. The fact that this figure appears in connection with such distinctly different generic codes serves to foreground the construction of gender division at the same time as alluding to its erosion.

In the following section I will be concentrating on those direct to video movies that I mentioned at the outset of this chapter. Although I suggested earlier that these films appear to fill a gap in the market, as far as the female cyborg is concerned, and may offer more radical interpretations of this figuration, I also want to point out that the possible relationships between the two. This is an argument that I will taking up in more detail, in the next chapter, when I look at the issues of race and the cyborg, but is also one to bear in mind here. The first film I will be discussing is a direct to video release called *Eve of Destruction*

(Dir: Duncan Gibbins, 1991). As will become clear it seems that the first *Alien* film partly inspired the making of *Eve of Destruction* but what also becomes evident is that the traffic goes both ways. In a kind of feedback loop between the mainstream and direct to video market it seems that *Eve of Destruction* is also referenced in *Alien: Resurrection*. For instance, Ripley is given the number 8, the same number applied to the cyborg 'Eve 8' in *Eve of Destruction*. It is also notable that Eve 8 is vaginated by a gunshot wound, which she explores and covers up, in a similar way to Call. It also seems pertinent that the fully human Eve is forced to destroy Eve 8 in what could be seen as a similar move to that made by Ripley when she kills one of her clones. There are other examples of similarities between these films but I have concentrated on those that, beyond generic conventions, seem to point to a distinct relationship. Perhaps, then, the more critical elements of *Alien: Resurrection* owe much to this earlier film.

THE FEMALE CYBORG AS HERO

The narrative of *Eve of Destruction* is centred upon the female scientist, Eve (played by Renée Soutendijk), who creates a copy of herself called Eve 8. Eve 8 has been programmed with the memories of the human Eve and whilst out on a test run finds herself at the centre of male abuse. Eventually, goaded by the events she encounters, Eve 8's 'battlefield mode' is triggered and she actively defends against those who are abusing her. Beyond this, Eve 8 begins a journey back through Eve's life in an apparent attempt to resolve those moments that have caused certain of the human Eve's character traits to remain repressed.³⁶ It seems that although the human Eve has attained a certain amount of prestige and power in her life there are informative moments in her past which could be said to stifle her character in the present. These events are shown to be connected to the way in which she has responded to various kinds of male abuse and, in some respects, continues to respond, as illustrated in her relationship with the military marksman sent to halt the runaway cyborg. This marksman seems to take on the role of psychologist as the film progresses and attempts, through a reading of Eve's innermost drives, to predict and control the actions of Eve 8. The human

³⁶ In this sense, Eve's depth of character (signalled by the cyborg's backward journey through her memories) is figured as having short-circuited certain of Eve's 'natural' human responses. So the more surface portrayal and characterization of Eve 8 can be read, rather ironically, as more authentic.

Eve appears to capitulate to his treatment of her until she is forced to take control at the end of film.

Claudia Springer states that the narrative of *Eve of Destruction* simply leads to a punishing of Eve 'for her sexuality and for engaging in technological rather than biological reproduction'.³⁷ In concentrating on the narrative trajectory of the film in reaching this conclusion she not only fails to engage with the spectacular sight of this female figure as she wreaks revenge on the men that abuse her but also with certain aspects of performance that indicate otherwise. Of course, this article was meant to present a broad overview and Springer, therefore, may have had every reason for glossing over other aspects of the film in making her points. However, it is notable that, in a later article, she appears to shift her position in regard to *Eve of Destruction*. Here she looks more closely at the representation of the, specifically, active and avenging female cyborg and speaks to the more ambiguous nature of this figuration when she says that these figures have 'inspired contradictory interpretations'. She goes on to say that they 'clearly embody a fetishized male fantasy, but they also represent feminist rebellion against a brutal patriarchal system'.³⁸ Specifically, she states that:

In *Eve of Destruction*, Eve 8 plays out a feminist fantasy when she methodically stalks and kills the men (and types of men) who abused her creator, scientist Eve Simmons [...] At the same time, the film condemns female sexuality and autonomy on a massive scale when we learn that Eve 8 contains in her womb a nuclear weapon on the verge of explosion, which must be destroyed to save the planet.³⁹

Not only has Springer taken into account the emergence of a variety of interpretations, since her first article, but, I would suggest, she now acknowledges the arrival of the 'female hero' as a theoretical and represented configuration.

Beyond the 'femme fatale'

Yvonne Tasker, in a chapter of her book *Spectacular Bodies* devoted to 'action heroines' in

³⁷ Springer, p.320.

³⁸ 'Sex, Memories, Angry Women', *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, (Duke University Press, 1993), pp.725.

³⁹ Springer, pp.725-726.

films of the 1980s, takes issue with those critics who choose to align the figure of the action-woman with past images of the 'femme fatale'. She goes on to make a distinction between the 'active heroine' (of which a more recent version of the 'femme fatale' may be included) and the 'action heroine' suggesting that the latter needs to be read in conjunction with the codes of popular action cinema.⁴⁰

Tasker explains that the male 'action hero' is usually an unambiguous figure, a clear stereotype, in Action cinema, who undergoes a variety of trials through which he is transformed and from which he usually emerges victorious. Of course, ambiguities are present when the 'hero' is figured as female but, even so, within this genre, she usually undertakes a similar narrative journey to that of the male hero. By using Tasker's definitions I would like to take issue with Springer's initial reading of the character of Eve. For example, Springer implies that Eve 8 is the embodiment of a masculine fantasy, which is especially indicated in the placement of a nuclear warhead within the 'womb' of the cyborg. Certainly, this would seem to suggest that Eve 8 is meant as a representation of the 'phallic woman' (which further implies that her very sexual presence is threatening whether or not she is active), but the plot makes clear that this warhead has been insisted upon by the military men who funded Eve 8's development. In other words, there is a definite foregrounding of their involvement in attempting to impose a kind of phallic identity upon the cyborg. At the end of the movie Springer states that the human Eve is forced to eliminate those threatening elements of her repressed being, in particular her repressed sexuality, in the destruction of her own creation – Eve 8. Eve is certainly forced into destroying Eve 8 but it is also clear that this is necessary in order to eliminate the threat of the nuclear warhead's imminent explosion: Eve 8 has to be 'turned off' because of the military's involvement in her creation; because of their insistence that she fulfil the role of weapon in their strategic manoeuvrings. So there is a kind of separation between the Eve 8 as 'military weapon' and the Eve 8 as 'avenging feminist'. What I am trying to point out here is that, once again, this scene could be read as Eve's annihilation of the 'phallic woman' – the annihilation of a male fantasy figure. That is not to say that the human Eve's power, or access to agency, is also conveniently quashed but rather she takes control of the situation and is, in fact, encouraged

⁴⁰ *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*, (Routledge, 1993), pp.132-152.

to become active through Eve 8's actions and presence. Eve, then, *becomes* the 'action heroine' at this point and can actually be seen to be bringing to the surface aspects of herself previously repressed. Although Jim McQuade (the military marksman/amateur psychologist – played by Gregory Hines) pries into Eve's past in order to predict, control and formulate strategies for Eve 8's annihilation, Eve is also forced to face up to her past; to consciously assess the situations that have brought about her suppression. The way in which the narrative is set up is not simply designed as an exploration of the enigma of womanhood (in fact, it seems to comment upon those films, particularly Film Noir, in which the woman is investigated in order, basically, to be destroyed) but presents both Eve's and McQuade's points of view and motivations. Eve 8 can therefore also be read as Eve's fantasy figure; an enabling figure through which she comes to terms with her past and re-connects with dormant traits of her personality. In this way Eve 8 can be read as an 'uncanny' figure; a projection of those traits and characteristics lost to Eve upon taking up her gendered role within this society. However, unlike my earlier arguments in regard to the 'uncanny', this is not strictly produced through a visual distinction based upon sex (although it may be argued that it is based upon gender). As part of Freud's assessment of the 'uncanny' he states that:

An uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes.⁴¹

This part of his description can be seen in conjunction with the kind of literalization that is common among the films I have been discussing. This has, of course, become a feature of other genres but one that is particularly relevant in Science Fiction and may be seen as a response to the challenge that the cyborg offers to traditional notions of identity. For the human Eve, 'Eve 8' can be seen as the literal creation of her imagination just as she may operate as that which the military men see, and fear, as uncanny in Eve. But where my reading differs from Springer's earlier account largely rests upon the idea that once the human Eve is 'switched on' there is no longer a need for the separate figure of the cyborg Eve 8 - perhaps Eve has now become a kind of cyborg herself in her assimilation and conflation of what was previously separated.

⁴¹ 'The "Uncanny"', *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, V17, 1917-1919, (Hogarth Press Ltd., 1955), p244.

I am reminded, yet again, of the replicants in *Blade Runner*, especially the character of Rachel who shares her childhood memories with Tyrell's niece. Whereas in *Blade Runner* we are dealing with two identities, two bodies (Rachel and niece), sharing the same childhood memories, in *Eve of Destruction* the identities, supposedly, remain the same whilst the body is doubled. Eve is therefore figured as a more fragmented character, possibly due to the experiences of her past and the way in which she has sublimated various aspects of herself. Of course, as I have argued, she may well be understood as a 'fuller' character by the end of the film but this is not, arguably, the case with Rachel. Rachel, who assumes a human and unified identity due to her prosthetic memories, becomes fragmented upon learning that these are false. It may be that Rachel regains a certain sense of identity through her relationship with Deckard but this still implies that she is reliant upon a masculine viewpoint in order to function successfully. Rachel's identity is therefore more firmly sutured to the replication of an assumed gender role whereas Eve's identity becomes more fully authenticated through a process, via replication, which allows her to perform outside of her assumed gender role. These differences are, of course, bound up with certain generic conventions – in fact, I would say that genre is used to account for these differences in characterization. For instance, Rachel, in being aligned with 1940s/1950s Film Noir, is, in some sense, only given the options that the genre allows for her. Eve, on the other hand, is finally allowed the relative freedoms of the Action genre (certainly in the sense that she moves beyond the generic performance more normally associated with the female).

In an interview, that I conducted over the telephone in February 1999 with Yale Udoff (the co-writer of *Eve*), it became apparent that two forces had indeed been at work in the scripting of the film (I was only able to speak with Udoff as Duncan Gibbins has tragically died since the making of *Eve of Destruction*). Udoff described to me how Gibbins came up with the idea of the 'woman as a bomb' and most of the action narrative. Udoff, on the other hand (who said he was a more 'character-based' writer) told me that he was interested in the idea that 'a machine had a greater feeling of contact with her emotion and her past than the woman, the scientist, who had denied all this – who didn't really want to involve herself as it was too painful'. He sent me a copy of the original script containing scenes in which Eve 8

explores Eve's past more fully and actually tries to talk to her abusive father in order to bridge the chasm between them. Although this is intimated in the film (the father is not dead when the military arrive on the scene and find Eve 8 with him) these scenes were cut to make way for the action elements of the story. I find it interesting that the cyborg Eve's character contains this kind of contradictory, or doubled, edge, which appears to be the result of two people's work on the scripting. It seems that even though Gibbins pushed for the less ambiguous characterization of the action story much of Udoff's input remains, giving Eve 8 a greater sense of connection to the human Eve. Rather than simply being a killing machine, out to avenge the injustices of Eve's past, Eve 8 is also shown to reach a kind of consciousness that puts her at odds with her surroundings.

Although Eve 8's heroic function is not indicated through enhanced muscularity, as has become common in the figuring of the 'action heroine' (in fact, Renée Soutendijk, who plays both parts, is quite diminutive in stature), she qualifies as a female hero through her use of technology; she co-opts the technological symbols of masculine power (fast cars, guns etc.) in order to achieve her aims. Even though she uses these technologies there is still a sense in which this slender, apparently feminine, figure does not rely on them for her strength. In one particular scene she renders a macho male assailant harmless by biting off his penis. Springer has suggested that she is 'taunted' by the sight of his penis, which culminates in her actions: in other words, she is envious of this ultimate sign of male superiority.⁴² But if close attention is paid to Soutendijk's performance of the scene it becomes evident that it is not the sight of the penis which triggers her aggression but his repeated use of the term 'bitch' in addressing her.⁴³ This term has many connotations that deserve attention here. Of course it has, over the years, become a derogatory word commonly associated with the female. Literally meaning a female animal (usually dog) it is also used to connote a 'lewd or sensual woman', one that is 'sexually provocative' and also 'malicious'. A further connotation (according to The Oxford English Dictionary) also involves a woman who is 'deceitful in

⁴² 'The Pleasure of the Interface', *Screen*, V.32, N.3, (Autumn, 1991), p.321.

⁴³ Eve 8's repeated reaction to the term 'bitch' could also indicate her insistence on not being defined in a way that can be read in conjunction with the femme fatale. After all the dictionary definition recalls many of the traits associated with this figuration and it may be that Eve 8 is insisting on her role as female hero here, rather than femme fatale.

sexual matters'. Apart from the irony of calling her an animal (given that she is an unnatural creation) the assailant appears to be accusing her of stepping outside the bounds of an acceptably passive femininity. On the one hand he lusts after her because she reveals her desire, but on the other hand he fears her active nature. In some ways, perhaps he actually speaks his fate into existence – having accused her of malicious intent she proceeds to act this out. More obviously, the term seems intended to 'put her down' and it is therefore the man's rather extreme insistence on his own superiority that, in conjunction with his displaying his penis, prompts her actions. After warning him not to call her 'bitch' she rebels against his contempt; in this moment she has understood that he thinks his ownership of a penis gives him the right to be offensive and she therefore 'removes his right'. Eve 8 quickly and effectively demonstrates the myth of phallic power, as connected to the body, by revealing just how vulnerable he really is.⁴⁴ Even though, for Eve 8, spectacle and speech (which could be taken as signifier and signified) are connected here they are also separated by her distinct facial expressions; after the initial shock of seeing his 'member' she actually looks interested, eager, and moves toward it without trepidation. When he continues to say 'bitch' she quickly shifts to angry irritation. Eve 8 re-writes Eve's life by refusing, in a rather dramatic way, passively to accept her position of fearful inferiority. This moment could certainly have been played differently, even given the same dialogue, but Soutendijk chooses to display her anger in response to the word 'bitch' not in reaction to the sight of his penis.

Although *Eve of Destruction* obviously exploits the emergence of powerful female characters in mainstream cinema (in fact, according to Udoff, Gibbins was inspired to create the character of Eve 8 by the first *Alien* film) it seems to offer a more complex and contradictory picture than many mainstream counterparts of the time. Much like the later *Alien: Resurrection*, it presents a strong female character fighting within a very masculinist environment and, in some respects, politicises the ensuing trials that she is forced to

⁴⁴ This scene is highly reminiscent of a scene in the first *Robocop* film (Paul Verhoeven, 1987). Here, Lewis (played by Nancy Allen), the female partner to Murphy, attempts to arrest a male gang member who is separated from his fellows whilst he urinates. As she holds her gun up to him he cheekily asks if he may replace his penis back into his trousers. She stares directly into his face for some moments before apparently not being able to resist the temptation of looking down at his member. Her attention redirected, the man knocks her down and she remains unconscious while Murphy is all but killed by the rest of the gang. Whilst this scene could be read as a reassertion of the male 'right' to power, in the face of a powerful woman, the scene from *Eve of Destruction* has the opposite outcome.

undertake. Sexuality is rarely foregrounded to such an extent in Action movies as the reasoning behind a given hero's tribulations, but here it is made very apparent. At one point, whilst surveying the mayhem left in the wake of Eve 8's battles, McQuade comments that the scene 'looks like a bad night in West Beirut'. Also, at the opening of the film, Eve 8's brush with the violence of urban living is neatly inter-cut with scenes of McQuade's army training manoeuvres, effectively suggesting that, for McQuade, there is another battleground within America itself and that the ultimate opposition is that between the masculine and the feminine. Alternatively, for Eve, the battleground appears to be between femininities; a femininity that acts upon her desires and drives and a femininity that denies and subsumes these.

The doubling of the Eves makes Soutendijk's performance particularly relevant to the film. It is as though the opportunity she is given to play such an unusually active female role were being underlined here. Throughout most of the film she plays both the acceptable face of womanhood (albeit a powerful career woman) which is juxtaposed by her ability to fill the role of the aggressive and driven action heroine. Of course, there is a long history of female 'doubling', particularly in connection with the femme fatale of Film Noir. *The Dark Mirror* (Dir: Robert Siodmak, 1946) provides an impressive early example in which Olivia de Havilland plays both identical twin sisters. In this film a psychiatrist is called in to decide which of the sisters has committed a murder and which is blameless in the affair. An interesting comparison with this earlier Film Noir can be seen in the later remake of *A Kiss Before Dying* (Dir: James Dearden, 1991), which notably came out the same year as *Eve of Destruction*. Here, Sean Young (who also plays Rachel in *Blade Runner*) plays an identical twin who is obsessed with the death of her sister. Determined to find out the truth she discovers that her sister's killer is none other than her own, duplicitous, husband. Here, in a kind of reversal, the femme fatale is revealed as blameless and innocent - the real killer and danger to the 'natural order' being the husband (played by Matt Dillon). Much has been said about the way in which the femme fatale of early Noir is often juxtaposed by another female character - who represents domesticity, safety, and support to the hero.⁴⁵ So in this sense, the femme fatale is frequently 'twinned' but in those films that foreground this structure, by

⁴⁵ Place, p.50.

having both 'sides' of the 'female psyche' played by the same person, it could be said that a certain demystification is taking place. Although *Eve of Destruction* most definitely draws upon Film Noir it seems to go one stage further than the earlier 'twin' movies. Most obviously, as will become apparent in my following analysis, Eve is seen to move beyond Tasker's 'active heroine' position in becoming the 'action heroine'. Apart from this, having one of the twins played as a cyborg (a cyborg that is created by the human Eve and who shares her psychical history) suggests a further move toward making manifest the symbolism inherent in this 'doubling' device. Whether Eve 8 can pass as human means that her performance is crucial. It becomes apparent in the film that Eve's own behaviour is 'learned', largely through the idea that Eve 8 is acting out her 'deeper desires'. In a particularly interesting scene Eve 8 returns to New York to see Eve's son (who now lives with the father). It is here that Eve 8 must 'pass' as the human Eve, given that the ex-husband knows the 'normal' behaviour of Eve, in order to gain access to the boy. So, Soutendijk is required to *act the acting* of Eve through Eve 8. This brings a further level to the foregrounding of performance - a level that suggests that Eve 8 is acting out a copy of a copy. This is highly reminiscent of Baudrillard's notions concerning the 'simulacrum'. In 1991, Baudrillard argued that the divide between the 'real' and fictional was breaking down and he outlined 'three orders' of the simulacra which speak to this blurring.⁴⁶ His third order ('simulation simulacra') is 'based on information, the model, cybernetic play. Their aim is maximum operationality, hyperreality, total control'.⁴⁷ put simply, this order has no origin or essence but, in an era of hyperreality and at its most extreme, is merely a copy of a copy. He goes on to say that Science Fiction has always dealt with the simulacra because 'it has always played upon the *double*, on artificial replication or imaginary duplication'.⁴⁸ Within Soutendijk's performance of this moment there appears to be a reference to this idea: if Eve's own behaviour is performed and Eve 8, at this point, is acting out that behaviour then it seems that there is no 'natural' origin for either character's performance at this time.

Of course, there is, within the title and plot of the film, an obvious reference to *All About Eve* (Dir: Joseph Mankiewicz, 1950) in which a seemingly naive fan attaches herself to a famous

⁴⁶ 'Two Essays', *Science Fiction Studies*, V.18, (1991), 309-321, (p.309).

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, p.309.

⁴⁸ Baudrillard, p.312.

Broadway acting star. The fan's desire to take on the 'role' of the star effectively foregrounds performance in this film and also seems to offer an exploration of the nature of a 'star persona' in the melding of the diegetic off and on-stage presence. The difference between *All About Eve* and *Eve of Destruction* is that, in the latter, the same actor plays our Eves which, ironically, has the effect of widening the gap between character/role and performer. What I mean by this is that the audience is not encouraged to believe that the performer and role may be one and the same. Unlike the strategies discussed in the analysis of Weaver's performance in *Alien: Resurrection*, Soutendijk seems to be placed firmly 'outside' of the role/s she is playing here. Of course, this may well be due to the fact that she is not a star but, as becomes apparent in my later analysis of the *Nemesis* series, this kind of melding is not confined to the 'star' body. Although much of both of Soutendijk's performances appear 'naturalistic' the very splitting of characterization in *Eve of Destruction* works to lay bare the artifice of the acting process. Connection is made between the two Eves but the viewer is also made very aware of the fact that this is a conscious enacting on the part of Soutendijk - partly due to the differing actions of the two Eves but also due to Soutendijk's success in creating a distinctiveness between the two roles. In addition, it may be relevant that Soutendijk is Dutch and the director (Gibbins) was British. Perhaps they brought to the film the kind of performance aesthetic normally associated with European cinema and theatre in which the skills and artifice of acting are often signaled for their own sake. As outlined in both my introduction and first chapter, traditional methods of actor training in Europe have been understood as upholding the separation of actor and character whereas training in the American style Method is commonly thought to bring with it an elision of actor and character. What I am suggesting is that Soutendijk's performance, along with the splitting of her role, works to evoke a more European style of performance. This also proposes a kind of separation between her sex and gender performance – a separation that American stylizations have often operated against (in part, as a reaction to European styles). Udoff stated that he was disappointed with the performance of McQuade as Gregory Hines had promised something more 'unusual'. Although he did not go on to explain what he meant by 'unusual' this statement might well suggest that there was an effort on the part of the filmmakers to bring a particular performance aesthetic to the screen and that performance style was fairly high on their agenda. By taking this into consideration, the

suggestion that I made earlier in regard to the human Eve reaching female hero status at the end of the film takes on another level of meaning which seems to refer to an elision of actor/role. By reaching a kind of wholeness, a wholeness perhaps associated with Method-type performance techniques, the character of Eve may be seen as returning to a more American ideal but one which ironically presents an even greater challenge to the way in which gender and role have commonly been sutured together.

Eve of Destruction was made on a budget of approximately eleven million dollars and the producers, Orion, originally intended it for cinema release. However, it seems that, according to Udoff, it was pulled from the American theatres because Orion wanted to use all their funds on the launching of *Dances With Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990). On one level, it is easy to understand how a relatively low budget film lost out to a high budget, epic picture, with an established male star, but I wonder whether there was any part of that decision that was concerned with the fact that *Eve* had a very central female character, played by a female actor who could not be guaranteed to attract audiences, to 'open' the film. Whether the information Udoff gave here tells the whole story or not, it still brings me to the question of why it should be that the shift from male to female lone cyborg seems to bring with it a shift from mainstream, or cinema release, to direct to video. I realize that certain male stars of the Action, or Science Fiction/Action, genre have started life in direct to video films but it seems that the truly heroic female cyborg is often more fully 'expressed' in this format. It may be that this is currently changing (especially given the impending release of 'Lara Croft' onto the mainstream, movie arena), but it will be interesting to see whether the kinds of recuperative devices mentioned in association with Sarah (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*) and Trinity (*The Matrix*) will be in operation here. There is also a sense in which these female action hero-cyborgs are merely brought into the mainstream to enliven a staling format or at the point at which a particular cycle of genre films has reached a phase in which its codes have become overly familiar. In this instance, perhaps it is 'safe' to unleash the female cyborg-hero onto the mainstream as she could well serve as a feminized body upon which a process of demystification of the genre becomes more acceptable.

In some respects, *Eve Of Destruction* stands on the borders between cinema and direct to video film (it was made with cinema release in mind) but my following examples were literally made for video release. These examples, interestingly, present female heroes that could well stand alongside the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jean-Claude Van Damme; by this I mean that they present muscled women and women with martial skills akin to their male counterparts in the mainstream movies. In chapter one I discussed the ways in which the above male stars' performances could be viewed in terms of a 'hyper-realism' due to the fact that the roles they played strongly echoed their star personae and that the skills necessary to these roles were ones that were acquired outside of any dramatic training in acting. Both actors were also reported to have risen to stardom due to these very skills, implying that they actually lived their roles prior to their re-enactment. This is also true of the characters I have chosen to concentrate on next – neither of these performers are best known for their acting skills; both apparently chosen because of already acquired physical skills which brings them into close alignment with the roles they are playing. Both *Knights* (1992) and the *Nemesis* series (here I will be discussing *Nemesis 2* and *3*, 1995) were written and directed by Albert Pyun – a particularly prolific creator of direct to video, Science Fiction/Action films (he has also directed a number of American, Martial Arts movies but I will be taking a closer look at these in my following chapter). The characters of Nea and Alex in these films enable a closer look at what happens when heroic traits are transposed onto the female.

Alex (played by Sue Price), who is our central hero in both *Nemesis 2* and *3*, is a genetically altered female created to oppose the 'mechanical' form of cyborg that has overrun an America of the future. She has been given 'special powers' in order to perform this task and is transported back in time to the relative safety of East Africa in 1980. Here she is taken in by a local African tribe and we see her adult life begin just as she is about to undertake a 'rites of passage' ritual in order to prove her warrior status. Sue Price is a bodybuilder who is particularly bulky in appearance. In terms of female bodybuilding categories she

would come under the class of 'heavy weight "physique"'.⁴⁹ In other words, she presents an especially spectacular and excessive version of the built up female body and one that challenges the macho posturing of like male body builders such as Schwarzenegger; she is, therefore, more on a par with the shape and type of male 'super-hero/anti-hero' of the 1980s, Science Fiction/Action cinema. My argument is that although, throughout these films, the audience is reminded that her body shape is meant to be the result of genetic engineering it is obvious that she is not, in fact, a creature of fantasy but a powerful female figure in her own right. Although her built-up physique may indicate that she is enacting a kind of fantasy, either of her own making or in accordance with others ideals, her very materiality challenges the rather more conservative images of the female cyborg that are on offer in much mainstream cinema. Of course, that is not to say that she is presented in a totally unproblematic way (rather, the dialogue and action somewhat clumsily and repetitively reminds the audience that this is a problematic figure simply because she is a muscled woman) but the slippage between role/performer here proposes a different set of issues, whilst overlapping, with those advanced by the 'hyper-real' male hero.

When initially introduced to the adult Alex the viewer is shown a sequence of body and face shots whilst Alex describes her upcoming trial of strength and endurance to a female member of the tribe. None of these shots are designed to expose her as a female body and it may be quite a shock to the viewer when her sex is later revealed. This introduction seems designed to foreground the ambiguities present in 'the redefinition of the sexed body that is worked out

⁴⁹ The following information was gleaned from an interview with Alan Runacres (Director of Training with the Weightlifting and Bodybuilding Association [WABBA]), 16th May 1999, and from having attended body building competitions and witnessed the sort of categorization involved. Within female bodybuilding there are basically three classes – Fitness, Figure and Physique. Fitness concerns body shape in conjunction with performance, 'Miss Figure' concerns a body trained to attain those physical characteristics closely associated with ideals of the feminine (a variation on the old beauty contest), and Physique concerns particular muscle build and definition. Although 'Physique' is also split into lightweight, middleweight and heavyweight it moves away from what are considered to be the realms of feminine beauty and the way in which the body is judged. The ideals within this category appear less gendered, even though they are judged in male and female classes, in that the female body shapes that are consciously sculpted through weight training come closer to the body shapes of male counterparts. It could be said that these women were actually training to look more like men but I am not sure that this can be taken to be the case given that there is a wonderful irony in the fact that male body builders actually acquire some of the traits associated with the feminine body (i.e. Large 'breasts' and heavy thighs) – so, in another sense, the female and male ideal body images within this category actually move closer together. It is notable that moves are afoot to remove the category of Physique – the reason given by Runacres was that it encourages abuse of the body and a use of anabolic steroids – however, this reason does not seem to have provoked talk of removing this category for men.

over the muscular female body of the “action heroine”.⁵⁰ It is as though this sequence of shots were intended to undermine the viewer’s expectations not only in terms of what to expect of an action hero (that they be male) but what to expect from the muscularity achievable upon a female body - which visually brings together the notion of a disjunction between her sex and her ascribed gender performance. Although this would seem to point to the idea that Alex is masculinized in order to perform this heroic role, seen in conjunction with mainstream films like *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2* it also offers a kind of reply or commenting upon the super-macho hero. By presenting a female hero in this way it further foregrounds the constructedness of masculinity (certainly at the level of achievable ‘sculpting’ of the body image) and the supposed ‘natural’ superiority brought about by innate differences between the sexes. In fact, the similarities in plot and action between *The Terminator* and *Nemesis 2* would, again, appear to indicate the opportunity for an intertextual reading - to the point where I would suggest that this is what the audience is invited to do. Having stated that the playing of Alex by Sue Price can be read against the playing of the Terminator by Arnold Schwarzenegger there is also a sense in which Alex offers a commenting upon the later characterization of Sarah in *Terminator 2*. I proposed earlier that Sarah’s ‘fem-macho’ portrayal, accompanied by the vision of her new found muscularity, was overshadowed in a comparison with Schwarzenegger’s larger build and role within the film, but it would be very interesting to imagine just what *Terminator 2* would have looked like if Sue Price had played the Sarah role. The hierarchy of muscularity present in *Terminator 2* would most certainly have been challenged if this had been the case. I also wonder, if Price had played the original Sarah (of *The Terminator*) whether her body shape would have allowed for the necessity of introducing Reese (as protector) or, indeed, re-introducing the Terminator in the sequel? In fact, *Nemesis 2* could be said to be a re-playing of *The Terminator* bringing ‘Sarah’ and ‘Terminator’ into direct confrontation.

In her article ‘Traits of the Female Hero’, Mary Ann Jezewski studies the similarities and differences in the narrativization of female heroes.⁵¹ She talks of how the female heroes’ legend revolves around the seemingly masculine deeds she accomplishes but also notes some

⁵⁰ Tasker, p. 141.

⁵¹ *New York Folklore*, V.10, N.1-2, (Winter-Spring, 1984), 55-73.

significant differences in the structure of the stories accompanying these figures. One of these differences concerns the absence of the female hero's mother from many of these stories. She goes on to say that:

The female hero most frequently received her power from her father or through her marriage and therefore it is her father and/or husband who becomes an important part of her legend.⁵²

Although the audience sees Alex's mother bring her back through time to Africa she is conveniently killed off at the beginning of the film. Along with this incident the introductory voice-over (performed by a male actor) announces that it is Alex's father (who is called 'Alex Rain' in the first *Nemesis* film) that has performed the DNA alteration upon his child and even given her his name. This strongly indicates that the female Alex of the *Nemesis* series is primarily 'fathered' and has been given her father's 'powers'. However, even though the film opens with this common trope in the presentation of a female hero, spectacle and narrative are very strongly set off against one another in these movies. The camera, seemingly without narrative explanation, constantly pans over Alex's/Price's body inspecting the flex of individual muscles and as Alex meets each new character on her journey they almost invariably comment upon her muscularity. Alex is also seen changing her clothes on a number of occasions (notably, most often into those of a male adversary she has just dispatched) which provides the flimsiest of excuses for yet another look at aspects of her physique. Interestingly, in *Nemesis 3* there seems to be less emphasis placed upon her upper body in which the familiar 'tit shot' associated with the eroticization/fetishization of the feminine body is actually replaced with a very definite 'bum shot' most commonly used in conjunction with the male, romantic hero.⁵³ Although this could indicate that she were being filmed as though she were a man, the fact that she is not thoroughly complicates the more usual use of these standard objectification shots and (at least, for this viewer) almost makes laughable the presence of these shots as indicators of sexuality (both of the subject and of the presumed sexuality of the viewer) in other films. There is further evidence of this type of complication in *Nemesis 2* when Alex rescues a character called Emily from the rebels. She seems attracted by Alex's body and comments on how muscled she is. Thus follows the now

⁵² Jezewski, p.68.

⁵³ For instance, this kind of 'bum shot' has been seen in the *Lethal Weapon* (Dir: Richard Donner, 1987, 1989, 1992, 1998) series in which shots of Mel Gibson's backside are notable.

familiar series of shots revealing various aspects of Alex's body seen from the point of view of Emily. This is a confusing moment due to the inherent ambiguities of applying a standard objectification scenario to a woman who looks like a man being looked at by another woman who looks decidedly androgynous. Surely this serves to confuse notions of the male or masculine gaze, as it seems to offer up a multitude of possible readings and pleasures. If, as Laura Mulvey's seminal article suggests, the cinematic apparatus still operates to promote a male or masculinized point of view then this scene could be construed as entirely oppositional to such an operation.⁵⁴ On the contrary, the scenario in question, along with the way in which it is shot and edited, appears to ridicule the very notion of a recognizably masculine or feminine body form.

A further difference, as noted by Jezewski, between the male and female hero narrative appears to be in the producing of heirs: the female hero commonly produces heirs that carry on her legacy whereas, in contrast, the male hero usually dies, without leaving heirs.⁵⁵ In *Nemesis 3* the character of Farnsworth 2 (the male cyborg sent back to return Alex to his future⁵⁶) is concerned primarily with whether she has procreated. It seems the mechanical cyborgs of the future wish to recuperate any heirs to bring their powers back within patriarchal boundaries. Alex, although she has not produced heirs at this point, fights against Farnsworth's attempts to impose his will upon her and, in this respect, is shown to be struggling against, rather than for, this patriarchal future. This is in marked contrast to the character of Sarah in the *Terminator* films. Alex is a more independent figure who battles to escape the clutches of those around her and who seems to stand *outside* of the very narrative of the film, in direct opposition to Sarah who, I have argued, seems trapped *within* a patriarchal narrative. This is especially noticeable in *Nemesis 3*, in which the common device of the 'time loop' is employed quite effectively, thus foregrounding Alex's battle

⁵⁴ 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Film Theory and Criticism*, (Oxford University Press, 1992), (First published in *Screen*, V.16, N.3, [1975]), pp.746-757.

⁵⁵ Jezewski, p.69.

⁵⁶ Of course, in terms of the series this could be seen as returning Alex to an earlier time - the release date of the first *Nemesis* film in which the hero role was played by her father.

against the story she finds herself written into.⁵⁷ It is as though the narrative that Alex literally wakes up in the middle of represents a patriarchal imprisonment/domination that she refuses to accept. It follows then that narrative and spectacle in the *Nemesis* films are either opposed or running in some kind of parallel to each other. This might appear a strange proposition, given that characterizations supposedly 'evolve' from a given narrative, but what I am suggesting is that whereas the spectacle of Sarah seems to serve the overall narrative (whilst not denying it does offer certain ambiguous potentialities), the spectacle of Alex takes centrality away from the narrative. Given the above evidence, one might assume that this is quite intentional in these two *Nemesis* films, as the 'shocking' play with visual expectations serves to dislocate the spectator from certain narrative expectations and the devices and tropes already mentioned are used to disrupt and question.

Unlike our muscled female hero of the two *Nemesis* films *Knights* gives us a fighting 'action heroine' with strong martial arts skills. Kathy Long, who plays Nea, is a well known martial arts expert and full use is made of those skills in the very elongated fighting sequence that closes the film. The vampiric cyborgs that are overrunning the world have killed Nea's parents, leaving her orphaned along with her baby brother. She eventually leaves her brother to be looked after by some settlers and we next see Nea as an adult woman attempting to combat the killer cyborgs. During this battle a further cyborg appears on the scene (played by Kris Kristoffersen), who rescues Nea. Gabriel (the 'good' cyborg) has been directed to exterminate the vampiric cyborgs to bring 'order' back into the world and Nea, having witnessed his fighting techniques, makes a deal with him that he will teach her how to oppose the cyborg threat. Thus follows a sequence of scenes in which the audience sees Nea undergoing her training in martial arts combat. Although this may imply that Nea is 'fathered' her collusion with a patriarchal regime is complicated by the way in which she uses her new found powers: she does not so much work to uphold a male law as she co-opts some of its tools in order to assert/insert herself into a position of power. Gayatri C.

⁵⁷ In this film she wakes up in a desert having lost her memory. She follows her footprints back to her recent past and much of the film concerns the return of her memory and how she came to be there. Having said this, she appears to re-write the ending through her realization of who Farnsworth actually is and, rather than relying upon him for her survival (she is weakened by a gun-shot wound) she remembers her meeting with a fellow 'sister/female hero' who advises on the path that she must follow.

Spivak's reading of the story of the Anglo/Indian 'Mary Oran', may prove useful here in understanding Nea's adoption of 'masculine' techniques. Spivak describes how Mary, in facing a male adversary at one point in the story, can be understood to appropriate a masculine ritual in order to avenge an earlier crime. According to Spivak's understanding of this episode, Mary's appropriation 'is a negotiation with the phallus, not merely masquerading as a man'.⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Chela Sandoval has argued that a 'cyborgian' consciousness is necessary if feminism is to retain its oppositional force whilst allowing for a multiplicity of localized strategies. She suggests that:

This *mestizaje* or differential consciousness allows the use of any tool at one's disposal (as long as it is guided by the methodology of the oppressed) in order to both ensure survival and to remake the world.⁵⁹

It could then be said that Nea literally adopts a cyborgian consciousness and appropriates the skills associated with masculine prowess.⁶⁰

When Nea first asks Gabriel to teach her his techniques he refuses, stating: 'You can't do what I do'. She responds: 'Because I'm a girl?', to which he replies: 'Because you are human'. This dialogue could be understood as an indicator of how Nea's human, female sexuality inhibits her actions but it could equally be read as a statement of the way in which humanity is now 'feminized' in a world where the cyborg/hybrids take up the position of the masculine (all the cyborgs are played by male actors). If this is the case then perhaps Nea can be seen to stand in for a male figure here in a similar way to Clover's 'final girl'. Even if this is the dominant reading of her characterization it is not configured in quite the same way, as is allowed by the generic codes of the Horror/Slasher movie: she does not have the same

⁵⁸ 'Who Claims Alterity?', *Remaking History*, Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani eds., (Seattle Bay Press, 1989), p287.

⁵⁹ 'New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed', *The Cyborg Handbook*, (Routledge, 1995), p. 414.

⁶⁰ This is also suggested by an earlier moment in the film. The overall rhythm of the film is broken by a rather incongruous shot as Nea lays wounded under the inspecting gaze of a vampiric cyborg. The camera pans over her body which strongly suggests that he sees her as a sexualized object and means to use her for his own sexual gratification. It is as though the director was referencing the 'rape revenge' theme that runs through so many action films that feature female heroes. This links the use of martial arts by women, as a means of defending against male violence, to an appropriation of 'phallic power'. The link between martial arts and female victims of rape has been made before. For instance, Sharon R. Guthrie has written of the benefits of martial arts training in the recovery process for rape victims. Guthrie, 'Liberating the Amazon: Feminism and the Martial Arts', *Women and Therapy*, V. 16, N. 2-3, (1995), 107-119.

victim-like qualities and is far less ambiguous as a character. This could, ironically, be due in part to her lack of trained acting skills; she does not appear to explore, or reveal, the psychologically 'realistic' (in terms of connoting a deeper sub-text) responses to her situation. However, as previously mentioned Tasker's analysis of the Action Hero points to the way in which he/she is usually drawn in a less complicated fashion than 'active' characterizations in other genres. The hero in Action movies is more commonly simplistic, driven by a particular intent and not usually given to displays of complex emotion. In this sense the display of emotional responses is often kept to a minimum and generally serves as a tenuous linkage between the action narrative and the character's active response. Likewise, the reasoning behind Nea's actions is not explored in any great depth but simply glossed over in order to provide a certain impetus and some semblance of linkage between the spectacular fighting scenes.⁶¹ Certainly, the main thrust of Long's performance is centered on the display of her martial skills. However, her acting skills are, arguably, no less 'embarrassing' than many of her male, mainstream counterparts.

Even though the cyborgs are aligned with a supposed masculinity the fact that they are also vampires may indicate that a more composite being is alluded to here. Cyndy Hendershot has discussed the similarities between the figuration of the vampire in Gothic texts and the 'replicant' of Science Fiction; how they both represent a return to an earlier 'one-sex' modelling of the body. Like Clover, she draws upon the work of Thomas Laqueur, and comments on how the 'one-sex' model, whilst 'endorsing male dominance, also underlined the flexibility of the body. Within this model biological sex itself was prone to fluctuation [...] In a worldview where the body itself was mutable and liable to change from male to female and vice-versa, the social became the means of naturalizing sexual difference.'⁶² She goes on to argue that the vampire body, like that of the replicant, undermines 'any belief in clear-cut difference between men and women'.⁶³ Although she notes that in Gothic texts vampires are usually ruled by a male figure, thus making masculinity socially superior here,

⁶¹ If her reasoning was explored more fully this may, in fact, bring the film closer to the now familiar female melodrama – as it is within this genre that more attention and focus is given as to how experiences affect a character as opposed to the actions they may or may not carry out.

⁶² 'Vampire and Replicant: The One-Sex Body in a Two-Sex World', *Science-Fiction Studies*, V.22, N.67, (1995), 373-398, (pp.373-374).

⁶³ Hendershot, p.377.

the differences between male and female power are not predicated upon the body. Hendershot underlines this point by remarking that ‘while the act of vampirism – active penetration of the neck – appears masculine, both male and female vampires engage in it’.⁶⁴ However, unlike the traditional tale of the Gothic vampire, Nea could be said to have upset this social order in asserting her own superiority through her fighting skills.

It seems that within the fantasy structure of the film a certain ‘realism’ is called upon to disrupt received suppositions. In other words, Long’s actual martial arts persona, along with the display of her skills, is foregrounded to the extent that it effectively blurs the boundary between fact and fiction here. Although this same kind of blurring could be said to take place in the using of male, Action performers (i.e.. Jean-Claude Van Damme) its effects are likely to differ simply because the hero is female. In this way, she invariably confronts the myths upon which ‘naturalized’ gendered roles have been constructed and justified. So the hyper-realism present in the figuring of the Kathy Long character could be understood as a device that may increase male fears surrounding a supposed feminine threat but it also serves to suggest a breaking down, or blurring, between gender categories that have been used to fuel those very same fears. This blurring, certainly in terms of the action of the film, is rather strikingly invoked just after Gabriel is injured in an image that seems to echo the idea of the composite/compound being within which traits associated with both masculinity and femininity exist. After what could be seen as his literal castration (his legs are blown off by another cyborg who actually resembles Nea in appearance) he wishes to die. Nea will not allow this and straps the upper remains of his body to her back and continues fighting (with Gabriel literally watching her back). She had earlier stated that she could help Gabriel learn about ‘how to live’ after the fighting is over (in which case she would become his teacher); so both Nea and Gabriel would then exchange knowledge and skills. In this instance, certainly in terms of social hierarchy, they may be seen as less differentiated.

Knights very obviously exploits aspects and themes used in films like *The Terminator*, *Universal Soldier*, *Blade Runner*, *Mad Max* (Dir: George Miller, 1979) etc. to the point where it co-opts similar visual images and presents a kind of collage of their narrative

⁶⁴ Hendershot, p.379.

themes. For instance, the desert terrain and costuming of the characters is highly reminiscent of the 'look' given to the post-apocalyptic world of the *Mad Max* series. The idea of cyborgs taking over the world bears some similarity to *The Terminator* narrative and the use of Eastern-style martial arts evokes films like *Universal Soldier*. Toward the end of the film there is also an obvious reference to *Blade Runner* at a point that marks the demise of the cyborg leader: having accepted that he is dying he sees a white dove fly from a nearby tree. Certainly, this co-opting could be read as straight forward plagiarism but, even if this is the case, I cannot stress enough that the effects of this kind of 'B-movie' aesthetic can be surprising and revealing – especially as read in conjunction with mainstream models.

What is also notable about these three films is the way in which they return some of these female heroes, with 'special powers' that enable them to liberate the world, to the present. The hyper-realism involved in their performance personas can be seen to operate in this way along with the present-day setting of *Eve of Destruction*. In addition, the time looping and travel in *Nemesis 2 + 3*, acts as a reminder that these characters are very much situated in the present. These 'B-movie' heroines bring with them a certain 'nowness' whereas, in films like *Alien: Resurrection*, the aspects of Ripley that mark her as 'action heroine' are very much displaced onto a possible future. It may well be that this has to do with budgetary constraints (for example, lack of money to build elaborate settings, lack of money to create costuming and special effects etc.) but the consequences produce an interesting contrast with higher budget productions; a contrast that may well result in a more rigorous accounting of current body politics.

Having originally decided to separate the studies of male and female cyborg, in order to tackle their different treatment, this chapter has also attempted to go beyond a comparison solely based upon representation and point to other issues. One main finding has been that accompanying the sex/gender shift to female cyborg there is often a genre shift – particularly in mainstream Science Fiction. The use of the codes of Horror cinema may well indicate the extent to which these 'cyber-women' threaten a patriarchal order and this genre certainly allows for a playing out of male anxieties in this respect. A further shift, which seems evident from the examples I have discussed, is that from mainstream to direct to video when

it comes to the figuring of the lone, female hero/cyborg. Action cinema, in its apparent directness and simplicity, along with the less ambiguous characterization of the hero, may, rather ironically, be readily harnessed to oppositional ends. Could it be that a conservative, mainstream Hollywood cinema is reluctant to produce this figuration, without attempts at recuperation, because she could prove too de-stabilizing to a genre that has been so strongly marked as masculine in the past? I am not attempting to prove that there is some kind of conscious conspiracy here. But even if it were argued that it is more difficult successfully to market the female Action hero, at this level (due, possibly, to the recognition of having to expand marketing to encompass a female audience, or that the already established 'mature', male market would have to be 're-trained' in terms of expectations), then this also speaks to the way in which capitalism colludes with a kind of gendered hierarchy. There are not many female stars, even today, who can demand the kind of salary often associated with a male star. There are also not many female stars, compared to male stars, who are marketed in such a way as to attract an audience purely on the strength of their name. It seems then that the female action hero/cyborg has, until very recently, been confined to the more limited market of the lower budget movie - separating her from the mainstream arena.

Whatever the more specific conclusions brought by this chapter, it does make clear the continuing and growing importance of 'intertextuality' in an accounting of filmic practices, both in terms of the texts themselves (how they draw upon one another) and in terms of their analysis. Apart from the most obvious form of intertextuality that I am undertaking here (that 'between' various films and genres and that between films and other cultural discourses) a broader definition of the word would also encompass the kind of intertextual resonances brought about through an analysis of performance techniques/practices and how these inter-link with the representations of gender and nationalities (more specific attention will be paid to race in conjunction with the cyborg in the following chapter). Annette Kuhn has described the various definitions and approaches covered by the term 'intertextuality'.⁶⁵ Her discussion builds up to the suggestion that intertextuality can extend to a blurring of the boundaries between media artifacts and social reality – it can encompass the study of how one slides into

⁶⁵ 'Intertexts', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, (Verso, 1990), pp.177-182.

the other – and vice versa. At this point, I would like to propose that the aspects of performance so far explored go some way toward doing just that and that this is an area of study that effectively uncovers an elision between fantasy and reality. For instance, the literal elision evident in the discussion of the personas of Sue Price, Sigourney Weaver and Kathy Long seem to point in this direction. In other words, the viewer is invited to see these performers (and, to some extent, the roles they play) as both ‘real’ and ‘produced’.

As I have already intimated, the question of Otherness, the questions of identity and subjectivity raised by and as seen in conjunction with the figuration of the cyborg, are not limited to surrounding issues of sex/gender. Issues of race are also either openly or covertly played out upon the representation of the cyborg. I have already mentioned this in connection with the personas of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Renée Soutendijk but, as will become clearer in my next chapter, these issues become particularly noticeable in those films that feature the 'black' cyborg and those that I have come to call the 'Martial Arts/Cyborg' movies. Of course, the gender issues do not disappear, but in concentrating upon the following Cyborg movies I hope to bring the racial aspects to the fore in my ongoing discussion.

CHAPTER 3: RACE AND THE CYBORG

In the preceding chapters I have concentrated on how aspects of gender and sexuality intersect with the image of the cyborg in American cinema. As has long been recognised received notions of identity are also very much bound up with racial origins. Until recently qualities and traits have often been assigned to particular nationalities with the assumption that the race or nation in question could be considered homogenous and that individuals belonging to various racial groupings were thus the vessels of essential racial characteristics. Perhaps not in the same way, but by drawing upon similar ideas concerning a supposed unified identity, racial markings, as with the markers of sexuality, have been referred to as 'evidence' of an essentialized being that is necessarily separate and divided from other modes of being. This approach and system of classification has also been imbued with judgements of value which often underpin and attempt to naturalise various power structures: the dominance of one over another, even the right of one to define another.

In the last few decades both political and academic studies have turned their attention toward challenging and disrupting the very paradigms that are used to support racial inequalities. The disruption has taken many forms but more recently the concept of hybridity has been used to draw attention to the falsity, both conceptually and literally, of traditional modellings involving clear-cut division and essential difference. In a world in which both national and personal boundaries appear more fluid it has become necessary to look to approaches that can accommodate these shifts and that can, perhaps, give a more accurate account of how we experience ourselves and others in present day society.

One of the main academic areas to have explored and developed ideas surrounding hybridity is that of post-colonial theory. Like feminist theory, post-colonial studies have moved from being dominated by a discourse of opposition to one that could be described in terms of negotiation; a kind of struggle from within as opposed to taking a stand from outside has emerged. In this sense the idea of the racial and cultural hybrid has been central to the growth of theories that aim to counteract concepts of purity and exclusivity as the necessary

components in a claiming of selfhood. Stuart Hall, in his article 'New Ethnicities', succinctly outlines a shift in approach, as underpinning political movements concerned with racial issues, from an earlier unifying stance to a greater acknowledgement of cultural differences amongst racial groupings. He states that:

The term 'black' was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organising category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities.¹

Hall goes on to note how various black activists, artists and cultural workers, in these early stages, fought not only against their marginalization within various fields but also against the way in which they were represented/defined by a dominating white community. Activists contested the 'stereotypical quality and the fetishized nature of images of blacks, by the counter-position of a "positive" black imagery'.² In this sense what Hall is describing is how the supposedly distinct opposition between black and white, which had been used to underpin white supremacy, was co-opted in terms of political opposition. Although Hall argues that this earlier strategy continues to exist he describes a more recent move toward, what he sees as, 'a change from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself'.³ He states that this shift has marked "'the end of innocence", or the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject'.⁴

Of course, this underlying transformation in approach has been greatly influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist theory and, in terms of post-colonial studies, the figure of the leading theorist, Homi K. Bhabha, stands at the centre of these recent debates. By drawing upon a mixture of Lacanian psychoanalysis and poststructuralist theory Bhabha expounds a model of hybridity as based upon 'a kind of "doubleness" in writing: a

¹ Although Hall is mostly referring to Britain here his analysis holds true for black diasporas in America also. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft et al. eds., (Routledge, 1999), p.223.

² Hall, p.224.

³ Hall, p.224.

⁴ Hall, pp.224-225.

temporality or representation that moves *between* cultural and social processes'.⁵ In this regard he states that:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or post-colonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory – where I have led you – may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualising an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism or multiculturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between*, the space of the *entre* that Derrida has opened up in writing itself – that carries the burden of meaning of culture. [...] by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.⁶

Gail Ching-Liang Low reads Bhabha's strategy as 'a discourse of partiality which works against the colonial reproduction of (unitary) meaning'.⁷ She goes on to point out, in an application of the terms of hybridity to the colonial subject, that 'neither the desire for racial and historical originality nor the demand for absolute obedience - based on this origination - will be met'.⁸ In this sense, the notion of hybridity extends not only to the colonized but also to the colonizer. For instance, if the racial Other is culturally hybrid, having taken on aspects of the colonizer's culture, then the traffic goes both ways - meaning that the colonizer, in a hegemonic appropriation of an-Other's culture, can also be understood as 'de-purified'.

There are, of course, post-colonial critics who read this recent strategy as playing into the hands of the white oppressor. For example, David Punter expresses his fears that those who extol:

Recent theories of the decentring of consciousness, far from being radical in their assumptions about human identity, are in fact the very emblem of complicity. In their extreme questioning of the human, in their exaltation of the 'inhuman', they are in fact repeating precisely the 'colonising' gambit, emptying the world of all inhabitants who do not conform to the central structure of prejudice that keeps the Western tradition in being.⁹

⁵ 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', *Nation and Narration*, (Routledge, 1990), p.293, my emphasis.

⁶ 'The Commitment to Theory', *New Formations*, N.5, (Summer, 1988), 5-23, (p.22), Bhabha's emphases.

⁷ *White Skins Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism*, (Routledge, 1996), p.197.

⁸ Ching-Liang Low, p.197.

⁹ *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.147.

However, Bhabha contends that an acknowledgement of hybridity and the 'in between' spaces of cultural exchange do not, necessarily, diminish degrees of agency. In fact, he asserts that '[i]t is [the] public sphere of language and action that must become at once the theatre and the screen for the manifestation of the capacities of human agency'.¹⁰ Bhabha goes on to explain that, in terms of a narrative construction, the cause/subject and the effect/eventuality are separated by a 'time-lag' that 'makes the *who* and the *what* contingent, splitting them, so that the agent remains the subject, in suspension, outside the sentence.'¹¹ In other words, he argues that the subject's action and effect cannot be unequivocally unified and that it is 'where the two touch [...] that kinetic tension between the contingent as the contiguous' where agency can be located.¹² Bhabha's formulation of agency is therefore not the same as the kind of individual agency (agency that is fully located *within* the individual human being) associated with received ideas of 'human beingness', consciousness and will. Rather than playing into the hands of the ruling elite, as it were, Bhabha sees this emphasis on the 'in between' spaces as allowing for 'the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription'.¹³ He further explains that:

In the seizure of the sign [...] there is neither dialectical sublation nor the empty signifier: there is a contestation of the given symbols of authority that shift the terrains of antagonism. The synchronicity in the social ordering of symbols is challenged within its own terms, but the grounds of engagement have been displaced in a supplementary movement of hybridity that exceeds those terms. This is the historical movement of hybridity as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement.¹⁴

As Nikos Papastergiadis has pointed out: 'Bhabha's strategy is not a redemptive one'.¹⁵ In other words, it does not attempt a return to some imagined 'before' of colonialism; it does not assume that the colonial subject can regain some kind of lost innocence or purity. Instead, the colonial subject, much like Donna Haraway's feminist cyborg, is not innocent but 'the

¹⁰ *The Location of Culture*, (Routledge, 1994), p.189.

¹¹ Bhabha, p.189, Bhabha's emphasis.

¹² Bhabha, p.190.

¹³ Bhabha, p.193.

¹⁴ Bhabha, p.193.

¹⁵ 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory', *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, Phina Werbner, Tariq Modood eds., (Zed Books, 1997), p.279.

illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism'.¹⁶ Like Haraway's cyborg, Bhabha's hybrid subject suggests the move toward 'regeneration, not rebirth'.¹⁷ And, like Haraway, his theories have provided a kind of theoretical groundwork that has inspired other academics in this field and beyond to formulate strategies of political resistance, which have led to some very different accounts of racial and cultural difference. Indeed, an appreciation of hybridity has rapidly entered into many areas of both academic and popular discourse and it has ballooned from being a more specific concept to one that may theoretically encompass various modes of being. Whilst this can lead to a denial of the imbalances present in actual, lived, experiences it does serve to concentrate attention on the contingency of identity formations.

Given the body of work that I have alluded to above it is surprising that there are not more examples of cyborg figures that foreground, in some way, ideas of racial hybridity. As the last two chapters have shown, gender and sexuality appears to be a central concern in the representation of the cyborg - particularly in mainstream filmmaking practices in America. That is not to say that racial and cultural differences/issues are not played out in some of the films already mentioned but they often remain more marginal, or perhaps more deeply embedded, when it comes to the deconstructing of the actual figure of the cyborg. This impression may simply reflect a lack of study, in terms of race, in connection with these images but that lack may also reflect the fact that although some of these figures are marked as foreign (usually in terms of extra-filmic associations - often via star persona e.g. Schwarzenegger's Austrian heritage, Van Damme's persona as the 'muscles from Brussels') this is usually conservatively drawn. As Richard Dyer points out, in his recent attempt to approach the specificity of representations of racial and cultural 'whiteness':

Attention is sometimes paid to 'white ethnicity' [...], but this always means an identity based on cultural origins such as British, Italian or Polish, or Catholic or Jewish, or Polish-American, Irish-American, Catholic-American and so on. These however are variations on white ethnicity (though, as I suggest below, some are more securely

¹⁶ 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (Free Association Books, 1991), p.68.

¹⁷ Haraway, p.100.

white than others), and the examination of them tends to lead away from a consideration of whiteness itself.¹⁸

So the cyborg figures in these movies are most often performed by white males and even though facets of their identity can be read as 'uncertain', and that this is often associated with 'variations on white ethnicity', any exploration of racial aspects does not appear to move very far from traditional concepts of a white, Western masculinity.

I realize that it is too simplistic to assume that issues concerning ethnicity would necessarily be more fully explored if central cyborg characters were replaced by actors (male or female) of non-white descent. As Robert Stam has pointed out there has been a history in American filmmaking of 'superficial integrationism, which simply inserts new heroes and heroines, this time drawn from the ranks of the subaltern, into old functional roles which are themselves oppressive'.¹⁹ Although I think that even this 'insertion' carries with it a disruptive potential,²⁰ or can promote a questioning brought about by the tension between role and actor, it can be assumed that this device is often intended as exploitative. Stam refers to examples like *Shaft* (Dir: Gordon Parks, 1971) and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Dir: Stanley Kramer, 1967) as films that allow subaltern characters 'into the club' as long as they play by 'white rules'. Within the American Science Fiction film arena there certainly remain films that exploit marginal groups (markets) but I have chosen examples, for discussion, that display a confusing of those 'white rules' or an apparent negotiation with the world in which central subaltern characters find themselves. In fact, later discussions concern a group of films that foreground a kind of 'in between' positioning, or double-consciousness, which is largely based upon ethnicity, whilst also exploring hybridity of a technological nature. I have christened these the 'Martial Arts/Cyborg' movies and, even though their impact can be read in very recent examples of mainstream Science Fiction films, they emerged largely in the late 1980s - early 1990s as direct to video releases. Although many can be read as containing

¹⁸ *White*, (Routledge, 1997), p.4.

¹⁹ 'Bakhtin, Polyphony, and Ethnic/Racial Representation', *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, (University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.263.

²⁰ As has been noted by Gwendolyn Audrey Foster in her study of the black female actor, Pam Grier, in the 'blaxploitation' movies of the 1970s. Whilst accepting that her representation was produced within an exploitative framework she goes on to argue that her extreme 'mimicry' can be viewed as a form of 'mediated' (as opposed to 'pure') resistance. Foster, *Captive Bodies: Postcolonial Subjectivity in Cinema*, (State University of New York Press, 1999), pp.174-180.

elements that are exploitative, they are largely produced, directed and/or written by Americans who belong to Asian subaltern groupings. I am not suggesting that these films are exactly radical in content, or provide a 'pure' or un-American viewpoint (after all they do tend to draw upon familiar American formulas/genres and even refer to past exploitation movies). They can hardly be read as a complete departure from the American film 'scene' but they do present a kind of negotiation with dominant white American culture - in fact, many appear to make this negotiation central to their narratives. In other words, these films cannot be considered unproblematic but they do seem to display a more thorough working through of post-colonial, ethnic (non-white) identity within a postmodern American environment.

Before beginning this exploration I want to start with a brief look at the representation of the 'black' minorities in Cyborg films. I am, of course, aware that, as Hall pointed out, 'black' is a term that has come to encompass a vast number of nationalities, but it is my contention that African-Americans or West Indian-Americans largely remain lumped together in many American films, in terms of presumed racial traits or stereotyping, as the opposite to white characters. As Robert J. C. Young has pointed out:

Racial difference in the nineteenth century was constructed not only according to a fundamental binary division between black and white but also through evolutionary social anthropology's historicised version of the Chain of Being. Thus racialism operated both according to the same-Other model and through the "computation of normalities" and 'degrees of deviance' from the white norm.²¹

So, unlike my later exploration into the depiction of largely Asian races in the Martial Arts/Cyborg movies, what are understood as 'black' characters, in much of Hollywood's output, continue to stand for the most extreme image of the racially opposite. If one were to consider 'degrees' of racial difference as a continuum, then Americans of African or West Indian origin are seen as the most visually, and understood as the most culturally, opposite to white. Whether the 'black' character continues to be exhibited as the racialized opposite to the white in the Cyborg movie, and just how this opposition appears to be played out here, is something that will be of central concern in the discussions below.

²¹ *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (Routledge, 1995), p.180.

The Mainstream Cyborg Film of the 1980s and Representations of 'Blackness'

Having stated that racial issues are rarely foregrounded in the earlier mainstream Cyborg movies there are a couple of notable exceptions. For instance, the character of Dyson (played by Joe Morton) in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Dir: James Cameron, 1991) initially appears to represent a departure from the norm in these films - that is in terms of notable black representations in these films. His close association with modern technology ostensibly presents him as a powerful and respected figure, but this is undercut by the fact that he basically functions as a scapegoat. The threat that these new technologies present is placed at his feet and, like the Terminator, he is forced to sacrifice himself in order to save humanity. In this sense Dyson is aligned with the terminating cyborg: the suggestion being that like the Terminator he too is a kind of hybrid, having taken up a strong position within white society. So a form of post-colonial hybridity here is earmarked as just as threatening to humanity as the technological hybridity offered by the cyborg machine-man. It seems that although class and position, in the 'drawing' of this character, could be taken as an equalizing mechanism in this film (implying that race is not an issue here) Dyson's function within the narrative means that, like the 'good' Terminator he too must 'bow out' to maintain a status quo.

Another interesting example, albeit of a more latent variety, can be noted in the figuring of the eponymous anti-hero in the film *Predator* (Dir: John McTierman, 1987). Here the alien-hunter/predator is melded with a technological body suit that allows for his visual disappearance. This cyborg-hunter of humans also sports a number of 'high-tech' weapons that, being built into the same suit, extend from his body and enhance his predatory prowess. The predator character (played by Kevin Peter Hall) is placed in direct opposition to the white, human figure of the army major, Dutch (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger). The alien is heavily marked as 'black' in terms of his costuming (in particular he sports a headpiece similar in appearance to dreadlocks) and, even though it is difficult to tell who

plays the character under the costuming and make-up, Hall is actually an Afro-American. This is interesting given the film's heavy references to Vietnam, in the sense that the predator is not marked as 'oriental' but Afro-American/Black. This in some ways proves that the black character here is figured as the polar opposite to the white, which allows for a direct and simplified mode of adversarial combat, in this Action/Science fiction film. However, this is complicated somewhat if attention is paid to scenes that appear toward the end of the film. In the closing stages of their battle Dutch realizes that if he covers himself in black mud the alien cannot see him - just as he cannot see the alien due to his technological suit. Although this is explained in terms of the narrative as producing a cooling effect which does not allow for the alien's 'heat seekers' to detect Dutch, visually it makes Dutch look black - thereby aligning him with this adversary. So Dutch plays by alien rules in taking on this mask of blackness and he eventually succeeds in destroying the predator. This, of course, suggests that, in terms of the film's narrative, Dutch is able to be more potently 'black' than the actual black alien is. This is underlined by the fact that Dutch is forced to rely on very primitive weapons in battling with this foe: he constructs spears from tree branches and designs rudimentary traps - of the kind that might be used in killing wild animals in the jungle. He is, therefore, seen to 'regress', to become a kind of jungle savage in these closing moments. So, once again, it seems that the black hybrid (in this case technologically enhanced 'black' predator) is figured as the threat to humanity here and, rather ironically, the film suggests that the human survives by taking up the position of the primitive, black savage.

The issue of visual perception, or lack of it, in the film also suggests that hybridity somehow makes the enemy, the opposing force, more dangerous in the sense that they may literally become invisible. In terms of the racial undertones this further implies that hybridity makes it 'less clear' as to who is the opposing Other. Is this 'unclear' status the real threat presented by the black, hybrid alien? Dutch's donning of the 'black mask' also operates to further signal that he believes the alien to be black. So even though the predator is figured as a hybrid this white man recognizes him as a black man. In other words, there is an attempt to recuperate those factors that hybridity threatens to disturb but this, in turn, is disturbed by the fact that contact with the alien also turns Dutch into a kind of hybrid. Even though this is

rather simplistically played out it may be that some of Bhabha's ideas concerning the two-way traffic of colonial hybridity and his account of the kind of negotiated agency this positioning offers to the colonized, may be evidenced in the figuring of these two hybrid characters. However conservatively constructed this scenario may indicate that the very introduction of the cyborg appears to draw out questions surrounding the notion of hybridity which here can be read in terms of the racial issues the film proposes.

Another way of understanding these scenes in *Predator* would be in terms of a kind of updated version of the 'noble savage' myth. This figure is most usually traced back to Aphra Behn's story of the royal, black slaves in *Oroonoko* (1688). The philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau later developed the figuration in the Eighteenth Century. Very briefly, in his early writing, Rousseau contended that man is essentially good, a 'noble savage' when in the 'state of nature'. He later went on to argue that civilization was necessary in providing a system of law that was moral and just to govern social existence. So these two strands in his writing accounted for the 'noble savage' as a kind of originary figure who needed civilizing along European standards. Needless to say, the 'noble savage' was seized upon in later novels and stories and has developed as a mythical, Eurocentric, viewpoint of foreign, colonized, natives. So, the 'noble savage', understood as primitive but pure, uncorrupted by the artifice of society, living in a state of grace, in communion with nature, can also be read as a more authentic version of humanity in a comparison with the civilized Westerner. To return then to *Predator*, these later scenes in which Dutch adopts a certain primitivism in order to survive, may mark a borrowing from the noble savage figuration.²² In adopting this mode, and returning to this primitive state, the suggestion might be that he becomes more fully and authentically human; his 'natural' strength and fighting prowess is thereby pitted against the 'unnatural', technologically enhanced skills, of his alien adversary. Taken this way, this is a doubled message in which the image of the black man (the 'noble savage') is drawn upon, rather ironically, to imply that this white man is human and superior to the black alien (read

²² I am not suggesting that this is the first time this kind of figuration has cropped up in film. For instance, some of the shots in *Predator* are highly reminiscent of images in *Apocalypse Now* (Dir: Francis Ford-Coppola, 1979) when the American captain (played by Martin Sheen) is seen to 'go native' in the killing of the renegade colonel (played by Marlon Brando). Of course, this film, in turn, pays homage to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* - a novel in which the jungle native is seen to stand for the 'primitive' side of white masculinity.

foreigner) who fights against him. In this sense, as has become evident in critiques of the 'noble savage' figure, the black man's authenticity is only realized upon being represented by the white man or seen through the white man's eyes. This underlines the fact that the 'noble savage' figuration is simply a projection of a white fantasy written onto the body of a colonized people. Of course, as Victor Burgin has pointed out, in speaking of the 'colour' of someone's skin there is a sense in which the subject is reduced to a 'body'. He goes on to note that "people of colour" are embodied people. To have no colour is to have no body'.²³ In other words, to be white suggests a disembodied positioning which can be placed in opposition to the body of the native. Therefore, the native body can stand in for the displaced body of the white man and, in terms of *Predator* it seems that Dutch's 'return to the body' is marked by his taking on of the black mask.

ISSUES OF AUTHENTICITY

Virtuosity (Dir: Brett Leonard, 1995) tells the tale of an ex-cop, Parker-Barnes, (played by Denzel Washington) who has been convicted of murder and sentenced to a long and harrowing imprisonment. Whilst in custody he is used, by Government authorities, as a guinea pig in experiments with virtual reality, police training programs. This involves his immersion into a virtual city environment peopled largely by white suited businessmen. Within this environment Parker becomes the adversary of a white psychopathic killer called Sid 6.7 (notably played by Russell Crowe of *Romper Stomper* [Dir: Geoffrey Wright, 1992] fame²⁴). Sid has been programmed with the memories and traits of a number of real murderers (including the fictional 'Grimes' - the white male who the audience learns killed

²³ 'Paranoiac Space', *New Formations*, V.12, (Winter, 1990), 62-73, (p.68).

²⁴ More recently Crowe has shifted from 'bad' to 'good' guy with his roles in *The Insider* (Dir: Michael Mann, 1999) and *Gadiator* (Dir: Ridley Scott, 2000). However, at the time of *Virtuosity's* release he was known for playing radically immoral/amoral and violent characters.

Parker's wife and child) in order to prove a most demanding and complex adversary.²⁵ The training program gets out of control and Sid becomes embodied in the diegetically 'real' world. Parker, then considered the only person able to track down Sid, is offered a pardon if he takes up his law enforcement role once again. In the mean time, Parker becomes romantically associated with a white female, criminal psychologist who accompanies him on his quest. Sid kidnaps her daughter and it is up to Parker to save her from being murdered. Eventually, Parker is able to return Sid to the virtual world and trick him into divulging the whereabouts of the little girl. Parker saves the day, rescues the daughter and finally destroys Sid.

In some respects *Virtuosity* can be understood in terms of a tokenism (a letting into the 'club', the genre, of a black artist). However, racial issues are played out more thoroughly than in many previous examples. The film's narrative trajectory ostensibly follows Parker's re-establishment into American Society through his taking up of a position on the 'right' side of American patriarchal law. His role as a policeman and father figure are fused here, with the suggestion that if he fulfills these dual functions he can, once again, become accepted and integrated into white bourgeois society. Robyn Wiegman has commented of the *Lethal Weapon* series that they 'seek[s] to override the potential disruption caused by race by establishing bourgeois culture as the signifier of racial indifference'.²⁶ Although much of the narrative of *Virtuosity* would appear to suggest that a similar device is being employed, unlike the Action/'Buddy' movie, race is brought to the fore in the adversarial nature of pitching the manifestly white against the black. Correspondingly, Parker's re-integration,

²⁵ The figuring of the 'serial killer' has become a trope in many Cyborg films. In relation to issues of race the serial killer can be understood as the embodiment of the white male colonizer and the violence associated with this colonization. In addition, it could certainly be assumed that there are racial connotations in choosing to program Sid with the memories of known serial killers. Apart from referring back to earlier Cyborg films that draw upon the 'Slasher' genre, 'serial killing' is statistically known to be a crime committed predominantly by white males, between the ages of 25-35. This information can be checked against several studies that 'profile' serial killers and reference can be made to some of those studies via: <<http://members.tripod.com/~Serialkillr/SerialKillersExposed>>, (5.2.00).

²⁶ 'Black Bodies/American Commodities: Gender, Race, and the Bourgeois Ideal in Contemporary Film', *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, Lester D. Friedman ed., (University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.320.

rather than appearing somehow unproblematic, is clouded with struggle and violence.

Throughout the film there are images which place Parker on one side of a literal divide whilst his adversaries take up their position on the other side. In the opening sequence, which the viewer later learns has taken place in the virtual world of the program, he pursues Sid through an oriental restaurant sectioned off by thin paper walls (I will return to the relevance of the 'oriental' space below). The walls allow for shadows to be seen, but they also obscure and confuse the identity of the people on either side. As this scene progresses these flimsy walls are broken down by flying bodies and gunshots until Parker faces Sid in the closing showdown of the sequence. Apart from symbolically reflecting a violent breakdown between this fantasy world and the real world these images also serve to accentuate the impression of Parker as positioned on one side of a dual-ity; as part of an opposition thinly divided in terms of race and legal standing. However, the film seems to thwart our expectations as after this opening scene, instead of a neat role reversal in which the black man takes on the hero/saviour function (within a narrative and genre normally associated with the white male hero) the audience then learn that our hero has been classified a criminal by the authorities. This abrupt disclosure, when the virtual reality world is shut down and Parker's consciousness returns to the diegetically real world, is notably echoed in his appearance. Within the virtual world he is seen wearing a policeman's uniform and has short hair in marked contrast to his dreadlocks and unkempt appearance as the criminal guinea pig. Of course, the end of the film redeems him but this does offer a tentative comment upon role reversal as a cinematic practice, in the sense that the virtual program can be seen to refer to past film representations of the 'good' black man. Further to this there are references to the history of slavery in America as Parker is chained and shuffles along in a similar fashion to familiar images of black slaves. Here, it is obvious that his criminalization is associated with his ethnic origins.

As the film progresses there is a further sequence that alludes to Parker's racial position in the real world. Having been forced to take up his post as law enforcer and nearing the end of his pursuit of Sid, Parker attempts to gain entrance to a television studio in which Sid has

taken hostages. The security guards assume Parker to be a criminal and proceed to shoot at him along a corridor sectioned off by large portions of plate glass. Parker runs from the shots down one side of the glass partitioning whilst the guards shoot at him from the other. The glass is shattered but Parker manages to elude the bullets being fired at him. Again, he is shown to be on the wrong side of a divide but the walls between him and his adversaries do not offer protection, they simply mark him apart. It is hard to tell quite what is intended by these images in conjunction with the overall narrative. In one sense it appears necessary for Parker to break through these walls but in another the flimsiness of these divides carries with it the suggestion that if they were stronger they would offer protection. So there appears to be a more reactionary connotation here in which the breaking down of various divides (most essentially those between black and white) can be read as dangerous. Along with this, both the opening and closing sequences (those that take place within the virtual world) make it difficult to judge the content of the rest of the film by the codes normally associated with 'realism'. To a certain extent meaning is made ambiguous as fantasy and reality fold in on one another. This can be taken to connote the way in which representations of opposition are built upon fantasy constructs and, perhaps, comments upon how racial stereotypes may display a kind of self-projection onto an-Other. This is underlined by various passages of dialogue in which it is mentioned that Sid *needs* Parker - as though they define one another. However, even though it is implied here that racial divides may be considered as somewhat artificial there is also an appeal to authenticity present. Parker's imprisoned persona (recalling the slave trade and his dreadlocked appearance) may suggest that he has 'returned to his roots' in some way and deliberately set himself apart racially. This, seen in conjunction with Sid's construction from a multitude of personalities, may further suggest that Parker stands for what is considered an authentic version of humanity in the film.

In considering these aspects of the film it is also important to note that Parker was originally imprisoned for killing two television reporters. In a flashback scene we see that Grimes had timed the murder of Parker's family to coincide with an interview in which two reporters question him on his growing celebrity status as a murderer. Having failed to rescue his family the injured Parker searches out Grimes and shoots him whilst the television reporters attempt to film the event. Parker turns quickly and shoots the two reporters. Although it is

implied (in Washington's performance of this moment) that he does not know who they are, the shooting can be read as Parker's attempt to destroy the representative mechanisms that portray him as a killer and that make Grimes into a celebrity. This is also a particular turning point for Parker in the sense that his status as a cyborg is brought about by the injuries inflicted upon him by Grimes. During the explosion that kills his family Parker's left arm is blown off and the viewer later learns that this has been replaced by a cybernetic prosthesis.²⁷ So, it seems that cyborgization has been forced upon Parker in the most violent of ways. This kind of hybridity is not revealed as a route freely chosen by Parker but one which has been brought about by the most extreme pain. This could, of course, suggest that Parker functions as a sort of embodiment of 'black' history - in the sense that post-colonial hybridity has only come into being due to a long and violent colonial regime. In terms of the narrative, it is also Parker's cyborg, or hybrid, status that makes him the most qualified to track down Sid. Again, this can be seen as a kind of re-working of the familiar detective character of Film Noir, who is brought into close association with the 'darker' elements of society, suggesting that he has some kind of intimate knowledge of how the 'other side' think and act.²⁸

It is ironic, to say the least, that Parker is actually forced to take up his position as law enforcer and protector for the white authorities due to the violence of those same authorities against him. It seems that the narrative closes down on any element of choice offered for Parker's survival in this world - the only road open to him being to uphold the values of the white society in which he is placed. It also seems ironic that, given his cyborg status and tenuous existence within this society, he is, in many ways, portrayed as more 'authentic' than his white adversary. In order to explore this idea further a comparison between Sid and Parker should prove fruitful. As was mentioned before, Sid's character is built upon a composite of some two hundred convicted killers - he is a multiple personality, copied and

²⁷ It is interesting that it is his *left arm* that is replaced, especially given the long tradition of the left arm/hand being associated with the 'sinister'. Had it been his right this might have suggested a kind of visual pun on the phrase 'the right arm of the law'. So Parker's authentically human side is being invoked as lawful whilst his prosthesis represents a kind of constructed, dark, or criminal side.

²⁸ Certainly Washington's past roles may be brought into play here - in particular the black detective of the film *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995). Walter Mosley, the writer of the original novel upon which the film was based, is known for his co-opting of the American 'hard core' detective genre which he both uses and subverts, to some extent, through the placing of a black central character.

brought together under the guise of a single body. Anthony Kubiak, in a fascinating study which refers to the discourses of performance, postmodernism and psychology, connects the representation of fragmented identities in film and theatre with recent diagnostic definitions of Multiple Personality Disorder (more recently termed DID - disassociate identity disorder). Kubiak traces its history back to earlier diagnoses of 'split personality' disorders. He notes that accounts of the 'split personality' were reflected in various fictions (most notably *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson). Likewise, he also seeks to make a tentative link between the 1970s/1980s emergence of DID and filmic images involving the representation of multiple personality. He goes on to explore the broader emergence of a conflation of 'personality' and 'identity' in American culture and suggests that this has fed into an apparently literal fragmenting of individual identity as well as promulgating a view of identity as more fragmented. This all leads up to his questioning of whether DID 'is "real" or [...] merely an artifact of certain kinds of therapies mixed with the cultural currency of multiplicity?'²⁹ Apart from underlining a certain feedback loop between diverse discourses his study focuses upon the theatrical nature of DID and, indeed, its 'cure'. The therapies involved in the recovery of an 'original' moment of trauma (the moment that causes the subject to split) must be 'performed' in front of an audience - the idea being that once the trauma has been re-lived the subject can re-integrate various aspects of themselves and become centered/unitary. In addition, the idea of performance implies that both the disorder and cure need recognition - placing emphasis on the therapist/audience in their defining. What is also of interest is that the supposed memories of trauma may not lie in the kind of memory associated with the mind but may be imprinted or dispersed across the body.³⁰

Both of these notions appear to be played out in the character/s of Sid. His need for an audience in the carrying out of his killings suggests a kind of perverted attempt to unify his existence and to have that unity/embodied humanity recognized. If Sid were taken to represent 'white masculinity' then he may offer an interesting commenting upon the

²⁹ 'Splitting the Difference: Performance and Its Double in American Culture', *The Drama Review*, V.42, N.4 (T160), (Winter, 1998), p.103.

³⁰ Although this idea can be aligned with Freudian notions concerning symptoms of hysteria, Kubiak's account does not focus upon this in such a seemingly negative fashion but simply appears to accept that memory can be more dispersed, across the body, rather than centralized in the brain/mind.

hyperbolic visual images of the white, male cyborg in earlier films; the suggestion being that if this white masculine subject is fragmented/dis-integrated he, rather ironically, is forced to foreground his own embodiment in order to reinsert himself back into society. However, Sid's embodied unity as proof of white masculine subject-hood is undermined by the way in which a less centered subjectivity is also played out in terms of his body: as parts are destroyed he is able to live on because his 'nano-bots' (a mass of microscopic robots circulating throughout his body) simply re-generate replacements. Sid is, therefore, not a real person and any amount of 're-play', it can be presumed, will not ultimately lead to a re-integration. This is set up in contrast to Parker's experiences in which a more literal re-playing of his past seems to enable him to reintegrate. In this way Sid appears to embody the falsity and corruption of the dominant and pervasive white culture that surrounds Parker, whilst Parker himself comes to stand for a kind of human truth and authenticity. Claudia Springer has also picked up on the racial politics in *Virtuosity* and notes that African-American actors, in some of the most recent Cyborg movies, are often cast in roles as representative of the 'real'. She goes on to say that:

There is an implicit message that African-Americans have a fundamentally 'grounded' essence that resists electronically induced instability and can 'heal' white people who are careening out of control.³¹

However, at the same time as Parker's 'native culture' is evoked to uphold the idea of the authentic human this is also hijacked by the white authorities as a sign, or a reminder, for their own human law.

As has already been mentioned aspects of performance are brought to the fore in this film in particular through the figuring of Sid. As Sid becomes more accustomed to the diegetically 'real' world he also becomes increasingly theatrical. At several points he refers to his own performance of certain events and states that he cannot be made accountable for his actions. The suggestion here is that because Sid is simply a performer his actions are not authentically

³¹ 'Psycho-Cybernetics in Films of the 1990s', *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1999), p.215.

his. In connection with the film's narrative his actions do not 'belong' to him but to one of the many 'alters' he has been programmed with. This can be read in terms of 'a wider notion of the white body, of embodiment, of whiteness involving something that is in but not of the body'.³² This idea can be further extended to include a notion of whiteness as an illusive dominating force - a force that is not necessarily tangible or situated in the body but transcends the body at the same time as it is expressed through the racial markers of whiteness. In very simplistic terms, Sid feels he can do what he wants because his actions are not 'situated' and cannot therefore be specifically controlled through recourse to/upon his body. Following from this he does not display any of the emotional signs normally associated with 'human beingness'; he simply appears to enjoy his role/s. Russell Crowe has commented of his own performance of Sid that the character:

Doesn't carry conscience or guilt or any of that human baggage, he operates purely on the basis of glee. Playing with Sid was fun because there wasn't any of that emotional baggage with him. I didn't have to process that side of him [...] With Sid, you get to work and you're going to get to terrorize the piss out of a whole room of people, off you go because it's only fun, it's only performance.³³

Apart from these comments implying a sense in which the Crowe persona melds with the character of Sid (a common marketing device used by actors in interviews - ironically, most usually employed to suggest a kind of authentic base to the playing of the role) it does underline the fact that he was not utilizing the usual methods with which to create the impression of an 'inner' life within the character. In other words he did not have to create a sense in which the character was 'real' but, instead, could simply present his performance without trying to hide the fact that that was what it was. In this sense, Sid can also be read as providing a kind of surface, albeit complex, characterization.

Parker, on the other hand, is portrayed in terms of a certain depth of character. This is usually signalled, in the film, via sub-textual moments where he does not speak dialogue but reacts in some way. These moments are held (the action stalls at these points) presumably inviting the viewer to interrogate Parker's motives and possible thoughts (further encouraged by the fact that some of these moments are filled with a flashback to Parker's earlier life).

³² Dyer, p.14.

³³ 'Interview with Russell Crowe', <<http://www.csh.rit.edu/~halle/russel.html>>, (2.3.99).

Parker is authentic because he has a history - not simply a personal history but an ethnic one that is carried through to his contemporary presentation.

The authentic/inauthentic split that is evident in *Virtuosity* is also noticeable in Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995), in which the 'authentic' black character, Mace (played by Angela Bassett), is female. Here the cyborg characters are marked through their use of a futuristic, black-market device, called 'Squid' technology. This consists of a headpiece (commonly hidden under a wig) which records the 'real life' experiences of the wearer. The resulting footage is not only viewed as though through the eyes of the wearer but the recipient is also treated to the feelings and emotions that the original wearer experiences. Most of the characters in the film are shown to use this technology but Mace consistently refuses to engage with it (until this becomes necessary at the end of the film) and is, therefore, not marked as a cyborg up until this point. In what appears to be an updated re-working of the seminal *Peeping Tom* (1960),³⁴ Bigelow attempts an exhaustive critique of voyeuristic, cinematic practice whilst also suggesting that the development of more immersive technologies (e.g. Virtual Reality, interactive computer games etc.) may result in an excessive extension of these practices. Carol Clover, in her study of the modern horror genre, has referred to *Peeping Tom* as a horror 'metafilm' that 'has as its task to expose the psychodynamics' of specularity and fear'.³⁵ Like *Peeping Tom*, Bigelow presents the audience with a very extreme version of diegetic voyeurism in which the act of voyeuristic viewing is linked with literal violence, primarily against women. It would therefore seem that Bigelow draws upon this 'meta-text' in an attempt to recruit its critical and political edge.

Although gender issues are played out within the film, the way in which these may intersect with race is also explored. This exploration is largely enabled by the character of Mace, who is intimately associated with the white male protagonist Lenny (played by Ralph Fiennes).

³⁴ Although this technology is also reminiscent of the 'feelies' in Aldous Huxley's novel, *Brave New World* (1932), and the 'stimmies' which feature in Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991).

³⁵ "The Eye of Horror", *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, (BFI Publishing, 1992), p.169, Clover's emphasis.

Lenny is an ex-cop and peddler/maker of recorded experiences (known as 'clips') using the Squid technology. He is a 'wheeler dealer' who is shown to use a variety of performance techniques in his attempts to sell his wares. He has a particular patter and mode of presentation which he is seen to utilize in order to con his customers and extract favours from his friends. His self presentation is largely marked as fraudulent and dissembling but this is also extended to the way in which he is seen to fool himself - particularly in his constant re-living of a past romance with the character of Faith (played by Juliette Lewis). He has self-recorded highlights from his past relationship with Faith and repeatedly plays back these scenes, effectively blocking his chances of 'moving on'. He is living in a perpetual present fed by his own past, which, in turn, becomes his present and conceivably his future; past, present and future are conflated when he sees/feels the tapes. Like Fredric Jameson's schizophrenic, postmodern subject he is 'unable to focus on [his own] present, as though [he had] become [...] incapable of dealing with time and history'.³⁶ Although Faith has long since left him he has set her up as an idealized figure, frozen in time, who has become the site of his own transcendence. He is not, therefore, a totally unsympathetic character in the sense that his present existence is understood to be the result of a 'broken heart' (suggesting a certain sincerity in his love for Faith), although it is notable that, even in this past he in some sense created Faith: he states later in the film that he 'found her in the gutter' and took her away from her life as a whore, encouraging her to fulfill her aspirations as a singer. In this way Lenny can be understood as a kind of pathetic version of a white manhood that seeks to control, that seeks to define his own Others and prefers to live vicariously either through the bodily/emotional experiences of others or trapped in his own recorded past.

Mace, however, in direct contrast to Lenny, is consistently presented as candid and earnest. She is revealed to possess a personal and political consciousness and to have a serious interest in the wellbeing of others. Mace's sense of empathy, unlike the 'dead empathy' played out by Lenny, does not appear to threaten her own sense of self or distort the boundaries of a traditional version of human subjectivity. Her authenticity is especially

³⁶ 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', *The anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster ed., (Bay Press, 1983), p.117.

signalled in a number of speeches in which she espouses the supposedly harmful effects of indulging in Squid. For example, toward the end of the film, just after she has stumbled upon Lenny's recordings of Faith, she angrily tells him:

This is your life - right here, right now. It's real time, time to get real - not playback - you understand me. She doesn't love you. Maybe she did once, I don't know, but she doesn't now. These are used emotions - it's time to trade them in. Memories were meant to fade Lenny - they're designed that way for a reason.

So there is a sense in which Lenny is not fully experiencing life while he insists on replaying recordings of his past. A distinction is therefore made here between what is real and what is not in terms of his relationship to time. In trying to persuade him to face certain realities Mace is attempting to bring him out of his fantasy world in order that he more properly engage with his material existence. As has been discussed previously, many feminist critics have noted how cyborg imagery has the potential to be used as a metaphor for transformation. However, as Jenny Wolmark has commented, in many Cyberpunk narratives:

These possibilities are never realized [...] because the social and temporal experience of cyberspace is centrally concerned with individual *transcendence* rather than *transformation*, with escape from social reality rather than engagement with it.³⁷

Although Wolmark's comments are aimed at written novels they are appropriate to *Strange Days* in the sense that the film is heavily influenced by the Cyberpunk genre.³⁸ However, the initial opposition between Lenny and Mace actually operates to foreground and deal with the idea of transcendence versus transformation. Lenny is resistant to the transformative potential of the Squid technology until he becomes inadvertently involved in the cover up concerning the murder of Jeriko One (a 'black power'-rap artist and community spokesperson). The appropriately named Iris (played by Brigitte Bako) passes a 'clip' of his murder by two white LAPD officers to Lenny. Iris, in turn, is murdered and a 'clip' of her death is also passed to Lenny. Lenny's 'transformation' appears to begin on viewing the 'Iris clip' and along with Mace's comments at this point he recognizes how he has become

³⁷ "Cyberpunk, Cyborgs and Feminist Science Fiction", *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1993), p.118, (my emphasis)

³⁸ In fact, Springer comments of the film that its 'dizzying style [...] provides a more fully articulated vision of electronically altered consciousness' than many of the other films she discusses (Springer, p.210). Although she sees this stylization as a potentially radical device I would add that this also marks an attempt to more thoroughly 'translate' some of the stylistic qualities of Cyberpunk writing to film.

complicit in a system of extreme exploitation. His reaction to the viewing of the 'Iris Clip' indicates this transformation: whereas, at the opening of the film, upon the viewing of a snuff clip, his response appeared minimal, here he reaches a state of panic and rushes to the scene of the murder in order to avert it. By the time he arrives he sees her body being wheeled out by medics and realizes he is too late to avert her death. It is as though whilst viewing he had forgotten that the event he is experiencing is in the past and imagines it as present time. When he sees Iris's body he is forced into the 'real' present in the most dramatic of ways. Of course, this clip is also of particular importance in the film because it is the one that most obviously draws upon the devices used in *Peeping Tom*. It is different from the previously featured clips because the killer has rigged the Squid apparatus so that Iris feels and sees from the killer's perspective whilst she is being murdered - in a similar fashion to the way in which the killer in *Peeping Tom* forces his victims to see their own reflection while he is killing them. The inference here is that Lenny is forced to face up to the implicit violence of his own viewing position in experiencing the pleasures of the killer whilst, simultaneously, feeling Iris's agonies. At the end of the clip Lenny is sick: his bodily response signalling a certain sincerity and authenticity of feeling. Perhaps, at this point, it can be assumed that he is reminded of his very materiality whilst, at the same, the transformation can also be understood to mark his entry into a particular hybridized state. For Lenny the cyborgian technology finally affects him in a way that appears very different from the traditional view of the voyeuristic male watching a film. This, in effect, also serves to place stress on the feedback elements of cyborgian technologies and Lenny can be said to have encountered the psychical effects possible from a cyborgian state of mind.

Although Lenny's transformation revolves around questions of gender his later viewing of the Jeriko clip implies that racial issues are also being played out in connection with this cyborgian technology. After Lenny has seen the clip he insists that Mace also see it. Having adamantly refused to use the Squid apparatus previously she asks him to tell her what was on the tape, to which he replies: 'I can't tell you - you gotta see it - it's that important'. It is as though he does not believe he has the right to tell this story (to mediate) and that she will not understand its impact unless she sees/feels it for herself. It is notable that this suggests a shift in the way in which this technology is used; in conjunction with the character of Mace it now

becomes a mode of re-authentication. The spectator sees Lenny place the 'Squid-set' on her head and it is her viewing that is shown in the film. Unlike most of the previous Squid segments this is shown without inter-cut sections of the wearer's reactions and at the end of the clip it is Mace's response that takes precedence. So Mace takes centre stage here by viewing/feeling the 'clip' and from this point on there is also an overall shift of perspective within the film itself: Mace becomes more centralized as a character along with becoming more proactive - the film becomes her story. She can be taken, at this juncture, to represent the black spectator seeing their own issues rather than viewing these as mediated through white concerns. However, issues of mediation in the recording and re-playing of the event, are simultaneously referred to given that she sees/feels this through Iris's perspective. It is also at this point that she can be seen to be cyborgized which indicates that she, like Lenny, literally feels a variety of viewing positions at the same time as her own feelings about this event occur. After the viewing she states that the clip 'is a lightening bolt from God'. Her comments here serve not only to indicate her hopes for justice but also the way in which she has, somewhat literally, been able to see and feel from a number of different perspectives - much like the God-like omniscience allowed to the reader of a traditional novel. Mace sees the tape as indisputable evidence of a racial violence that she was all too aware already existed and presumably hopes that the white authorities, along with the more general white population, may be forced into accepting the injustice of this violent act. Given the obvious reference to the 'Rodney King' video recording, her wishes may be viewed as hopelessly optimistic but can certainly be taken as a comment upon the denial inherent in white society and the black perspective of this particular recording.

Along with the reference to Rodney King the Jeriko One character is also highly reminiscent of the adversarial black activist, Malcolm X (this is signaled in his rhetoric and costuming). However, what follows, can also be seen to comment upon how civil rights politics have shifted over the years, from a more oppositional standpoint to an acknowledgment of hybridity within the post-colonial subject. Mace initially wants to release the tape and Lenny states that even though he sees this as her choice, if it were 'let out' it might cause a major riot (further reference here to the L.A riots following the general release of the Rodney King tape). Mace, therefore, compromises and agrees to hold off on releasing the clip.

Thus, *Strange Days*, in a similar fashion to *Virtuosity*, figures transformation through cyborgian hybridity here as potentially dangerous and de-stabilizing. However, the film also suggests the ways in which the hyperreal effect of the Squid apparatus can be seen as a device either used to promote a version of the status quo or to jolt society to more radical effect. What is particularly interesting about the way in which this is explored is the fact that the specificity of viewer perspective is taken into account in the film. In other words, it is not only the technology or content of the clips that is seen to activate response but also the way in which the technology is put to use, received and understood. The agency of the user/viewer, the agency of the cyborg/hybrid, is not removed but, to borrow again from Bhabha, can be seen 'as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement'.³⁹

Having argued that the black characters, in the examples given, serve to denote authenticity I am not denying that this can be read in a number of different ways. For instance, it may be taken as an indicator of a role reversal, of the kind that Stam refers to, giving the black characters the function normally associated with a white hero or heroine. It can also be read in conjunction with a politics popularly associated with earlier civil rights movements, especially in the sense of recapturing or remembering a lost ethnic history in order to promote a sense of unification, both within an individual and within a community. On a more cynical note I would say that this positioning could be related back to earlier representations in which the black body was utilized to connote an animalistic side to being human. If the black characters are portrayed in terms that can be understood as a 'natural' extension of past representations (a kind of up-dated version of the 'primitive' within this highly technologized society), then perhaps Mace's constant reference to the materiality of life becomes sutured to an assumed black essence (even if this is re-valued within the film). Further to this, it may be that the black protagonists in these two films are intended as a kind of reminder of what the white community appears to have lost. So, along with the apparent critique of technological trends, the black characters function, rather ironically, as inhabiting

³⁹ Bhabha, p. 193.

a somewhat desirable position, as representing a state that the white community may need to return to. In this way there is a positive value placed upon this sort of black authenticity but it may also be based upon basically racist assumptions. In fact, the ending of both of these films can be taken to indicate this: the 'marriage' (almost literal in both films) of black and white not only can be read as a liberal call for racial harmony but also as a co-opting of assumed racial traits in order to retain a more reactionary model of humanness. Perhaps this can be read as a call for the defusing of direct opposition but if this is meant to denote a sort of exchange then it is questionable as to who really benefits.

Springer has suggested that, in Science Fiction movies of the 1990s, cyberspace is figured as holding 'the therapeutic power to solve the problems it is responsible for creating'.⁴⁰ This seems to be the case in both of these films but this operates along with the racial inflections in many of these movies. For instance, a brief discussion of a couple of more recent mainstream films, may help to underline what I am getting at here. Through the character of 'The Oracle' (played by Gloria Foster) featured in *The Matrix* (Dirs: Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), it becomes evident that the human characters' attempt to return to 'reality' and escape the computerized illusion of the 'real' is associated with the authenticity of the Afro-American. Not only is it a black character that introduces Neo (played by Keanu Reeves) to the possibility that he is living in an illusion, but it is a 'black mama' figure who appears to act as the catalyst for Neo's eventual transformation. Her world is figured as highly domestic and nurturing and it is she who encourages them in their quest: she tells them what 'they need to hear' (according to the character Trinity) in order that the human race can regain their lost sense of unification with reality. In many ways this character can also be likened to the figure of Gynen (played by Whoopie Goldberg) in *Star Trek: Generations* (Dir: David Carson, 1994) who, again, plays a kind of black 'mother earth'-counsellor who is regularly consulted when the crew face personal and emotional problems. If cyberspace is often associated with a kind of maternal sphere (as has been previously discussed) then it is also recently figured as affiliated with a racialized Other. This is interesting because at the same time as the black character, in these films, is often allied with

⁴⁰ Springer, p.214.

a certain authenticity they are, simultaneously, affiliated with the imaginary sphere of cyberspace.

This kind of racialization is particularly noticeable in the recent film *The Cell* (Dir: Tarsem Duamdwat, 2000). Here cyberspace is manifestly the therapeutic sphere within which the female character (played by Jennifer Lopez) is seen to enter the mind of a comatose, white, male serial killer. The Lopez character investigates the repressed and unconscious memories of the killer suggesting that this man's human character is constructed as deep in the truly Freudian sense. At one point she tries to heal the killer's pathological psyche and a kind of 'battle of minds' occurs which is played out in terms of fantastical imagery. It is notable that her imagery is very flat and bright in appearance, compared to the dark and deep imagery associated with the killer. The images that represent her mind are reminiscent of non-perspective paintings (the special effects look particularly 'pasted on' and drawn) whereas his actually stress perspective and depth (the special effects here are also more integrated, less detectable), especially given the way in which the Lopez character is seen to crawl into its, literally, layered recesses. It is as though she is figured here as a character whose psyche is not constructed along the lines of the Freudian depth modelling. Whether she is then meant to represent a more postmodern subject, whether this flat imagery is intended to connote her inherent 'goodness' (outward appearance as a direct reflection of her character), or whether this imagery is intended to portray her as less than human is open to interpretation. It is also important to note, particularly given my forthcoming discussions concerning the Martial Arts/Cyborg movie, that the images used to reflect her mind are highly reminiscent of oriental (mainly Indian) art and design. This suggests that Lopez's Hispanic origins are being sutured here to a sexualized, mystical and spiritual world, often associated with the 'exotic' East, as offering a retreat from the horrors of his world. So, although this is a different kind of racialization (given that Lopez is Hispanic and given the more oriental nature of the way in which her character is, literally, drawn) it does serve to underline how race continues to be in play in the figuring of the subjects' interaction with cyborgian technologies.

BORDERLINE CASES

In both *Strange Days* and *Virtuosity* there are moments when the use of new, highly interactive technologies are associated with the 'oriental'. For instance, as previously mentioned, in *Virtuosity* it is an orientalized space that Parker finds himself within in his opening, virtual battle with Sid. Also, in *Strange Days*, there are a sequence of scenes (which notably take place in Mace's limousine) in which Lenny attempts to sell Clips to an oriental passenger - at this point it is revealed that the passenger, in fact, possesses the latest model of 'player', putting him at the cutting edge of this technology. Although these moments are brief they do serve to indicate a certain pervasiveness in the suturing of interactive/cyborgian technologies with the oriental.

Of course, as far back as *Blade Runner* (Dir: Ridley Scott, 1982) the oriental has been seen in conjunction with new technologies in Science Fiction cinema. In this seminal film the oriental characters (most of whom are background extras) are consistently seen to be the makers/producers of technologies surrounding the manufacture of the Replicants - even though it is a Western male who plays the part of the 'overlord/creator' in charge of the whole operation. However, as Dyer points out in his discussions of the characters of Tyrell and Sebastian in *Blade Runner*, 'both the representatives of white creativity in the film are pale creatures leading attenuated lives, devoid of human interaction, dead and dying'.⁴¹ So there is a sense in the film that these figures of white supremacy are literally dying out which may well suggest that a new kind of being, one that is associated with the oriental, is about to take over. At the time of *Blade Runner*'s release certain Eastern economies were growing fast and countries like Japan and Korea were well known for their manufacture of computer components and other cutting edge technologies. For a while it might have been that these Eastern nations were understood as suppliers for the West but over the course of the 1980s it became apparent that the, so called, 'Tiger Economies' were outstripping Western economies, in terms of growth, and that they were fast moving from being the

⁴¹ Dyer, p. 214.

copiers/providers of Western led technology to becoming the inventors/initiators of new technologies. This may well explain why later Cyborg films, such as *Robocop 3* (discussed in chapter one), so openly feature the oriental as the enemy, rather than as a sort of mystical underclass providing the labour and hardware for Western led technologies.

So, the startling growth rate apparent in Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore at this time could indicate a sort of 'econocultural' rationale behind the recent upsurge in the use of oriental images in Science Fiction.⁴² Apart from the way in which these Eastern countries may now be perceived by the West, or more specifically by the U.S.A (in terms of their economic power etc.), in a more direct sense a certain amount of Eastern money has recently been poured into the American film industry (e.g. Columbia Pictures take-over by Sony and the six hundred million dollar Japanese investment in Disney). Does this in any way further account for the manifestation of certain cultural references? Although this is supposition on my part, it does not seem too far-fetched to assume that along with this investment Eastern business people may have had some influence over output. Alongside Eastern financial intervention has come the exploitation of various Asian markets for the American film product. Although numerous multiplex screens were built in new geographical markets, with Japan being one of the most lucrative expansions for American film producers, the growths in these new market areas was also aided by video, and pay T.V technologies.⁴³ It may then be that oriental images have also been consciously built into films as a way of addressing those markets as well as reflecting their increasing cultural prominence due to economic growth. Whilst it is difficult, and probably not desirable, to argue for some kind of direct link between these economic and political, national positions and the images in question surely it is well to bear in mind the historical backdrop to the emergence of specifically East Asian characters and imagery that connotes East Asian

⁴² Roland Roberts uses this phrase to denote a 'clashing' between two opposing cultures based upon the economic dynamics of the particular historical context. Roland Roberts, 'Japan and the USA: The Interpenetration of National Identities and the Debate about Orientalism', *Dominant Ideologies*, Nicholas Abercrombie et al. eds., (Unwin Hyman, 1991), pp.186-187.

⁴³ Richard Maltby gives a concise account of this growth and dispersion of Hollywood films in his chapter "'Nobody knows everything". In particular see p.35 where he mentions the early 1990s growth in Eastern markets for American films. Maltby, 'Post-classical Historiographies and Consolidated Entertainment', *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, Steve Neale, Murray Smith eds., (Routledge, 1998), pp.21-44.

cultures in the Cyborg film.

There is obviously more to these images than a simple reflection of world economic trends. For instance, oriental images, or references to oriental film, are not new to American film, or the Science Fiction genre in particular,⁴⁴ but an analysis of the way in which recent depictions are inflected may go part way to revealing how certain mechanisms are in operation when it comes to the intersection of race and the cyborg. David Morley and Kevin Robins suggest that evident within cultural representations of 'high technology' there exists a degree of what they term 'Techno-Orientalism'.⁴⁵ Edward Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism*,⁴⁶ explored how Western cultural representations have played their part in the construction of the Oriental Other (whether this is configured in terms of threat or exotic retreat). By drawing upon his ideas, Morley and Robins argue that the association of, what they term, 'postmodern technologies' with images of the Orient can be understood as a continuation of an orientalist practice in the West. They later state that this also serves as a disavowal mechanism that 'defers [...] the encounter with Western self-identity and self-interest, as well as the recognition of what is common in both the Japanese and Western experiences of modernity'.⁴⁷ In this way the depiction of these technologies and their potentialities seems to be displaced in the creation of a kind of virtual Orient - an exotic space in which the 'tourist' can be freed from Western rationalism and taste the 'mystic essence' of the East.

⁴⁴ For instance, *Bad Day at Black Rock* (Dir. John Sturges, 1955) features Spencer Tracy as a one armed martial arts expert within a Western, cowboy setting and *The Magnificent Seven* (Dir: John Sturges, 1960) provides a further example due to the fact that it was basically a remake of Kurasawa's *The Seven Samurai*. Also the 'Ninja' characters that consistently appear in the Bond movies reveal that this is hardly a new phenomenon. Along with these examples, aspects of the robot-gun slayer (played by Yul Brynner) in *Westworld* (Dir: Michael Crichton, 1973) and *Futureworld* (Dir: Richard T. Heffron, 1976) can be read as oriental - a figure who refuses to be 'put down' by America and who refuses to be slave to the desires of the West. Brynner was often cast as the exotic hero. Having hailed, originally, from Vladivostock (situated in the very east of Russia - very close to East Asia) his heritage appears to have been drawn upon to make of him a kind of westernised, oriental persona. At a time when Vietnam was uppermost in the minds of America this robot can be read as a kind of East Asian threat. In addition, a more recent reference to the oriental appears in the thinly disguised Jedi characters (trained by the oriental alien, Yoda) of the *Star Wars* series of films (1977, 1980, 1983, 1999) - the 'force' very obviously referring to the ch'i energy that I will presently be discussing.

⁴⁵ Chapter 8, 'Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic', *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, (Routledge, 1995).

⁴⁶ *Orientalism*, (Penguin, 1978).

⁴⁷ Morley and Robins, p.167.

This kind of formation seems particularly apparent in films like *Blade Runner* and is perhaps even more evident in recent movie versions of computer games like *Mortal Kombat* (Dir. Paul Anderson, 1995) and *Streetfighter* (Dir. Steven De Souza, 1994). Both of these films present the audience with a markedly fictional space (*Streetfighter* achieves this in its use of comic-like characterization and plot, and *Mortal Kombat* by rapidly moving its protagonists to a magical island); a space that can be read as corresponding to the type of cyberspace in which the games may be played; a space which is most definitely signalled as oriental in nature. *Mortal Kombat* accomplishes this by heavily referencing *Enter the Dragon* (Dir. Robert Clouse, 1973) and, indeed, features an oriental-American hero who is pitted against an evil oriental overlord. *Streetfighter* sets its action in a fictional oriental country - complete with images that resemble those seen of the Vietnam war (although there is also some reference made to the recent Gulf War crisis - which is indicated in the playing of the anti-hero, Bisson, as a kind of Arab warlord). Although there are oriental characters present in these films aspects of a now popularized oriental culture are also appropriated by the Western characters - in particular their consistent use of martial arts in the action sequences of the films.⁴⁸ In fact, it seems that, increasingly, the martial arts content of a Science Fiction/Action film is not necessarily directly associated with oriental characters and has become a kind of free floating signifier of the interaction between human and computer technologies. An even more recent example of this can be found in *The Matrix*. Here the Western protagonists are all represented as adept at forms of martial art which, in conjunction with computer graphics and computer-altered images, give them supposedly super-human capabilities. The camera/computer techniques on display in this film are sutured to the oriental; as though the actors, as well as the characters they play, were orientalized along with their cyborgization, in becoming immersed in such technologies. In other words, the mystique of various forms of martial arts to a Western audience is here co-opted to underpin (or account for) the splendour of the graphics on display and, in particular, those graphics

⁴⁸ This, of course, is also reminiscent of the many low budget Martial Arts films that emerged in the 1970s and from which some of these films appear to draw their imagery - as opposed to directly referencing Hong Kong action movies or Chinese films.

which allow the human actants to perform extraordinary feats.⁴⁹ These characters are both literally and diegetically cyborgized; they operate on the borderline between fantasy and reality and between the real and technologically created world. It is almost as though they were the embodiment of Bhabha's 'in between' state; a state that, in these films, is brought about as an effect of this suturing of the oriental to cyborg technologies; a state that can be understood as connoting a hybrid identity both in terms of race and technological interaction.

Interestingly, the performance of the main protagonist in *The Matrix*, by Keanu Reeves, suggests that aspects of his own past and star persona are drawn upon to supplement the connotations of an orientalist, hybridity in the film. Born of reportedly 'hippie' parents, his mother being originally British and his father Chinese-Hawaiian, Reeves was actually born in Canada but later acquired dual Canadian and American citizenship.⁵⁰ Reeves is, therefore, known to be a kind of literal hybrid in terms of his racial heritage and this appears to underpin the connotations of a kind of orientalist hybridity in the film. In addition, the constant discussions in the press of his 'hippie' roots and early, alternative, living style also serves to identify him with a 1960s lifestyle which was known to draw upon aspects of Eastern mysticism. Of course, I mentioned racially inflected, hybrid connotations to be found within the casting and stars like Schwarzenegger and Van Damme but here Reeves' persona is utilized in a more complex fashion. Perhaps this is because he can be more readily understood in terms of an-Other within (in that much of his upbringing took place in America and in the way in which his earlier career was built upon a kind of alternative drop-out American 'teen' image). He can be read as an in-between character who is racially connected to the Orient but also to an American counter-cultural movement. *The Matrix* therefore deploys the Reeves persona to suggest the literal embodiment of an in between state of being which is brought about by his interaction with technology in alignment with a presumed racial hybridity.

⁴⁹ A recently constructed Webpage includes a review of the film (apparently penned by 'Suzanne - from Malaysia) entitled 'Tao of *The Matrix*' and gives this account of the film: 'it is the first film that successfully integrates eastern and western filmmaking technique. For the West, the actors, and the special FX [...] from the East, the martial choreography and wire work, and the philosophy embedded in the film and script.' <<http://www.stormloader.com/thematrix/>>, (12.12.99).

⁵⁰ This information was taken from a biography of Keanu Reeves. Sheila Johnston, *Keanu*, (Pan Books, 1997), pp.2-8.

TECHNO-ORIENTALISM AND THE POSTMODERN SUBJECT

The oriental has, in broader terms, come to have a resonance with ideas of postmodern subjectivity. Aspects of oriental culture, as understood on a popular level by the West, may be seen to 'fit' rather neatly with some of the central tenets of postmodern theory. As an example, it is possible to consider how the growth and appropriation of Eastern mysticism and religion by the West can be seen in association with the postmodern notion of an implosion of linear time scales - past/present/future. Western accounts of Zen Buddhism and Taoism stress the idea of 'living in the present moment' (this is backed up by meditative practices that are seen to encourage this state)⁵¹ which may be viewed not only as a kind of orthodoxy with which to organize, focus or even cope with present confusions of a temporal nature but also gives a kind of meaning to the experiencing of temporal disorder. References to Eastern orthodoxy may provide an individual with a strategy with which to embrace the present by alleviating anxieties concerned with a loss of a sense of historicity. Paradoxically, by turning to what are construed as 'ancient truths', 'ways of being' etc. there is also a sense in which a Westerner remains connected to a distant past - perhaps a past that is understood as pre-modern in certain respects - even if this past is not directly their own.

In accounts of Eastern mysticism there are many other strands that are emphasized that may be understood in a kind of conjunction with postmodernism. At a time when a Western ideal of subjectivity appears to be failing, the Buddhist doctrine of a sort of 'ego-less self' can be conveniently appropriated to mark a transition from a unified 'I' to a more fragmented idea of being. Interestingly, Edward Conze connects this doctrine with the psychoanalytic idea of a pre-oedipal state in which the child is not differentiated from the mother. He says: 'We would be perfectly happy, quite blissfully happy, as happy as, according to some

⁵¹ See Padmasiri De Silva's *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979) and Edward Conze's *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Bruno Cassirer, 2nd edition 1974). In Daisetz Teitaros Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture* (The Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938), he suggests that 'Zen is a religion which teaches not to look backward' which he later asserts is why, even given its pacifist intentions, it was taken up by the Samurai because 'it treats life and death indifferently', (p.34).

psychologists, the child in the womb, if we first could get rid of our selves'.⁵² This sense of the loss of ego, and of an inner emptiness, in Buddhist thought has recently been co-opted to provide a model of being that also allows the body to be seen as a receptacle of information - information that can be passed between bodies, whether these be human or not. Padmasiri De Silva's comments go further in suggesting that 'a religion which denies a permanent self can make provision for personality study that has often been put in an almost polemical form' and that 'the doctrine's view of human experience as a *process* falls in line with accepted dynamic psychology in the west'.⁵³ Although De Silva attempts to connect Buddhist doctrine with a very American brand of individualistic psychology (à la Rogers and Maslow⁵⁴), more recently it seems that a reading of Buddhism, focusing on its supposedly anti-intellectual stance, also serves to promote a more decentralized view of human being; one that becomes particularly relevant in the Martial Arts/Cyborg movies that I will be looking at in more detail below.

Following on from my brief discussion above, and bearing in mind Said's earlier work, I would also say that there is a further Orientalist category that needs particular consideration - that is the Orient as 'enigma' and site of mystery which engenders the notion of the 'inscrutable' Oriental. This kind of configuration rests upon the conceptualization of an 'essential' Oriental ambiguity: a 'natural' ability to be spiritual and aggressive, benign and competitive. As Sheila K. Johnson has argued:

If one recalls that Ruth Benedict called her famous study of Japan *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, then it is fair to say that in the early postwar period Americans concentrated on the chrysanthemum, seeing Japan as an artistic, somewhat feminized

⁵² Conze, p. 18.

⁵³ De Silva, pp. 82-83, (my emphasis).

⁵⁴ Although de Silva does not go into much detail regarding the work of these two theorists/therapists their ideas are largely thought to be influenced by an American 'individualist' ideology. Carl Rogers' proposition of a sense of self as central to the understanding of psychological motivations and his ideas concerning the drive toward 'self-actualization' could be read as a naturalizing of competitive ethics underpinning free market capitalism. Likewise, Abraham Maslow's model of the 'hierarchy of needs', which when fulfilled can lead an individual to attaining 'self-actualization', can also be understood in this way. It is then perhaps rather ironic that De Silva attempts to marry the doctrines of Buddhism with these versions of humanist psychology, as the latter largely appears to encourage a greater sense of ego whereas Buddhist ideas have more commonly been understood as providing ways in which the ego, or sense of self may become less of a concern. For a concise account of Rogers' and Maslow's ideas reference can be made to *Introduction to Psychology*, Rita L. Atkinson et al. eds., (HBJ Publishers, 1985 edition), pp.522-527.

nation; in the late 1970s and 1980s, however, Americans began to focus more on the sword, recalling Japan's more masculine, assertive, samurai tradition.⁵⁵

She backs up this argument with an account of American novels and nonfiction in which the 'geisha and cherry blossom' image was largely replaced by images of shoguns and ninjas when it came to depictions of Japan and the Japanese. Although she later argues that these shifts and paradoxes serve to underline how various images are inflected by an American, ideological perspective, what I am suggesting is that there has been a certain conflation of these two extremes in recent representations; a conflation that may serve to displace cyborgian imagery, hybrid consciousness, onto the now 'innately' paradoxical orient/oriental. It is true that martial arts have come to be the dominant signifier of the oriental, but I do not think that the presumption of a purely masculinist bias in these representations necessarily follows. On the contrary, I believe martial arts have come to connote a presumed paradox - an embodied expression of a 'popular' understanding of the Yin/Yang principle as central to certain Eastern philosophies. Indeed the histories of martial arts are often drawn upon when it comes to exploring the supposedly composite nature of the oriental. This can be evidenced in recent writing and handbooks that describe martial arts. For example, Max J. Skidmore, in charting the development of Chinese Kempo amongst the Shaolin monks, talks of the way in which Hapkido was influenced by spiritual aspects of Buddhism and Shintoism.⁵⁶ Much is also made of the 'softer' arts in recent publications (arts such as Aikido or Tai Chi, which are reported as non-violent methods of self-defence based upon evasion or redirection of the attackers own force), and although Skidmore categorizes martial arts into competitive-external and spiritual-internal both the competitive and spiritual components are generally thought to be important to the successful learning and undertaking of martial skills.⁵⁷ What is interpreted as the more passive side of the arts is, again, described by Brian and Esther Crowley in their description of how the Samurai sword should not only be understood as an

⁵⁵ *The Japanese Through American Eyes*, (Stanford University Press, 1988), p.ix.

⁵⁶ 'Oriental Contributions to Western Popular Culture: The Martial Arts', *Journal of Popular Culture*, V.25, N.1, (1991), 129-148.

⁵⁷ I am not suggesting that a connection between the spiritual and the physically aggressive is unique to the orient - Susan Bownell's comparative study of 'muscular Christianity' and the martial arts in China makes this point ('Sports in Britain and China 1850-1920: An Explanatory Overview', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, V.8, [1991], pp.284-290). However, the way in which this is currently configured in terms of an essentialized oriental nature, in the context of postmodern existence and high technology, brings a different meaning to this conflation.

offensive weapon but as an instrument used to channel the healing powers of ch'i (known in Japan as Ki) in order to bring relief to the injured or sick.⁵⁸

Ch'i is a term that is often associated with a mystical kind of 'life force' and is thought to be the basis upon which both aggressive and healing powers are successfully transmitted. Accounts of how the artist can harness the power of ch'i vary from the simple learning of breathing techniques to a more spiritual awareness and connection with a 'life force', or 'energy', both within and outside of the body of the artist. The Crowleys go on to describe how it is important that the Yin and Yang, inherent within a given body, be balanced in order to allow for the free flow of this 'life force'. It appears to be this ambiguous balance between the two sides of the 'life force', between the masculine and feminine sides, which underpins the idea of the paradoxical, and innately hybrid oriental. Yin (the feminine principle) appears to relate to the negative/softer side of nature and Yang to the positive/harder aspects and both are seen to have equal importance if a body/mind is to remain successful and healthy. Of course, I am not suggesting that these ideas do not carry with them a degree of sexism; simply that the way in which they are popularly understood has formed a basis upon which oriental ambiguity is currently depicted.

The 'High'/'Low' Feedback Loop

Although I have mentioned some familiar mainstream filmic representations above, I feel that the Martial Arts/Cyborg films offer the chance to more thoroughly examine the oriental/technological conjunction, for a number of reasons. The most important, for this analysis is the way in which the direct to video, Martial Arts/Cyborg films can be read alongside more mainstream examples. Whilst I am not suggesting that all direct to video, Cyborg films qualify as Martial Arts/Cyborg films, there are so many that feature martial arts along with the figuring of the cyborg (that emerged in the late 1980s/1990s), that the category I have created appears useful in locating these productions and their obvious influence on later mainstream Science Fiction films. For example, direct to video releases

⁵⁸ *Moving with the Wind: Magik and Healing in the Martial Arts*, (Llewellyn Publications, 1993), pp.189-210.

like *Cyborg* (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1989), *Cyborg 2: Glass Shadow* (Dir: Micheal Schraeder, 1993), *Knights* (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1992), *Cyborg Cop* (Dir: Sam Firstenberg, 1992), *TC 2000* (Dir: T. J. Scott, 1993), *Heatseeker* (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1994), *Techno Sapiens* (Dir: Lamar Card, 1994), *Cyber Tracker* (Dir: Richard Pepin, 1994), *Cyber Tracker II* (Dir: Richard Pepin, 1995), *Grid Runners* (Dir: Andrew Stevens, 1995), and Albert Pyun's *Nemesis* series (1993-1996), all heavily feature martial arts as somehow bound up with the figuring of the cyborg. However, I will only be looking at a chosen sample from this particular range of films.

As previously stated, I have found an intertextual approach useful in looking at the Cyborg film and here intertextual readings become particularly relevant in looking at the traffic between the direct to video market and mainstream cinema. In fact, intertextual readings seem to be encouraged here, as many of the direct to video films appear to offer up a commentary on earlier mainstream films (i.e. *Blade Runner*, *Terminator* etc.). This is made quite blatant, by a number of direct to video, Martial Arts/Cyborg films, in the similarity of their very titles with more familiar Science Fiction films and in the way in which they heavily reference plots, scenes, even dialogue, from mainstream movies of the genre.⁵⁹ Linda Ruth Williams notes how films like *Fatal Attraction* (Dir: Adrian Lyne, 1987), *Basic Instinct* (Dir: Paul Verhoeven, 1992) and *Indecent Proposal* (Dir: Adrian Lyne, 1993), can be seen as the more acceptable, mainstream versions of low budget, direct to video, erotic thrillers. She goes on to point out how the Blockbuster, erotic thriller (in comparison with the direct to video movies) actually offers less active positionings for its central female characters and acts to 'sand down the revealing rough edges of its lower budget counterpart'.⁶⁰ Carol Clover makes a similar point in an interesting comparison between two horror films: the exploitation film *I Spit on your Grave* (Dir: Meir Zarchi, 1977), and the mainstream, courtroom drama, *The Accused* (Dir: Jonathan Kaplan, 1988). Clover argues that the former film can be understood as laying bear the more glossed up, repressed/latent

⁵⁹ Of course, this can also be understood as a plagiarizing of the more popular mainstream films and as a way of encouraging/tricking a prospective video viewer into watching a particular film. However, this does belie the fact that a number of these movies engage in active and interesting intertextual comment.

⁶⁰ 'Sisters under the Skin: Video and Blockbuster Erotic Thrillers', *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, Pam Cook, Philip Dodd eds., (Scarlet press), p.108.

elements of films like *The Accused*.⁶¹ Of course, Williams' and Clover's use of the intertextual reading primarily looks at how lower budget movies may be appropriated and altered for more popular, mainstream consumption but what I am, in part, intending to display is how the lower budget, Martial Arts/Cyborg movie in fact unravels, operates to uncover, or answers to existing mainstream films. Having said this, I am not denying that there is also a sense in which they have gone on to influence later, higher budget, Science Fictions films. In other words, the flow of influence can be seen to run in both directions which can be perceived as fundamentally challenging the understanding of a 'high'/'low' artistic boundary in film.

A further reason for choosing to concentrate on some pertinent examples of these direct to video films is the obvious fact that they more often feature central oriental characters. As with the first part of this chapter, when I chose those films which featured Afro-American protagonists, I believe that movies which directly represent race, in terms of actual casting, can provide a clearer base upon which to analyze how racial markers are used to inflect certain images in other films; those in which issues of race are less directly referred to. So, whilst I am not arguing that central subaltern characters necessarily offer a more radical perspective, a reading 'between' films in which they feature and films in which race is ostensibly subsumed can provide some interesting results. Having said that, many of the direct to video, Martial Arts/Cyborg films also provide a more complex, and at times alternative, exploration of both cultural and technological interactions in human societies.

In terms of this study, one of the best examples of a Martial Arts/Cyborg film that outwardly encourages an intertextual understanding is *Grid Runners* (Dir: Andrew Stevens, Prod. and Presented: Ashok Amritraj, 1995). The title is, of course, highly reminiscent of *Blade Runner* and, in many respects, the film focuses on similar issues: *Grid Runners* concentrates on the complications of living in a hyperreal city environment and, like *Blade Runner*, sports

⁶¹ Clover returns to this subject throughout her book - however, she makes mention of how lower budget films lay bear certain 'bottom-line propositions of horror' in her introduction. Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in Modern Horror Film*, (BFI Publishing, 1992), p.20.

a number of 'replicated' humans.⁶² The Grids refer to geographically policed areas, which are, in turn, represented by computer grids located in a central Police Station. Surveillance and control are exercised and guided centrally from this main computerized institution. In this panoptic environment the boundaries between each urban Grid and between the diegetically real and virtual world are patrolled by the Runners, who, like border guards, make sure that no one crosses between urban grids without permission or between the virtual and real world without payment. The narrative revolves around the illegal crossing of these boundaries and the central protagonist, David Quarry (played by the ex-world champion Kick Boxer, Don 'The Dragon' Wilson), as a Grid Runner, is the oriental 'meat' in this particular sandwich. When two virtual, female characters are brought over into the real world it is up to Quarry to track them down and return them to their 'Cybersex' program. The 'Cybersex' characters, Leanna and Greta, have been replicated and embodied through a process called 'cyberplasm', developed to make flesh of these virtual porn-stars in order that they be sold to the highest bidder on an international market place. However, a further character, called Dante, manages to harness the 'cyberplasmic' process of his own volition and escapes his virtual world of a martial arts game called 'Lethal Combat'. Initially Quarry takes his orders directly from the policing force that employs him but upon the murder of his partner, by Dante, he divorces himself from this authority as he takes on the quest to avenge this killing.

Interestingly, it is within the virtual world of 'Lethal Combat' that we are first introduced to Quarry. The film opens with Martial Arts fighting scenes in which Quarry faces a number of opponents and it is not until he requests a move to another 'level' of the game that the viewer is alerted to the fact that this is not a real environment (indicated by the instant change of scenic backdrop to the fights in each separate level). Having succeeded through levels 5, 6 and 7 Quarry asks to be 'transported' to the final level 10 where he faces the 'demon' Ninja Dante (played by Michael Bernardo). Here Dante, who appears to have access to all the magical powers associated with Ninjitsu mythology, is able to predict Quarry's movements and fighting tactics. One of the main tropes of recent Orientalist discourse has involved the idea that the oriental Other does not 'play' by the same rules of conduct as the West (read

⁶² *Grid Runners* also bears some narrative resemblance to the later *Virtuosity* and its genealogy could also be traced back to *Rollerball* (Dir: Norman Jewison, 1975).

American). This has, for example, been used to underpin a notion of Japanese business techniques as 'unfair' and has been extended to encompass the idea that 'they' (the Japanese) are essentially and culturally very different.⁶³ During the level 10 battle Dante, in a telepathic communication with Quarry (represented by the speaking of dialogue in voice-over whilst the camera shot concentrates on Dante's unmoving mouth) states: 'I don't play your rules'. The use of this voice-over device could certainly indicate that it is Quarry who imagines what his adversary is actually thinking. However, if Dante were meant as the embodiment of an oriental threat then the racial reversal, due to Bernardo's more Western appearance as compared to Wilson's oriental features, may simply suggest a role reversal - in which the oriental character is good and the Western character evil. Nevertheless, this is complicated by the fact that Dante appears as the most proficient, amongst the virtual fighters, in martial arts combat and by the way in which there are various references to a more intimate connection between these two characters. At one point Dante communicates: 'You can't kill me, it would be like killing a part of yourself' which implies that he actually represents an aspect of Quarry's own character. If this aspect is meant to be Quarry's oriental side, a side that may have become repressed due to his involvement with American culture and underlined by his positioning as an agent of the American law machine, then it is interesting that this is embodied by a character of more Western appearance. If Quarry is meant to represent a fully 'consenting' American, it is telling that this manifestation of his own, personal Other be projected upon one of Western appearance. Further configurations arising from this play upon racial positionings are possible, but suffice to say what the film succeeds in doing, at this point, is to thoroughly confuse what is seen as self/us and what is seen as Other/them. In this sense, both these characters could be construed as racial and cultural hybrids, which is articulated through their meeting within a technologically produced environment.

The use of weaponry and fighting techniques also deserve a mention here as there are a

⁶³ For instance, Roland Robertson describes how since the 1960s, and especially during the 1980s, economic clashes between the two nations 'have ramified into a conflict over the core cultural features of the two societies'. He goes on to describe how these came to be played out in terms of assumed, essential differences between the two races. Robertson, p.186-187.

number of visual allusions to the psychical temperament of both Dante and Quarry. The idea that the fighting images are expressive of their inner state is underlined by the way in which the weapons are posited as extensions of their bodies, as opposed to separate technological aids. This may, in part, reflect an understanding of the ethos behind certain systems of martial arts training in which it is encouraged that the fighter develop an intimate connection with their chosen weapons. However, this is literalised in the film when Dante is able to *grow* both a new hand and sword after Quarry cuts away his arm, foregrounding the connection between body and weapon. Of course, the notion of weaponry being brought into close association with a bodily referent is not new to Western philosophy (or indeed cinema), in that there has been much commenting upon the phallic nature of such instruments (it is, after all, arguable as to whether phallic power is really understood as totally separable from its bodily referent, the penis). But what is notable in the Martial Arts/Cyborg movie is the way in which the weapons are dispersed throughout the body. Unlike the classic Hollywood Action movie where guns are carried at hip (genital) level, Quarry chooses to conceal his knife in his shoe at one point. The fighting techniques themselves, when compared to fight sequences featured in Classic American films, also utilize many more parts of the body in striking out at an opponent or defending from the blows of an adversary. Wilson's kick-boxing skills are utilized in the fight scenes in which Quarry is shown to use his legs, arms and hands in fighting opponents, in a gymnastic display that proposes a much more decentralized version of the fighting body than has, until recently, commonly been seen in American Action movies - where emphasis has classically been placed upon the upper body in aggressive displays. Further to this, during his initial, virtual battle with Dante, Quarry uses the split stick (commonly known as 'Screamers' due to the noise they create when wielded) against Dante's single stick (called a 'Bo'), in what appears to be a visual metaphor of his inherent duality as compared to Dante's more singular manifestation.

If connections are to be read between the use of the body and weaponry here, and if these connections are made in terms of a kind of phallic prowess, then what does this more dispersed imagery suggest? In a comparison with a film like *Tetsuo* (Dir: Shinya Tsukamoto, 1989), in which the conjunction between the sexualized body and machinery is literalised, it is evident that the phallic imagery on offer is also disseminated throughout the body. In this

Japanese film phallic connotations are explored in many seemingly separated areas of the body (hands, heads, feet etc.); these areas are both penetrating and penetrated by the metallic environment surrounding the protagonist. Therefore various areas of the body may be seen to become both aggressive and passive organs suggesting some kind of inherent duality in the functioning of these sexualized localities. It is almost as though the 'one sex' modeling, drawn upon by Clover's aforementioned exploration of the horror genre, is very literally present here.⁶⁴ The imagery of the 'metal fetishist' in *Tetsuo* suggests that he can be considered as a cyborg in the making - in his apparent melding with the mechanical contraptions around him. Given this and the implications of the body imagery it seems that his attempts to become cyborgized also display an assertion of his own sexual hybridity. Albeit in a less radical way (the sexualized duality being less manifest than in *Tetsuo*), it seems that a similar dispersal of phallic imagery across the body is present in *Grid Runners*. This may not only reflect a more de-centralized understanding of sexuality but may also suggest that phallic power is, in fact, less sutured to the penis as the central bodily referent.

My argument here becomes clearer if attention is paid to those times when a gun is produced by a character in a Martial Arts movie. In these circumstances it is common for the use of the gun to be referred to as a way of cheating. In part, this is due to an understanding that there is far less skill and training involved in its use (apart from the obvious fact that the introduction of a gun threatens closure to a given narrative within a Martial Arts scenario) but there is also the sense in which the gun is seen as detached from the power of the body - from the power of the *ch'i* forces which move through and beyond the body. The gun, which has its own mechanism, is therefore a separate mechanical device in these films; it cannot truly be understood as representing a 'natural' kind of extension of bodily power but, rather, is something that is wielded when human endeavor fails. In this way it does not command the same respect in the Martial Arts movie, as is evident in the various traditional Action genre films in the West. So, although the fighting/body imagery is more de-centralized in the Martial Arts film there is a sense in which the power of the body (which can be read as

⁶⁴ In Clover's study, she draws upon Thomas Laqueur's account of the earlier, pre-modern, 'one sex' model of male/female genitalia in which the female genitals are simply understood as an inversion of the male penis. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Harvard University Press, 1990).

phallic power) is made more apparent. In some respects then the martial artist, in this instance Quarry, can be aligned with the way in which the black character of recent Cyborg films functions to indicate a certain human authenticity (perhaps this explains why Quarry's virtual foe, Dante, is actually figured as a literally inauthentic Westerner). Having said that, Quarry is seen to use an old Colt handgun; at the end of the film he grabs his adversaries gun to use against the futuristic 'ray guns' shot from an enemy helicopter. This appears as a sort of flippant gesture toward the Western but Quarry's skill is also implicit in the way he manages to shoot down the helicopter with such a deficient weapon. The gun here is then ridiculed and perhaps, by extension, the way it operates as a sign of phallic prowess.

Having stated that Dante was represented as a more 'singular' character this is also extended to the virtual characters of Leanna and Greta. Both of these women are blatantly one dimensional and sexually stereotyped: Leanna being submissive and obliging stands for a kind of 'soft' or passive femininity as opposed to the threateningly active Greta, who is dressed in leather and sports a Dominatrix whip. They are each driven by singular motivations and perform very particular functions, manifestly for the male characters and also in terms of the game/plot of the film. Having escaped their virtual worlds Dante, Leanna and Greta are all heavily marked as fictional and therefore set up in direct contrast with Quarry. It is almost as though these virtual characters (who are all Western in appearance) represent the types of narrative agent commonly found in American Action films. This suggests that Quarry's hybrid positioning is being advanced as more realistic, more human. A racially inflected hybridity here is sutured to complex characterization in the production of a kind of authenticity (although much of Quarry's characterization is actually indicated in his body imagery, as is the case in the 1980s mainstream Cyborg film, this is far more elaborately drawn out). This is fascinating, not only as a point of comparison with the attempt at a more unified and boundaried subjectivity evidenced in many of the 1980s, mainstream Cyborg films, but also given my earlier analysis of how cyborgian hybridity is so often figured as threatening and inauthentic.

So, the supposedly racially pure, or certainly the white male Action hero, in a comparison with *Grid Runners*, might be read as particularly inauthentic. In fact, it is interesting that Craig D. Reid (in an article comparing techniques used in the Hong Kong Action movie and the American Action movie) comments on how 'American martial-art actors insist that they are actors first and martial artists second, which is probably why a star has fewer fights as he becomes more well known.' He goes on to say that '[i]n Hong Kong, the actors are actors first, and martial artists first'.⁶⁵ Of course, performance training in Hong Kong and China more usually encompasses the learning of fighting and acrobatic skills along with singing and acting whereas Western drama schools have tended to concentrate on acting skills; although some tuition may be given in fencing, dancing and singing this is usually secondary to the teaching of acting.⁶⁶ However, what is notable about his statements is the way in which the Hong Kong action hero/star is required to continuously display and develop their martial skills whereas the Action star of many American films becomes increasingly actionless (as discussed in the rather extreme case of Schwarzenegger's playing of the Terminator) with the onset of fame or popularity. Reid argues that this leads to stagnation in American fight choreography in which innovation is discouraged as the Action star persona concretizes. On the other hand, innovation is encouraged by a Hong Kong industry in which fights are often choreographed with little rehearsal, compared to the excessively rehearsed fight scenes in American films. The Hong Kong artist is able to work at speed due to the honing of actual martial skills whereas the American martial hero, being less skilled, or having stagnated in their fighting creativity, needs all the help they can get from the cinematic apparatus in order to retain their hero status. Of course, this is reminiscent of some of my previous arguments, in which the bounds of 'realism' now intersect with extra-textual knowledge of the stars actual activities/skills etc. Here, it seems, that Reid is commenting upon a rather ironic reversal in which the Hong Kong Action movies' attempts to create more entertaining (read less realistic) fight sequences is based upon actual skills whereas the American fight choreographer's attempts to produce more realistic fighting scenes leads to a decline in the actual, bodily, skills applied. Further to this it seems that these differences in production

⁶⁵ 'Fighting Without Fighting: Film Action Fight Choreography' *Film Quarterly*, V.47, N.2, (Winter, 1993-4), p.31.

⁶⁶ In recent years this has shifted as the 'fame schools' have come to prominence - these schools teaching a range of skills with strong emphasis on each - musical, dancing, singing and acting.

methods actually underpin a certain kind of stardom for the American action-actor - a stardom that necessarily corresponds with a reduction in his need to enact his skills/prowess. The formulation of American action stardom therefore seems linked to an increasing disconnection from the actions of the body. Like the 'console cowboys' of Cyberpunk the American action star can be seen to be immersed in cyborgian technologies in an effort to gain transcendence from the body; as though American Action stardom, of this time, connoted a kind of mythical/imaginary whiteness that (to borrow from Dyer again) 'is in but not of the body'.

Reid also talks of a kind of 'ridiculous' posturing in American Martial Arts films in which inappropriate 'twirling' of a sword (or like weapon) simply 'slows down the fight by creating excessive delays [...] [that] can amplify already existing skill deficiencies of the actor'.⁶⁷ In the closing fight sequence between Dante and Quarry the former performs just such an elongated twirling which, to any aficionado of the Martial Arts film, must appear laughable. Even if the viewer were not used to the codes of the Martial Arts movie this twirling, along with the consistently more dance-like maneuverings of Dante, once again strongly marks him as a fictional character in what could be construed as a further reference to the mythical nature of the phallicized Western action hero. I would further suggest that, due to various documentaries about artists like Bruce Lee and the recent reports of the tremendous physical skills brought to bear by the likes of Jackie Chan, in a current resurgence of interest in the Martial Arts movie Western audiences are now likely to regard these performers as more 'realistic' than many a Western counterpart. This extra-textual knowledge may well encourage a reading of the hybrid Quarry as more authentically skilled than his western counterparts. This version of authenticity, however, differs from that noted in *Virtuosity* and *Strange Days* largely because it is predicated upon the notion of a kind of 'natural' oriental hybridity as opposed to the enforced hybridity brought to bear on the black characters of the previous movies.

⁶⁷ Reid, p.35.

Having already mentioned the connection between the learning of Martial Arts and acting as part of the repertoire of a Chinese/Japanese performer it is relevant to consider how traditional acting techniques in these countries may also serve to underpin a more decentralized image of the oriental performer. For example, J. Riley has noted, in his recent study of performance techniques in Chinese theatre, that in approaches to various Chinese acting styles, the student 'begins with a conception of his body as dissected into separate units of articulation, which he then learns to bring together to construct a whole'. He goes on to say that 'whatever the system of dissection for the purposes of training, each unit of articulation is accorded equal importance'.⁶⁸ In these training methods it appears that even though there is a sense of unity brought upon the performing of a particular role the actors initial training encourages a dispersed sense of the body and the way in which it is used to communicate character. Even upon the polished performance of a role the actor appears to echo this training process. For instance, Riley comments that in Nuo theatre a ritualistic dissecting and reconstitution is carried out by the artist (just prior to performance):

The performing body is prepared (emptied), dissected and substituted, part for part, at the moment of reconstruction into a new whole. Each part operates and articulates on different levels of meaning - the parts may contradict each other, or repeat the meaning articulated by the other parts. But the corporeal centre of the new body unites all the separate parts.⁶⁹

At one point, Riley describes how performers are positioned 'as a kind of Grezanger between two worlds - whether between the states of life and death, health and infection, earth and heaven, real and not real (this world and the world of theatre), this and other'.⁷⁰ His comments are very telling as it seems that, certainly according to his interpretation, there exists a literal attempt to articulate, through a system of training that initially involves a decentralized understanding of the body, an 'in between' positioning as part of the performance codes within Chinese theatre.

As applied to many of the Martial Arts/Cyborg movies an 'in between' positioning, articulated by the genre's protagonists, can be read as an attempt to avoid the various stereotypes associated with the portrayal of the oriental in American films and can be seen as

⁶⁸ *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.87-88.

⁶⁹ Riley, p.125.

a liberating device within this context. Again, this is reminiscent of the way in which Bhabha understands human agency to operate and the way in which he sees his hybrid, post-colonial subjectivity as offering a greater degree of flexibility. However, it is notable that this 'liberation' is not extended to the female characters in *Grid Runners* and rarely extended to the females that feature alongside male heroes in other movies of this American sub-genre whether they be played by women of Western or Asian appearance. This is not, however, always the case with the Hong Kong Martial Arts movie in which the female fighters are often figured as equal in skill to their male counterparts, within the context of a single film. For example, Verina Glaessner compares the way in which Angelo Mao is figured in Hong Kong movies and how she appears in the American film *Enter the Dragon* (Dir: Robert Clouse, 1973). In the American film she is shown, in flashback, to be undergoing attack from a number of male adversaries. She successfully fights off these men until, at the end of the sequence (trapped in a warehouse) she commits suicide. Glaessner states that this 'is a curious scene in which the suicide is at odds with the whole conception of the fight hero or heroine in Chinese films - everyone knows she would have gone down fighting.'⁷¹ Dana Polen, in an exploration of the American 'Kung Fu' genre, explores the tension between narrative and spectacle. He warns that:

The power of spectacle is inextricably linked to the functions of sexual difference in late capitalist society; that is, the offer of a freedom from logics, from rational controls, is often held out to a male at the price of the reification of woman.⁷²

This would ultimately seem to be in operation in *Grid Runners* even if this reification is also utilized, to some extent, to further connote a kind of hybridity present within its main protagonist. For instance, apart from the brief appearances of subsidiary female characters, the females that receive the most attention in the narrative are literally 'virtual'. Having briefly materialized, Greta faces destruction at the hands of Quarry and Dante neatly returns Leanna to her virtual 'Cybersex' program. Although, at one point, Quarry does appear to encourage Leanna to develop independent thought and desire, upon completion of the action plot he is seen to re-visit her within her virtual world (is this in order to keep their relationship alive within the confines of his own imagination?). Alternatively, his return to

⁷⁰ Riley, pp.83-84.

⁷¹ Glaessner, *Kung Fu: Cinema of Vengeance*, (Lorimer Publishing, 1974), pp. 80-81.

⁷² 'Brief Encounters: Mass Culture and the Evacuation of Senses', *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, Tania Modleski ed., (Indiana University Press, 1986), p.185.

the virtual Leanna could be read as his having fully accepted the 'feminine' within - especially if this is seen in conjunction with scenes earlier in the film, in which he refuses to take part in the Cybersex programs and, instead, frequents the Lethal Combat game. I realize that it would be easy to read this trajectory in terms of an Oedipal scenario (in which Quarry, having proved his adult manhood, has now gained sexual access to the female) but given the way in which the film implies that the virtual characters may represent various aspects of Quarry's own psyche it is also possible to see his interactions with them as an externalizing of his internal conflicts. Thus, having fought against his dark (masculine) side he now, literally, embraces his more feminine side.

The apparent sexism in *Grid Runners*, in a comparative reading with *Blade Runner*, could be understood as a more blatant account of the way in which the female characters operate in the latter film. *Blade Runner* also offers us a number of literally constructed female stereotypes, the most threatening of which are conveniently killed off leaving Rachel (the passive princess of the piece) occupying the position of 'love object' for Deckard. Perhaps in the depiction of a literal, material death for Leanna there is a sense in which this feminine 'ideal' is more thoroughly located within the imagination of the male? The way in which Quarry later visits Leanna, at the end of a day's work (if she functions as a projection of his own, internalized Yin), also makes manifest how what could be seen as the feminine side to his own nature is only allowed expression outside the realms of an inherently masculinist world. A further comparison between the way in which Rachel/Deckard and Leanna/Quarry interact is rather telling if the scenes in which 'desire is spoken' are taken in account. Deckard finds it necessary to articulate this desire along with a somewhat aggressive display of his own dominance whereas Quarry actually questions Leanna as to whether she really wants to have sex with him. Leanna replies: 'I don't know what I want. I'm not allowed to think like that' whereas Rachel is simply forced to acquiesce to Deckard's idea of what stands for human femininity. Although both scenes are dubious it seems that there is a sort of reversal in trajectory here if Leanna is seen as Rachel's counterpart: Rachel's questioning is brought to an end upon the advent of this scene whereas Leanna's questioning is ostensibly encouraged.

So, *Grid Runners* provides a particularly clear example of the kind of feedback loop, between mainstream and direct to video, that I referred to earlier. *Grid Runners* also operates here as an interesting comparative example with other films where various forms of racial difference are played out: notably those covered in the first section that dealt with the representation of 'blackness'. However, in order to explore the intersection between mainstream and direct to video Cyborg films more thoroughly I have chosen to concentrate next on a film by one of the foremost director/writers of the Martial Arts/Cyborg sub-genre. Having already mentioned a few of his films, *Knights* and the *Nemesis* series (in chapter two), the following section will offer a further account of this little known director. Following this I will briefly cover a number of other films from this sub-genre and offer further intertextual analysis in order to unveil how they appear to complicate and bring to the fore issues of race that may or may not have been focussed upon in earlier, mainstream Cyborg films.

Albert Pyun - Hack or Heretic?

Over the last two decades the director and writer Albert Pyun has become an extremely prolific producer of direct to video films.⁷³ Since 1982 (with the release of *The Sword and the Sorcerer*) at least twenty of his films have been released directly to video. He is often cited, in 'B-movie', cult, and 'Trash' review pages on the Internet and in various popular Fanzines, as the filmmaker that reviewers love to hate (or hate to love). For instance, in an account of his recent *Mean Guns* (1997), which can be found on the Internet in *The Bad Movie Report* page, the writer states: 'Let us now add yet another warning sign to this Litany of the Lost - the words which strike fear into the heart of low-budget aficionados everywhere; *An Albert Pyun Movie*'. He goes on to say that, in spite of the fact that he considers Pyun to be a terrible director, and even though his review for *Mean Guns* is largely scathing, he actually liked the film. He says: 'Do I still feel this is one of the stupidest (sic) movies ever

⁷³Having been told, by his manager and production office secretary, that Albert Pyun would be willing to grant me an interview I was repeatedly unable to make contact with him. I was initially interested in speaking with him because I wanted to discern whether he considered that any of the films he has made in some way reflected his experience of living in an America where he could be considered an Other within (his name is Korean). Due to his rather dubious notoriety as the author of these movies I felt that they may well, whether directly or more indirectly, articulate his experiences and perhaps represent a deliberate distortion of the perspectives to be found in much American film.

made? *Hell, yes! Mean Guns* does not have a brain in its head, but it seems to realize this, and in fact embraces this condition with glee'.⁷⁴ So, Pyun, whether intentionally or not, has become the Ed Wood of the 1990s. However, leaving value judgements aside, his films are interesting in a number of respects, in particular in the way in which they appear to engage in a kind of dialogue with mainstream Science Fiction movies, and for the purposes of this discussion I have chosen to concentrate analysis on *Heatseeker* (1994).

As previously discussed films like *Mortal Kombat* and *Streetfighter* make use of extreme racial stereotypes in their depiction of, albeit fictional, worlds full of action, competition and adventure. In comparison, *Heatseeker* on some levels appears to work against racial stereotyping in its depiction of its fighting heroes. This is a film *about* game-play in which the competitive undercurrents between nations and conglomerates are interrogated. The martial arts competition (which takes up most of the second half of the film and strongly resembles the now familiar computer gaming format), around which the plot of *Heatseekers* revolves, is ostensibly organized to prove which company/conglomerate's technology is superior. During the games the nominated cyborg fighters (fitted with their company's techno-implants) are meant to prove their superiority by killing their opponents. A direct link is made between this fighting competition and the companies' profits in the continual voice-over commentary, which announces immediate rises and falls in share values according to how the gladiators perform.

Although each company appears to represent a nation as the film progresses it also becomes apparent that stereotypical nationalistic symbols have become detached from their human counterparts in a way that suggests that human geographical origins no longer anchor this symbolism. Apart from the idea that this may be justified in terms of articulating how conglomerates do not necessarily adhere to national boundaries this also works to confuse, and sometimes detach, familiar iconography from the traits and characteristics that it has come to represent. In other words, there appears to be a deliberate confusing of imagery and stereotyping that connote a geo-political influence, suggesting new, imagined, economic

⁷⁴ <<http://www.stomptokyo.com?badmoviereport/meanguns.html>>, (5.3.99), his emphases.

boundaries are replacing geographical, national boundaries. In this instance, a destabilizing of imagery associated with nationalities is played out by the creation of a somewhat chaotic distance between actor and actant. For instance, the conglomerate Sianon, as its name suggests, seems to represent an oriental economic force but its head of marketing (played by Norbert Weisser) has a vaguely Germanic accent and their 'gladiator', Xao (played by Gary Daniels), is very 'Aryan' in appearance (he has bright blond hair and an extremely sculpted physique) and a vaguely Australasian accent. Traditional fascistic imagery is thereby dislocated from its nationalistic associations and overlaid onto the new oriental 'threat'. On the other hand, our all-American hero, Chance O'Brian (played by Keith Cooke - whose character name seems to refer back to China O'Brien - the eponymous female hero of the now famous, American-made, Martial Arts movie *China O'Brien* [Dir: Robert Clouse, 1988]) not only has an Irish name but his appearance is particularly ambivalent - certainly in terms of detecting his national origins - as his features do carry some of the signifiers of an oriental origin. Of course, this could simply be taken to be rather clumsy casting or perhaps a deliberate casting against type.⁷⁵ However, this is doubtful if the casting of our 'other' American hero, in the film, is taken into consideration. Bradford (played by Thorn Matthews), who is ostensibly fighting for an American owned company (built up by his father), is very much the 'type' which has come to be associated with the depiction of a particular brand of American masculinity: he is clean cut, square jawed, built like a boxer and consistently dressed in tailored suits. Bradford befriends Chance but it is later revealed that he is being blackmailed by Sianon to spy on Chance. So, once again, the honest purity of the familiar all-American white hero is ridiculed and a character who displays the markers of a certain racial hybridity replaces him.

An earlier indication that Chance is the only 'authentic' hero of the piece can be taken from the fact that he is also the only fully human contestant - all the other contestants, including Bradford, are associated with particular companies (Chance is not affiliated to a company)

⁷⁵ This is a phrase commonly used to refer to the casting of an actor who either does not 'fit' with the character physically/visually or who is not generally known for the playing of a particular type of role. This can also be extended to the playing of ethnic characters by white actors (e.g. Lawrence Olivier's playing of Othello) although, as has oft been noted it is rare for this to be reversed - the playing of a white character by an ethnic actor.

and have therefore taken advantage of the cyber-implants to improve their strength, skill and performance in the ring. It is almost as though each contestant was attempting to implant what Chance seems to have acquired naturally. In addition to this a sexual or gendered form of hybridity is also implied as essential to the true hero of the film. For instance, Xao's (Chance's main opponent) main failing is later revealed to be the lack of 'the love of a good woman'. Chance, having initially refused to enter the competition is finally forced into fighting because Sianon have kidnapped his fiancée (Jo - played by Tina Cote, who also featured as the androgynous 'love interest' of Alex in the previously discussed *Nemesis 2*). It seems they have a double purpose in appropriating Jo as they also coerce her into feigning affection for Xao in order to make him a better fighter. This could be seen as Sianon, rather literally, attempting to co-opt Chance's 'feminine side' in order to force him into a purely masculinist arena. Alternatively, perhaps, a capacity on the part of the hero for romantic, heterosexual love is held out as signaling a kind of superior masculine humanity. Although this is hardly a new configuration what may be articulated here, through the use of this familiar trope, is the sense in which a blurring of the masculine/feminine divide is necessary to the success of humanity. This is especially indicated since the attachment between this couple is somewhat unusual - Jo and Chance's relationship is firmly established at the opening of the film and they appear to be far more equal partners in their interactions than is commonly depicted within the American action genre (although recent films, like *The Matrix*, do appear to be moving in this direction). Jo, for instance, is Chance's trainer and, as such, advises him on his moves and fighting techniques. In this sense it could be that Jo is meant to stand for 'mind' in a kind mutual coupling in which Chance can be read as 'body'. However, this is reversed in a scene toward the end of the film when Chance attempts to get to Jo, who is being kept locked up in a Sianon corporate building. At this point, Chance fights his way into the building under the watchful eye of Tung who is shown to be following his progress through the security cameras. Tung's gaze then turns to the near naked body of Jo, also shown on a security monitor, and thus follows a sequence of intercut shots in which Jo appears to be physically punished with each blow that Chance dishes out to the company's security team. This scene also seems to indicate that Tung understands this couple to be one and the same person and perhaps believes they can only be controlled upon separation. In this way the film can be read as commenting upon gendered divides between the sexes as a

mode of control. This sequence stands out from the rest of the film, especially given the 'norms' of the codes of the Action film and appears rather incongruous. However, this is not unlike a number of other, rather bizarre sequences to be found in many of Pyun's films - in which the, albeit chaotic, narrative seems to come to a sudden halt whilst the psychosexual dynamics of the piece are played out.

At the end of the film Chance is seen to have his final showdown with Xao but, in this instance, all the main players take the stage. As Chance breaks through his opponent's defences his blows reveal the metallic implants under Xao's skin. Chance is obviously winning against Xao and, at this point, Tung turns to the use of his gun. Tung's companions also take out guns but are disarmed and beaten by both Jo and Chance and at the end of the fight the viewer is left with the image of this couple in each others arms. During the fray both Jo and Chance have gained possession of the guns which, upon their embrace, they rather deliberately drop in unison. This is a strong image which can be read as suggesting that even though Chance and Jo are forced, throughout most of the film, into taking up the traditional roles of hero/male and victim/female, when brought together they are allowed a more equal status; the gun here operates to connote that both Jo and Chance can take possession of the phallus and that both can detach themselves from this particular symbol of authority over the Other. However, a further way of reading this scene could be in terms of how it might comment upon recent mainstream Science Fiction/Action films. With the advent of the 'female hero' in mainstream cinema, both sexes/genders are now seen to be played out around symbols commonly associated with phallic prowess - at the forefront of which, most usually, is the gun. The rather deliberate dropping of the gun by Jo and Chance might then articulate an understanding that it is the idea of a particularly phallic authority over an Other, whichever sex displays this authority (takes up the gun), that works to separate them, and by extension, lies at the heart of other separations based upon race, class etc. If Jo and Chance are meant to be read as hybrids who have attained an individual balanced state of the Yin/Yang then there is no need for them to assert either side of this dichotomy in their interactions with one another. The balance within and between them can therefore be read as played out against the competitive warring that surrounds them.

Prototype and TC 2000

My suggested reading of the final scene in *Heatseekers* may seem overworked but it is not the first time that this kind of configuration can be seen in the Martial Arts/Cyborg movie. For instance, in a film called *Prototype* (Dir: Phillip Roth, 1992) there is a similar idea at play. The separation of the sexes is made particularly manifest in this film as our couple, Chandra and Hawk are actually divided through their taking up of extreme positions associated with masculinity and femininity: Chandra develops a greater degree of connectivity via her psychical interfacing with a computer, whereas Hawk (ironically in his efforts to become worthy of Chandra's affections) allows himself to go through a process that leaves him physically armored. In his metamorphosis into a Prototype-cyborg, Hawk discovers that this brings with it a desire to kill the Omega-cyborgs with which Chandra is associated. In one particular scene, Hawk comes face to face with Chandra's father Zorn, who is also an Omega-cyborg. Hawk's directive is to kill him but, in an effort to survive, Zorn explains: 'We're really brothers my friend. Look into your mind and see the other - you know who he is - the other, you remember him don't you, he is with you'. Hawk ignores these words and kills Zorn only to discover that this brings about his own death. Also, at the end of this film, there is a short 'coda' scene in which a male character called Sebastian is seen entering the Prototype laboratory. He looks over the 're-birthing tank' (the same tank used to transform Hawk) and sees a young, female doctor (featured earlier in the film) inside. As the boy turns away the doctor suddenly opens her eyes. Presumably this final scene is meant to propose that the battle is not over, only this time the de-humanized killer is female. It seems too banal to assume that this is meant as a warning against a rising female power, especially given the complexity of the rest of the film, but rather that what is being suggested is an alternative story, in which the characters change places and the sexed roles are reversed, signalling the way in which behavioral traits are not essentially attached to one sex or the other.

Along with these scenes, in which there is a foregrounded playing out of gendered separations, marked by the divergent uses the couple chooses to make of the cyborgian technologies at their disposal, are scenes in which an oriental band of 'protectors' attempt to halt the devastation caused by the war between Prototype and Omega. The Protectors are introduced as genetically altered humans able to interfere with the Prototype's tracking devices by joining together, in meditation, and sending out a kind of chanted hum. They are figured as very capable martial artists and are also portrayed as sexually ambivalent figures - at least in the eyes of the surrounding humans. This is emphasized when they ignore the invitations of the local prostitutes who then refer to them as 'fags'. They communicate through some form of telepathy and are shown to have an unusual empathy and caring for each other and those they seek to protect. Although male actors/martial artists represent the Protectors there is a sense here in which they are positioned both literally and figuratively 'in between' the sexes/genders. Their desires are not articulated in an obviously gendered sense - they appear very calm in all their undertakings, which suggests that they are driven by something outside of the libidinous urges attributed to the other humans. These are not a dehumanized, robotic collective, like the 'Borg' of the *Star Trek* films, but are shown to be especially 'humane' in their treatment of each other. This is further underlined by their performances - their movements are especially relaxed and fluid in a comparison with the more robotic style of the Prototype and the 'Borg'. It seems that these protectors offer a hope for the future in which their collectivity/connectivity proposes a peaceful solution (also a less defensive form of masculinity) without the loss of those traits most heavily associated with being human. So, ultimately, through the figuring of the orientalized band of Protectors, the film does not seem to be suggesting a return to some kind of natural state (like many of the films previously discussed), by doing away with technologies that appear to exaggerate gendered divides. Rather, by drawing upon a kind of 'oriental ambiguity' and connectivity, it suggests that certain technologies (specifically virtual reality and internet technologies in the film) can decrease divides. Although this is largely played out through recourse to sex and gender dichotomies the racial implications are also clear. For instance, it is possible to see a kind of 'techno-orientalism' at work in the association of the Protectors with the computer technologies in the film. But what seems to be most foregrounded is the way in which the gendered ambiguity, associated with the oriental, is co-opted to suggest that racial divides

can also be overcome - as though racial hybridity, in an alliance with a kind of gendered hybridity (Yin/Yang), were being indicated through the oriental. For instance, in one particular scene, one of the Protectors is seen to die - notably he is the only one of Asian appearance. His associates surround him and mourn his death and it is at this point that it becomes particularly noticeable that they are not Asian. So this band of cultural, perhaps racial, hybrids are not obviously seen to be of Asian origin. Consequently we have a very complex playing out of various forms of cyborgization in this film. It is as though *Prototype* takes up the cyborg figures of the mainstream film and plays them off against one another whilst simultaneously offering up a literal and conceptual 'in between' positioning.

Finally, I want to look at a Martial Arts/Cyborg movie that brings together both the black and the oriental martial arts hero, as this seems a particularly appropriate way in which to bring this chapter to a conclusion. *TC 2000* (Dir: T.J. Scott, 1993) features Bolo Yeung (playing the character of 'Sumai' - Yeung first came to fame in his role in *Enter the Dragon* and is also commonly known as the 'Beast from the East') and Billy Blanks (who plays Jason Storm) as two characters who have been marginalized by a dominating, post-apocalyptic, techno-society. Initially, Jason, aided by techno-implants and a chip implanted in his brain, is seen as a policing figure, called a Tracker. His job is to control movements between the borders of the underworld and 'topside' - in particular to guard this underworld from the invading Breakers who live at street level. Following the murder of his white, female partner, Zoe, a series of events makes him begin to doubt the motives of this governing body (and, indeed, his own role as a literal governing body) and he decides to leave the underworld for the Topside. Having made this decision he is stripped of his Tracker privileges, which involves the removal of all the cyber-implants in an operation referred to as 'de-programming'. Notably what is removed during this process is a 'homing system', 'direction finder' and 'access chips' - which could be assumed to function as rather literal metaphors for the thought processes/mechanisms that have previously marked him as affiliated with this largely white, underworld nation. Upon entering Topside he stumbles upon a street-fight in which he witnesses Sumai annihilate his adversary by using his 'chi' powers. One of the spectators of the fight shouts 'use the chi' and Sumai is seen to deliver a blow through the body of a bystander thereby toppling his opponent whilst leaving the bystander unhurt. Later

in the film it is made clear, in the dialogue, that 'chi energy transfers power through objects' and after this Sumai, in the final showdown, is seen to knock out an opponent by sending a blow through a thick, iron doorway. These images suggest that, due to Sumai's oriental powers, he is able to traverse both literal and figurative divides.

What is particularly interesting about this film is the way in which a kind of guerrilla warfare, against the ruling Underworld elite, is so strongly associated with the oriental. At one level this could certainly be taken to be a reference to the Vietnam War and the guerrilla tactics used by the Vietnamese - marking Topside as a largely oriental space. During the 1970s a number of often low budget American Martial Arts films were produced - some of these featured Asian and Western characters and there was a further sub-genre that featured Afro-Americans as martial artists.⁷⁶ During this time it seems that black performers were figured as taking up a similar position to the oriental or were seen to appropriate oriental forms of martial arts in an enacting of their struggles with white society. So *TC 2000* seems to heavily reference these earlier films and also offers a more up-dated playing out of the racial dynamics that these earlier films appear to have introduced.

Throughout *TC 2000* Sumai is positioned as Jason's teacher and advisor - he not only tutors him further on the martial arts but is older and has a deeper knowledge of the Underworld's history and the 'happenings' prior to the apocalypse that divided this world. In terms of actual fighting Sumai's more considered approach is consistently set off against Jason's more impulsive actions - whilst Jason seems to spontaneously leap into action against opposing forces Sumai appears to use his understanding of his foes to strategic advantage. So Sumai's ancient oriental wisdom is co-opted here by a black character as a way of dealing with his own tenuous position in this post-apocalyptic (read postmodern?) world. When the two join forces there is an especially interesting dialogic exchange between them. After Sumai informs Jason that an attack during the day would be best (because this particularly adversary 'thinks no one is stupid enough to go by day'), Jason replies: 'No one ever accused me of

⁷⁶ Films like *Black Belt Jones* (Dir: Robert Clouse, 1973), *That Man Bolt* (Dir: Henry Levin, 1973), *Good Guys Wear Black* (Dir: Ted Post, 1979) etc.

being bright'. It seems Jason is acknowledging Sumai's greater strategic skills but at the same time appears to put himself down in rather strong terms. Of course this could be taken as an indicator of Jason's bravery but it is also a comment on how he has come to understand himself as reflected in the attitudes of his Underworld leaders. Could it also be that this rather strange dialogue acts as a kind of commenting on how the black hero/anti-hero has been previously portrayed in Action cinema? In other words, the implication is that having commonly functioned as a very polarized adversarial force against the white man, the black action man has not been represented as a very complex character. The stereotyped black hero has commonly been portrayed as physically powerful but rarely intellectually insightful. Therefore, apart from Sumai's literally 'in between' positioning in the film - in between black and white - the oriental is also being sutured here to an heroic positioning in which both the mind and body are brought together and may well be utilized to suggest a more appropriate positioning for the modern black hero to adopt. Once again a kind of cultural hybridity is suggested, through the figuring of the oriental, to be a more powerful and circumspect form of 'negotiation' with the world of the white man. This is also underlined by the fact that the band of warriors that surround both Sumai and Jason are literally placed in between two other warring factions - those of the mafia-like gang (led by a character called Niki Picasso) and the soldiers of the Underworld. Unlike most Action films we have a three-way split here in which Sumai and Jason's street gang are forced into fighting both factions, eventually winning the day.

As with many of these direct to video releases *TC 2000* is also riddled with very obvious references to earlier, popular Science Fiction films. For instance, the title is reminiscent of the 'T 1000' in the second *Terminator* film and the headquarters of the mafia-like gang somewhat resembles the Tyrell corporation's central offices. There is also a borrowing from *Total Recall* when it comes to the idea, at the end of the film, that a vast machine can rejuvenate the earth's atmosphere. However, even though the film appears to be a mish mash of borrowed images and tropes it is notable how it seems to focus its attention around the oriental band of renegades. It is almost as though the filmmakers had taken these familiar images but re-focussed the narrative to bring out issues that remain more hidden in various other Science Fiction movies. The *Blade Runner* elements (which are a particularly common

reference in this sub-genre) may serve to remind the audience of the futuristic vision at play in this seminal film but what is magnified and further explored in *TC 2000* is the oriental, street level existence. So, although Jason can be seen as a kind of stand-in for Deckard, the story is effectively re-focalized through the oriental characters. Rather than being simply a re-telling of the *Blade Runner* story for a black audience (signaled by the casting of Billy Blanks) - a form of blaxploitation Science Fiction - it should rather be understood as exploring in more detail a kind of alternative telling of that story taken from the perspective of a grouping that, at this time, remained relatively marginalized in the mainstream film.

The seemingly ramshackle narratives of many of the Martial Arts/Cyborg films can be understood as an attempt at a more detailed account of how race and technology can be seen to interact. They can also, through the figure of the cyborg, be understood to be playing out a particularly post-colonial form of hybridity. In some respects these films appear to reverse some of Williams' and Clover's arguments about the relationship between lower budget films and mainstream counterparts - in particular the way in which the lower budget movie pares away and somehow simplifies what may be at stake in the mainstream versions. Many of the Martial Arts/Cyborg films, although foregrounding more latent elements of mainstream films, are actually relatively complex. In this sense, they do not necessarily offer a simpler accounting of what is at stake but seek to play out the paradoxes and complexities associated with post-colonial hybridity. For instance, *Heatseeker* does not operate to pare away the complexities of a mainstream film (complexities that may seek to hide a more simplistic undertone) but quite the reverse - it reveals the complexities that may be glossed over in a film like *Streetfighter*. This kind of 'complexification' is also evident in the sheer number of characters that get an 'airing' in the Martial Arts/Cyborg movie. Whereas, in many mainstream films the spectator is usually offered a couple of central and opposing characters, in the Martial Arts/Cyborg movie it is more common to have a multitude of fairly central characters which suggests a plurality of viewing positions is on offer.

In moving on to my next chapter I would like to point out that although issues of racial differences are not to be the main focus here many of the ideas I have introduced remain

relevant. I am particularly reminded of Dyer's discussion in explaining how he went about choosing his textual examples in his study of racial 'whiteness'. He asks the question as to whether in choosing to analyze texts that define 'whiteness', that make 'whiteness' obvious in a comparison with the foregrounded figuration of non-white people, 'am I not reproducing the relegation of non-white people to the function of enabling me to understand myself?' ⁷⁷ Certainly, as has become apparent, some of the films discussed in this chapter operate in this way - in fact, as I have previously suggested, this 'operation' is actually made clear in some instances. My own focus has, of course, been different to Dyer's but in coming to look at two recent films, directed by David Cronenberg, in which racial difference is not manifestly figured (in the sense that practically all the characters are white) is not meant to suggest that race does not come into play at all. In fact, there is such a marked absence of non-white characters that I would say these films were actually intended to place distinct emphasis upon an unequivocally white interaction with technology. Further, I would say that these films not only intend to place stress upon racial whiteness but, specifically, racial and gendered whiteness - the white male being the main focus of attention here.

So, unlike the examples used in this chapter, in representative terms these Cronenberg films are specifically about white masculinity and how it can be seen to interact with postmodern technologies. With the exception of the 'oriental' waiter in *eXistenZ* (who is promptly killed off by the white male lead) both casts appear white and Western. Certainly there is reference to forms of white, ethnic specificity - revealed in the racial/cultural connotations through the use of unconvincing accents within the game in *eXistenZ* - but this is not only undercut within the performance of the accents but in the later revealing of their having been performed by the predominantly male, white, and American group of game-players. As far as issues of gender are concerned I would also argue that both films are primarily presenting the audience with a masculinist vision. Whilst the sexuality of the actants in *Crash* goes beyond the strictly heterosexual 'norm' it is the male characters, in the film, that initiate the various encounters. Given that *Crash* is based upon J.G. Ballard's book this is hardly surprising. As Alan McKee has commented of Ballard's writing:

⁷⁷ Dyer, p.13.

Though it must be mentioned that Ballard is very keen in some way to desexualise the sex acts he presents, making the idea of sexual pleasure somehow a construct of the society which has collapsed, while the sexual urge continues in a more animalistic way [...] the sexuality which comes through the cracks in society is always shown to be masculine.⁷⁸

He goes on to say that Ballard's *Crash* 'remained within the masculine sexuality which has determined so much of the dominant tradition of science fiction writing'.⁷⁹ Following on from this, even though the ways in which sexuality are played out within the film may not be seen to comply with strict models associated with a dominant, heterosexual masculinity it still revolves around the male subject or an assumption of maleness. As Linda Ruth Williams states, in her reading of the film as part of Cronenberg's oeuvre, 'female sexuality is not central to the erotic mechanics of *Crash*.'⁸⁰ This seems to be further enhanced in the film given Cronenberg's amendments to the narrative (with the replacing of the 'Elizabeth Taylor' section with the James Dean scene). This replacement may well signal a shift toward a more homosexual focalization - however, this still prioritizes the male subject. So Cronenberg's figurations may be alternative, in a comparison with the hyper-masculine, highly muscled, macho cyborg of a film like *Terminator*, but they are undoubtedly masculine (even if they are read as outright examples of a masculinity 'in crisis'). Of course, as will become evident in my following discussions of both *eXistenZ* and *Crash*, this focus upon the male subject, and the way in which this subject may be affected by cyborgian technologies, serves to pinpoint what has so often been at stake in the Cyborg film - the threat that these technologies represent in terms of the continuation, or not, of the traditional, humanist, male/masculine subject.

⁷⁸ 'Intentional Phalluses: The Male "Sex" in J.G.Ballard', *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction*, N.57, (Spring, 1993), pp.60-61.

⁷⁹ McKee, p.66.

⁸⁰ 'The Inside-out of Masculinity: David Cronenberg's Visceral Pleasures', *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture*, Michelle Aaron ed., (Edinburgh University Books, 1999), p.43.

CHAPTER 4: DAVID CRONENBERG AND PERFORMING CYBORGS

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised how attention paid to performance can be particularly illuminating when it comes to looking at the issues being played out in many Science Fiction/Cyborg films. Although this has not been my sole focus, in that I have made particular reference to gender theory and post-colonial theory (amongst other areas), this chapter gives me the opportunity to more thoroughly explore performance as associated with the figuration of the cyborg and to offer some alternative ways of viewing the performances on offer. To do this I am concentrating my discussions around two recent films directed by David Cronenberg. Cronenberg's name has surely become synonymous with the exploration, in one way or another, of human bodily and mental boundaries. His early career, as the director of 'Schlock Horrors', like *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1976), seems to underpin his apparent interest in displaying the transgression, or blurring, of the boundaries that have previously been established in a defining of human subjectivity. So the relative freedoms of the Horror genre have allowed Cronenberg to graphically develop his apparent interest in questioning the boundaries of the human subject and have allowed him to work toward the portrayal of a re-formed human subjectivity. In more recent years, with films like *Scanners* (1980) and *Videodrome* (1982), he has moved securely into the realm of Science Fiction (whilst, notably, retaining many of the elements so prevalent in his earlier Horrors). In this way, he has explored shifting subjectivities as seen in conjunction with scientific technological advances. His subject matter and, to an extent, the imagery associated with this modern day auteur, intersects with the concerns brought about by the advent of the cyborg. In fact, Holly Hunter (who plays Dr. Helen Remington in Cronenberg's *Crash* [1996]), in a recent interview, compares *The Terminator* to *Crash*. In describing how she arrived at a justification for her performance in *Crash*, she relates her understanding of J. G. Ballard's project as an implantation of technology in the minds of human beings (Ballard having written the book *Crash* [first published in 1973] upon which the film is based). She goes on to comment that this is not 'like the *Terminator*, where Cameron actually took technology and made it part of someone's body. Ballard is talking about taking technology and making

it part of our minds. So there is a steeliness, a coldness that displaces the emotional that you and I know'.¹

Just as Hunter notes the connection between the more predominant cyborg figurations of mainstream films and the characters in *Crash*, I would go further in saying that many of the characters in Cronenberg's Science Fiction films fit within a definition of the cyborg. This becomes particularly evident if his films are read in a comparison with the *Alien* series or alongside the mainstream 'cyber-thrillers' of the 1990s. However, the two films I have decided to concentrate upon, *Crash* and *eXistenZ* (1999), represent his most recent foray into the world of technological and human transgressive potentialities. *eXistenZ* offers the audience a somewhat alternative vision to the kind of cyborg presented to us in films like *Johnny Mnemonic*, *The Net*, or *Virtuosity*; even though its subject matter, concerning the interface of the human with computer generated environments, is ostensibly similar. *Crash*, on the other hand, may seem more difficult to define under the heading of the Cyborg film, but can be usefully read in conjunction with earlier depictions of the cyborg (*Robocop*, *Terminator* etc.) which articulated the impact of cyber-technologies in more bodily terms (i.e. through technological prosthetics, the development of the artificial body etc.). In this sense, *Crash* may be understood as depicting a kind of 'low-tech'² precursor to these cyborgs, given the way in which the car bodies become extensions of, and are melded with, the human bodies on display in this film. Further to this, connections can be made between the newer computer technologies and the car, in the way in which these can be seen to emulate some of the functions of the car: as indicated in the appropriation of terms like 'drives' and 'crashes', which form part of a familiar 'computer-speak'. Claudia Springer also makes this comparison when she talks of the cyber-thriller's 'association of technology with exhilarating speed', which she goes on to claim 'places it in the tradition of the 1950s and 1960s youth culture films that celebrate fast cars and motorcycles'.³

¹ Jean Uppenheimer, 'Mr. Showbiz Interview: Holly Hunter', <http://mrshowbiz.go.com/people/hollyhunter/content/credits.html>

² This is a term borrowed from William Gibson's Cyberpunk novels which means the use of older technologies or people who do not have access to newer technologies (low-techs).

³ Springer, p.211.

What also makes *Crash* and *eXistenZ* particularly pertinent films to focus upon in this chapter is the way in which both cry out for analysis at the level of performance. Both these films, in different ways, appear to place questions of performance, as connected to the depiction of changing subjectivities in conjunction with a hyper-technologized environment, at the heart of their projects. For instance, this is made clear in the reference to literal, filmic performance in *Crash* during the scene in which Vaughan ‘re-plays’ the death of James Dean and in *eXistenZ* when, in the closing moments of the film, the ‘characters’ critique their own contributions within the virtual game. I will come to discuss both of these scenes in more detail below, but my point is that if the viewer were in any doubt about the centrality of performance in the two movies these moments definitely serve to concentrate attention to this area.

Embodied in the way in which both these scenes are presented is the sense in which the boundaries between actual (as in framed, artistic performances) and social performance are blurred - the apparent tenuousness of this divide becomes highlighted here. It seems that along with the way in which the various characters in these films become cyborgized, in their interaction with technologies, a more bodily blurring between human/machine is echoed in, and sutured to, a psychical blurring which, in turn, is expressed in a foregrounding of the performance aspects of various behaviours, strategies and approaches. Along with the diegetic emphasis upon performance (as central to the way in which the actants respond as cyborgized subjects of these technological worlds), comes the implication and suggestion that this blurring is also occurring outside of the frame of the films. Paul Patton, by drawing upon Fredric Jameson’s ideas about the nature of subjectivity in our present period of late Capitalism, suggests that urban living has increasingly led to a kind of individual role playing amongst city dwellers. Patton extends certain of Jameson’s notions concerning a sense of loss of subjective inwardness, referential depth and coherent expression as indicative of the ‘postmodern’ experience, by arguing that to facilitate a life spent in such close quarters with so many strangers people are increasingly encouraged to indicate their ‘role’ within society.

He goes on to state that:

In cities, people identify other people on the basis of their appearance, their social role or other singular characteristics. In turn, this mode of relating to others reacts back upon their sense of self and they experience themselves as actors⁴

Therefore, it might be that *Crash* and *eXistenZ* can be seen to explore this kind of idea and perhaps to develop it even further; as illustrated in those moments when characters in both films, self-referentially, question and analyse their own performances. In other words, although their self-analysis can be read as a foregrounding device it can also be understood as an illustration of the degree and extent to which performance has already become 'real-ised' or is fast becoming endemic as a constituent of postmodern subjectivity. In fact, Cronenberg, in a recent interview, concerning *Crash*, has been quoted as saying:

The conceit that underlies some of what is maybe difficult or baffling about *Crash*, the sci-fi-ness, comes from Ballard anticipating a future pathological psychology. It's developing now, but he anticipates it being even more developed in the future. He then brings it back to the past - now - and applies it as though it exists completely formed. So I have these characters who are exhibiting a psychology of the future.⁵

To a degree, his comments here serve to further illustrate my ongoing argument that a focus upon performance in the Cyborg movie can act as some indication of the way in which these films may be seen to be reflecting versions of present subjectivities (along with perceived shifts in a defining of humanity) as well as presenting the viewer with various possible social models of postmodern subjectivity.

In fact, as I implied in those earlier, opening comments, it may be that my filmic examples here are exemplifying the kind of feedback loop between actual and social performance that appears to be an increasingly common phenomenon in present-day, Western society.⁶ In some respects this is hardly surprising given that recorded performances, of one kind or

⁴ 'Imaginary Cities: Images of Postmodernity', *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, (Blackwell, 1995), p.117.

⁵ 'Crash: David Cronenberg talks about his new film "Crash" based on J.G. Ballard's disturbing techno-sex novel', *Sight and Sound*, V.6, (1996), p.8.

⁶ James Naremore, in his article 'The Performance Frame' (*Star Texts*, [Wayne State University Press, 1991], pp.102-114) utilizes a distinction between the 'aleatory and theatrical' to describe the possible difference between 'real'/social performance and screen, or framed performance. He explores arenas where this divide can be seen to be blurred and gives the example of pornography as requiring a certain 'aleatory' (therefore 'real') element just as some forms of social play require a great degree of the 'theatrical'. So it seems appropriate that Cronenberg is using a text that has been described as 'pornographic' in his exploration of a blurring of the divide between reality/fantasy, the authentic/performed.

another, are so pervasive now. It is no wonder that learned behaviours, social etiquette, the acting out of various identities and so on, are more likely, on some level, to have been gleaned from the various models of humanity that adorn our screens. As stated in my introduction, the possible presence of this kind of feedback loop makes it extremely important to deconstruct those models, not only to gain an understanding of how these films *reflect* present-day experiences but also to grasp the codifications of what we are being *presented* with in terms of appropriate social behaviours in a near future. Certainly this is central to my project in this chapter and, although I am largely dealing with what could be considered more alternative forms here (given that Cronenberg is closely associated with exploitation cinema and, more recently, independent Cinema, as well as mainstream products - and given that he admits that, in the case of *Crash* he intended to 'return to his roots' in terms of style and subject matter ⁷), I will be undertaking some comparative analysis with aforementioned mainstream examples.

Crash is basically an episodic film that deals with the sexual exploration of a band of people brought together by their shared experiences as the victims of car accidents. Vaughan, the apparent organiser of this cult-like group, is driven by a desire to re-play the car crashes of various famous film stars. Along with this project he introduces the Ballards to the possible pleasures to be gained from a literal collision with technology (in this case the car), and thus proceeds a startling number of scenes in which the characters' sexuality is played out in a melding of flesh and metal. *eXistenZ*, like *Crash*, is also concerned with the human/machine interface but here the technology in question is the more recently developed, so called Virtual Reality game. At the beginning of *eXistenZ* the audience is introduced to a number of characters (most notably Allegra Geller the supposed creator of the 'eXistenZ' game-world) who attend the premier tryout of this new Virtual Reality product. Each character 'jacks' into the game world and thus ensues a tangled narrative in which Geller, accompanied by a young and seemingly inexperienced security guard, attempts to avoid assassination and

⁷ In an interview with Chris Rodley he was asked: 'was *Crash* intended as a back-to-basics Cronenberg movie?' Cronenberg replied: 'Absolutely. That was very conscious... We had many discussions about returning to the old style, except we felt we were a lot better at it! But the techniques and parameters were like the old days'. *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, (Faber and Faber, Revised Ed. 1997, [1st ed. 1992]), p.192.

recoup the game software trapped in her injured pod/computer. Upon completion of the game it becomes apparent that during the opening scenes of the film the competitors were already in another game, in which Allegra is merely a game-character. However, the audience also learns that this woman, along with her partner (who plays the security guard), actually intends to assassinate the real creator. From this moment on, the levels of reality and game fantasy intensify to the point where it becomes questionable as to what is diegetically real and what is constructed game scenario.

Although both *Crash* and *eXistenZ* can be seen to explore a human technological interface and although both films depict this interface in very visceral, visual terms, they can be understood as moving in upon the subject from ostensibly opposing directions. In *Crash* it seems that the movement is from the inner to the outer, in a variety of ways: the characters view the world through the windscreens of their cars, their seemingly perverse desires are somewhat literally written upon their bodies and there is constant reference to the outer materiality of their experience. It is as though what could previously be understood as inner, human drives and emotions had risen to the surface of their being in their rather literal acting out within this alienating and highly technologically mediated mise-en-scene. In some respects, the playing out of their desires upon the surface of their bodies can be seen in alignment with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theories concerning, what they term as, the Body without Organs (BwO). Scott Bukatman, in an analysis of the cyborg body in several Cyberpunk novels, along with Ballard's *Crash* and Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, describes how the kinds of bodies on show here are in a process of 'subject annihilation'. He outlines how the characters in these fictions are attempting to 'dismantle the self', which is revealed in the way the order of an individual organism, denoted by the ordered siting of the organs of the body, can be displayed as displaced or arrayed across the desiring body. So the totality of the organism is challenged, as the body appears to be in a process of constant re-definition. He goes on to say that:

The Body without Organs is the state where we desire to dissolve the body and regain the world. So the contemporary drama of the subject, which I call *terminal flesh*, is played out upon the *surface* of the body: "depth" is an illusion that belongs to a passing moment

of a particular subjectivity. The surface of the body becomes the arena for the dissolution of the governing instrumental reason of the organism.⁸

With this in mind it could be said that the characters in *Crash* are attempting to 'regain the world' through their literal, bodily interaction with the technology around them. On the other hand, the movement in *eXistenZ* is, superficially at least, in the direction from the outer to the inner. Although there remains much visual play in *eXistenZ* with the idea that 'inner' organs, along with bones and teeth (which are notably transformed into a gun - and could therefore be said to be reconfigured into a phallic organ) are now literally located on the outside, but this is offset by the film's narrative frame. According to this narrative, the characters, having been 'jacked in' via their central nervous system, enter into a virtual environment in which the seemingly haphazard but rigorous rules of the game affect the very core of their being. The game penetrates, both literally and figuratively, their bodies and sensibilities which, in effect, alters their behaviour and causes them to act in ways that are alien or surprising to them. Also, whereas the performances in *eXistenZ* display a variety of styles and, by extension, behaviours on the part of those involved, in *Crash* they could be termed neutral, with very little difference displayed between the actants in the ensuing drama. It is as though the difference in direction here were intended to illustrate or underline a possible difference in methodological or stylistic approach on behalf of the actors in each of these films. Again, as mentioned in the introduction and other chapters of this thesis, approaches to acting are often split between those methods that apparently work in a direction from the internal psychological apparatus of the individual actor and/or character toward an outward revealing of those structures, and those that purport to be inspired by more outward signs of character and surrounding mise-en-scene, which are thence internalized in the creation of a particular performance. For example, I looked at this difference in chapter one as underpinning the development of American acting stylizations, as connected to an effort to forge a particular and authentic sense of American identity. In this instance, the growth of the Method, and its associations with the inner drives and anxieties of both character and actor, marked a departure from the more 'outward' acting styles associated with the English. This nationalistic differentiation is, to some extent, played upon in the casting and performances of Jude Law and Jennifer Jason-Leigh in *eXistenZ* and can even be evidenced in

⁸ 'Postcards from the Posthuman Solar System', *Science-Fiction Studies*, V.18, (1991), p.354, Bukatman's emphases.

Cronenberg's substitution of Ballard's use of Elizabeth Taylor, in the novel, with the James Dean scene. But, to return to this inner/outer modelling of acting styles, I would suggest that the difference in direction does not simply illustrate the divergent natures of the central technologies of each, respective, film, but also serves as a kind of extreme demonstration of past acting methodologies. Further to this, given that recent acting methodologies have commonly been associated with and inspired by various, contemporary scientific and psychological paradigms of humanity, what Cronenberg succeeds in doing is bringing to the fore the way in which these modellings are affected when combined with modern day technology. So whilst the 'direction difference' between these two films may serve to highlight residual understandings of human performance, this is simultaneously complicated by the way in which the performers and their performances are bound up with Virtual Reality and vehicular technologies.

In some respects, it is as though Cronenberg penned *eXistenZ* as, in part, a reply to *Crash* (or, perhaps, to further elucidate the central concerns of *Crash*) and rather than present a repeat performance of the options on offer in this film he came at the same concerns from the opposite direction.⁹ This may be understandable given the critical reaction that *Crash* received, particularly in Europe, and the moral outcry, from certain quarters, that the film seemed to inspire. In other words, perhaps Cronenberg himself reacted to this response and decided that the articulation of an 'outward to inward' approach in the performances was less likely to be understood as threatening to current mores; it could more readily be seen in terms of a fantasy construct and as, supposedly, less likely to be encouraging actual displays of violence upon society. I would suggest that this is, ironically, largely due to stylistics of performances that have come to be read in terms of 'naturalism' and therefore as closely associated with current social behavior. In other words, a style, such as that evidenced in *Crash*, which appears to evacuate the inner workings of humanity inherently threatens our

⁹ *eXistenZ* can also be read as a reply to the mainstream film *The Game* (Dir: David Fincher, 1997), which, in turn, appears heavily influenced by Cronenberg's *Videodrome* - the Cronenberg connection being partly signalled in the casting of Deborah Unger in both *Crash* and *The Game*. Here the ending of *The Game* is relevant in that the central protagonist, caught up in a deliberately fictional drama, emerges back into the diegetically real world. Whereas in *eXistenZ* the game could be said to continue - therefore leaving the ending far more open.

current models of what it means to be human, whereas the rather playful styles adopted in *eXistenZ* can more easily be read as a less serious threat to those models. Along with this, if the two films are read in conjunction with mainstream Cyborg films, Cronenberg, in true auteurist fashion, seems to have offered up a trajectory which takes the viewer from the bodily cyborgs of the mainstream 1980s movie to the 'psycho-cyborgs' (associated with computer technology), where the emphasis is upon mental and psychological aspects of a machine/human melding. In this sense the two films make for a rather convenient comparative coupling.

COMING TO THE SURFACE: *CRASH* AND THE EVACUATION OF THE INNER

During the opening shots of the film *Crash*, the camera slowly pans across an airport hanger, surveying the smooth metallic surfaces of the planes before finally focusing upon a man and woman having sex. Catherine is shown 'caressing' the metal surface of a light aircraft in a way that suggests she is interacting with it on a physical/sexual level (in fact, her attention seems more focused on these caresses than the man who stands behind her). During this scene her expression remains almost quizzical and distant as though she was somewhat removed from the situation or, at least, remained relatively unaffected by it - she does not display the more usual signs of arousal that a film-going audience may have come to expect. There is very little sense of emotional connection here and the way in which the scene is set up seems to encourage a viewing of the surfaces of their bodies and clothing as though these people were simply an extension of the surrounding mise-en-scene. Even the accompanying music to the scene appears to forestall any depth of enquiry: it is minimal, repetitive and does not have a particular or dominant melody line. In this sense, it does not offer the more familiar kind of musical hierarchy (with the melody lines supported or underpinned by other lines) nor does it operate to connote emotional subtext or any kind of hidden undercurrent, it simply echoes the somewhat detached view from the camera.

This opening scenario sets the tone of the piece and as the film progresses it becomes apparent that even inherent in the performances given, the very style of acting being employed, there is a similar sense of 'surface', of superficiality, of lack of depth. There is little indication of emotional/psychical depth (at least of a recognisably authentic nature) being played out, with the performers seeming most concerned with their own externality as well the external natures of what surrounds them. It also seems that any sense of a characters' personal history is not so much marked in terms of nuances of performance but by the outward scars, tattoos and injuries they sport. For instance, in a later scene, the character of Ballard (played by James Spader) has a brief conversation with Dr. Helen Remington (played by Holly Hunter). This scene takes place after Remington and Ballard have all but recovered from their head-on collision, just prior to their first session of sexual intercourse. Whilst Ballard drives Remington to work the ensuing conversation consists primarily of exchanges of information; notably about what they do and what they see as opposed to how they feel. In many films this kind of dialogue may well have been played for what lay 'under' it - giving the characters a deeper level of emotional connection. Indeed, it is a common acting exercise to play different underlying emotions, motivations, behind a few lines of mundane dialogue - but here the delivery is direct, without any indication of particular tensions or censored thought. There are moments when an unusual camera angle is adopted in short cutaways, detailing certain movements, but even these do not seem to signal subtext and, at most, simply echo the way in which these two people appear to be coolly sizing one another up. In fact, the nearest thing to underlying motivation in the performances is at the point when Remington very deliberately starts to smoke. Thus follows a close-up on her cigarette - the smoking woman being a common code for a kind of phallic or repressed sexual undercurrent - which here simply seems to operate to highlight a cinematic coding with the inference that Remington could be read as using her knowledge of this cinematic code in order to quickly and efficiently communicate her desire for sex with Ballard. Alternatively, Remington may be hyper-aware of the way in which her smoking may be read by Ballard and may therefore be considered complicit with his view of her, fitting into this role as a quick route to pleasure.

In terms of the way in which these particular performances may have been elicited it is interesting to note that Cronenberg, reportedly, replayed the tapes/rushes and had the best colour monitors installed for the cast to refer to during rehearsal and recording.¹⁰ Although it is not unusual for actors to view the rushes for a days filming, or, indeed, to have access to the monitors, it is unusual for these things to be set in place so specifically as an aid to the process of performing. Even though this further suggests the importance that Cronenberg placed upon performance in the film, it also implies that actors may have been encouraged to focus their attention on outward appearances, as though they were being asked to see themselves as objects or bodies in conjunction with the other objects and technological bodies of the surrounding mise-en-scene. Whilst this production technique may well have been used to elicit a particular style of performance (almost as though it were reproducing, or emphasising, a pervasive panopticism within postmodern society) the resulting vacuous quality could be read as allowing the director more freedom to impose meaning. I discussed this kind of vacuous style in chapter one and the way in which it did appear to allow for meanings to be 'pasted onto' a given performance, by the director, but the camera work and muted coloration (amongst other things) in *Crash* simultaneously connote a very detached point of view - a lack of commenting, positioning, or moral tone on behalf of the filmmakers. In terms of how these performances operate within the context of *Crash*, then, it could be argued that this is meant to encourage a more thoughtful and critical engagement on the part of the viewer. Having said that, it seems that the audience is discouraged from attempting to find underlying symbolism or metaphorical meaning: the metaphors have been literalized and are simply there to see.

Vivian Sobchack, in her book *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, talks of a shift present in the aesthetics of the Science Fiction film. She too draws upon Jameson in describing the way in which a 'depth' model is now being replaced by a 'surface' model in Science Fiction movies. She looks at how 1950s 'sci-fi' inscribed space as 'deep' which, she now argues, is being replaced by an exploration of space as shallow, all surface, displaying rather concealing, and she goes on to detail the ways in which this surface aesthetic manifests

¹⁰ Chris Rodley, 'Crash', *Sight and Sound*, V.6, (1996), 7-11, (p.7).

itself.¹¹ What is missing from her description is any detailed discussion at the level of performance. Given the number of references to Jameson's work in many criticisms of postmodern film I find it surprising that performance remains largely ignored. Jameson basically states that an evident shift from 'depth' to 'surface' as expressive of postmodern subjectivity, along with the representation of this phenomenon in postmodern culture, has resulted in the repudiation of four crucial and fundamental depth models in contemporary theory. He goes on to name these areas as 'the dialectical one of essence and appearance...the Freudian model of latent and manifest, or of repression [...] the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity [...] and, most recently, the great semiotic opposition between signifier and signified'.¹² He later states that depth modellings have, in general, been replaced by surface modellings 'or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth)'.¹³ He continues to explore models of postmodern subjectivity and comments that:

As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling.¹⁴

By drawing upon Jean-Francois Lyotard, he goes on to say that 'feeling' seems to have been replaced by 'intensities' which are 'free-floating' and 'impersonal'. But what is of particular interest is the way in which he illustrates his discussion with reference to film and film performance. He does this through a brief analysis of the Hollywood star system in which he argues that a 'preceding generation projected their various roles through and by way of their well-known off-screen personalities' whereas the latest generation of stars function 'in the utter absence of "personality"'.¹⁵ Although his discussion is fairly short and relatively cursory, in this regard, he does, at least, appear to acknowledge the usefulness of this approach in ascertaining modes of postmodern subjectivity and how the replacement of a depth by a surface modelling has affected a very particular performance paradigm.

¹¹ See, in particular, Sobchack's chapter 4, 'Postfuturism', *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, (Ungar, 1993), pp.223-305.

¹² *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso, 1991), p.12.

¹³ Jameson, p.12.

¹⁴ Jameson, p.15, Jameson's emphasis.

¹⁵ Jameson, p.20.

Like many film critics and theorists, any analysis of performance in Sobchack's book, is largely confined to issues of spectacle (the appearance of the actors/stars, the surface elements of costuming, make-up etc.), as though the emphasis on spectacle in the films under discussion denies a questioning of other elements. A further instance of this tendency can be seen in Bukatman's major work, *Terminal Identities*.¹⁶ Although at the heart of this project is the exploration of forms of postmodern subjectivity he too concentrates his efforts on a reading of appearances/spectacle and other elements of mise-en-scene in film, rather than analysing performance stylizations. This is particularly evident in a further article by Bukatman, entitled 'Who Programs You?'¹⁷ in which he pays close attention to Cronenberg's *Videodrome*. Here he discusses the way in which *Videodrome*'s characters express a kind of terminal identity and elides these characterizations with a discussion of actual subjective experience. Even though there is a sense, in his account, in which certain aspects of performance feed into his hypothesis I suspect he avoids approaching theories of performance as this could be seen to undermine his argument - in the way in which he may be in danger of re-introducing a kind of depth modelling of human identity. For the purposes of argument and without wanting to appear too presumptive, perhaps this avoidance is due to a limited understanding of performance practices as based upon the Method model - which has classically required an acting out of inner depth. In other words, perhaps, for Bukatman discussion of acting would be automatically suggestive of a sense of emotional subtext or depth. My point here is that although, in many ways, the apparent emphasis on spectacle (in particular, with the return of the Blockbuster movie in the 1980s) in recent mainstream films can be described as another manifestation of this 'surface aesthetic' I would argue that closer analysis of performance styles reveals a further level in the shift from a 'depth' to 'surface' aesthetic; a level which Cronenberg rather ironically emphasises through his referencing of one of the leading Method actors of the 1950s.

As previously mentioned, there is a scene in *Crash* during which Vaughan re-plays the death of James Dean. Vaughan's introduction to this enactment involves a re-telling of the events

¹⁶ *Terminal Identities: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, (Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁷ 'Who Programs You?: The Science Fiction of the Spectacle', *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1990), pp.196-213.

that led up to the Dean Car crash and various details of the road accident itself. Whilst narrating these events Vaughan's body moves around the 'stand-in' Porsche Spyder (the model of car that Dean was in at the time of his death) as he caresses various areas of its bodywork. His rather languorous body movements are reminiscent of the way in which Dean uses his body as a performer. For instance, in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Dir: Nicholas Ray, 1955), during one particular scene when the Dean character is talking with Judy (played by Natalie Wood), he uses some rather unusual body movements which not only suggest what he feels (which is not really present in the dialogue) but also suggest that his whole body is being affected by his surfacing desires toward Judy. In some ways, this is an example of the classic Method style, particularly of the 1950s era, in which the body language of the actor is often juxtaposed the spoken dialogue. As described in my introduction, the classic Method style, which emerged during this period, focussed on the psychological apparatus of the individual actor and the 'motivation' that may lie 'behind' a character's action. Based upon an interpretation of the first of Stanislavski's three books on acting (*An Actor Prepares*) the Method took some of its central tenets and placed a great deal of importance on preparation work, in isolation from the script, rather than the rest of the 'mechanics' of performance. So, during this early period, one of the main features in the development of the Method style was its emphasis on the physical/emotional body of the performer rather than the spoken dialogue. This marked a move away from intellect, as denoted by clear vocal utterance of dialogue, to a kind of bodily responding as a supposedly more authentic approach to acting. Also, as previously outlined, as a preparation technique, this style drew heavily upon a popularised form of Freudian psychoanalysis and included exercises that aimed to help the actor 're-call' past emotional events in order to 'use' these in performance. Therefore, Dean's performance in 'Rebel', if understood in association with these techniques, was intended (or can be read) to connote a certain kind of psychological depth within a characterization: indeed, as I have already argued, the Method appeared to play out a depth modelling of human being. At first glance, although there seem to be similarities between Dean's and Koteas' (who plays Vaughan) performances here I would argue that they are vastly different, especially given the overall contexts in which they appear. During the re-play scene Koteas' performance can well be read as a kind of pastiche of the Method style which, given the circumstances of this re-enactment, can further be understood as an extreme

extrapolation of some of the tendencies presented by this style. For instance, the searching for an authenticity of feeling seems to have led Vaughan to literally 'live his role': in fact, Vaughan actually tells his audience that he is aiming for as much 'authenticity' as possible. Leo Braudy has commented that the Method 'also drew upon *empathy*, as well as emotional and sensory memory in the creation of a role'¹⁸ and with this in mind it seems that Vaughan can be read as the most quintessential proponent of the style, during this scene. Having said that, Vaughan later undercuts the authenticity of his own performance when he asks: 'Was I glib... "James Dean died of a broken neck and became immortal"?' In fact, throughout the film he consistently undercuts the 'truth' of earlier statements which, again, suggests that he is not necessarily sincere - at least not in the sense that sincerity connotes an essential depth of emotion. All of this is further underlined by Remington's comments. For instance, when Ballard asks if the participants in the re-enactment are really hurt, she replies 'I don't know. You can never be sure with Vaughan...this is his show'.¹⁹ So although the Method, and its associations with inner 'truth' and 'authenticity', is evoked here, this is undermined throughout. Vaughan's taking up the Method style is not intended to connote depth of emotion but rather to indicate, specifically with reference to filmic performance, his own positioning as a celluloid cyborg in a world of 'multiple surfaces'.

By inserting this reference to Dean, Cronenberg is also tapping into the issues played out in the films in which this star featured. For instance, the actor is best known for his portrayals of a disaffected youth, alienated from the adult world around him and seemingly full of 'existential angst'. Cars were important symbols in many 1950s 'teen' movies and the 'drag race' was a common feature of Dean's and other 'teen' movies of the period. In a sense, Cronenberg is taking these elements and like Ballard, in a similar fashion to what he perceives to be Ballard's psychological prophesy, is going further in suggesting that tendencies in those earlier movies are actually being lived out by the characters in his film.

¹⁸ "'No Body's Perfect': Method Acting and 50s Culture', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, V.35, N.1, (1996), p.199, my emphasis.

¹⁹ It is interesting to compare this with comments made by the character of 'Plato', in *Rebel Without a Cause*. When asked about the Dean character Plato says of him: 'He doesn't say much but when he does you know he means it...he's sincere'. Of course, within the context of this film, sincerity was being highlighted by these comments as a kind of extra-filmic selling point of the Method style.

However, in a comparison between these two films it becomes evident that elements of earlier Dean films are brought to the surface in *Crash*. For example, in James Dean's films the 'drag race' can be read as a metaphor for sexual activity, for a sexual 'rites of passage' into adulthood, whereas in *Crash* the metaphor is literalized in the way in which the 'drag race' actually becomes sexualised. So *Crash* can be seen to literally act out these earlier encodings.

Leo Braudy, in talking of the Method and its sociological implications, discusses the search for 'models of being' in post-war America and how this search came to be heavily 'focused, as it never had before, on the examples the movies furnished'.²⁰ He goes on to look at how the Method actor came to articulate the emergence of a new form of masculinity in America and states that the '50s ushered in a preoccupation with film actors as social symbols'.²¹ Taking this into consideration it is as though Cronenberg were presenting us with the logical outcome of this mechanism in that his characters literally live out the underlying imperatives set up in the typical 'Method movie' of this period, which, ironically seems to track, in performance terms, a shift from the depth model to the surface model. Seemingly, the interior impulses and intensities (articulated by the Method's bodily performance) - most notably the sex drive and the death drive - have been thoroughly externalised in the characters in *Crash*, reducing the performance of the human subject to a surface rendition of what has previously been assumed to be their basic, underlying drives.

The Method has, of course, moved on since its heyday, when stars like Marlon Brando and James Dean were at the height of their 'anti-hero' fame. As Virginia Wright Wexman has stated:

In place of the anxiety-fraught romantic relationships suggested by the neurotic male Method stars of the fifties, newer Method stars like Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, and Al Pacino typically project a cold narcissism that suggests they are beyond romance.²²

²⁰ Braudy, p.195.

²¹ Braudy, p.195.

²² *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance*, (Princeton University Press, 1993), p.179.

It may well be that the performances in *Crash* can be read as a further development in the Method stylization. For instance, Marianne Conroy (in her discussion of *A Streetcar Named Desire* [Dir: Elia Kazan, 1951] as a seminal film in which the style fully emerged) talks of the way in which the Method 'foregrounded how social and cultural categories are acted out'.²³ In her closing statement she notes how:

The significance of Method acting for our time lies in the way its middlebrow mix of heterogeneous cultural styles prefigures a differentiated and perhaps distinctively postmodern perspective on national identity and culture.²⁴

Along with these comments, the emphasis placed on the body (as opposed to the spoken word) in Method, could allow the style to be read as a precursor to later performance practices. Further evidence of a link between later styles and the Method can be found in its apparent association with Existentialism. It was not uncommon for the anti-hero in films of this era to be understood as enacting an existential version of subjectivity, which later became associated with more avant-garde practices. For instance, Peter Gorsen (writing in the late 1970s) comments on how this philosophy can be understood as closely related to the emergence of alternative forms of performance from the 1950s onwards. He states:

There is something striking about the unsymbolic reflection on one's own corporeality and its nonverbal language, on the aesthetics of an unseemingly unconditional "naked existence" (Sartre), which shows similarities with the modern "*I am in my body*" tautology, and, in connection with, the determined stand against declarations that crop up to assert the claims of the scientific approach, of finality, and of exclusiveness.²⁵

However, rather than seeing these links as evidence for the performances in *Crash* to come under the rubric of the Method and given that it has become such a broad term (encompassing a number of seemingly different approaches to acting), it may be more accurate to say that certain similarities reveal the way in which this dominating style can be seen (in some kind of hegemonic fashion) to appropriate elements of other stylizations. There seems no doubt that alternative stylizations may well have influenced the Method (and vice versa), but I do not believe that developments in the Method style fully account for the performances evidenced in *Crash*. Although, on one level, the *Crash* performances may

²³ 'Acting Out: Method Acting, the National Culture, and the Middlebrow Disposition in Cold War America', *Criticism - A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, V.35, N.2, (1993), p.256.

²⁴ Conroy, p.258.

²⁵ 'The Return of Existentialism in Performance Art', *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, (E.P.Dutton, Inc., 1984), pp.136-137.

work in a comparison with the more recent portrayals associated with Method acting (as a kind comment upon current filmic styles ²⁶), within the context of this film an alternative approach may shed more light on the performance style adopted here and, by extension, the characterizations under discussion.

Karl Toepfer, in an article entitled 'Nudity and Textuality in Postmodern Performance', states that the sight of a nude body in performance produces a tendency for the spectator 'to collapse distinctions between the "real" body of the performer and the "imaginary" body of the "character" textualized out of a theatrical code'. ²⁷ Toepfer goes on to call this effect 'an extreme form of realism which seeks to dissolve difference between reality and representation'. ²⁸ He also talks of the way in which nudity can subvert authorial intention by 'exposing the distinctive signifying power of an author's language (as opposed to an author's story or "vision") [...] For the expressive authority of language depends much more on the material reality of the sign than on the imaginary "world" evoked by the referent'. ²⁹

Although he is largely talking about live stage performance, and nudity in films can be understood to operate somewhat differently, it is still interesting to consider his comments in association with the bodies on display in *Crash*. Given that the filmed body is already at one remove from the "real" it could still be that the kind of mechanism Toepfer relates is being referred in *Crash*. This would certainly fit neatly with the film's allusion to a confusing of fantasy and reality, on the level of performance and as foregrounded in the character's re-living of famous deaths. For instance, on one level the nude bodies being paraded in *Crash* could be taken to indicate a kind of hyper-authenticity, but this is complicated by the strong implications of the inauthentic in their lack of emotional/human 'depth'. So, in this sense, the mere sight of the undressed human body no longer connotes the authentic human. In another sense, and as discussed in the introduction, it may be that these nude bodies are intended to illustrate the idea that the only element left in an account of the authentic human

²⁶ As a point of interest, James Spader, in his early career, studied at the Michael Chekov Studio and performed with the Actor's Studio (one of the famous homes of the Method style). Certainly, his casting and performance then can be read alongside developments within the Method school.

²⁷ *Performing Arts Journal*, V.54, (1996), 76-91, (p.77).

²⁸ Toepfer, p.77.

²⁹ Toepfer, p.85.

is the material body. If this is the case then, in *Crash*, these authentic human bodies do not remain intact for long due to the way in which the characters seek to collide/collude with mechanical technologies. So, perhaps it is more pertinent to consider how the star personas in *Crash* operate in conjunction with his comments? Most of the cast are known or associated with performance driven pieces and do not fit snugly within the mainstream star system - a system that relies so heavily upon the supposed 'real life' experiences of the actor. In taking the examples of two of the better-known actors in the film (Holly Hunter and James Spader) it becomes evident that they are strongly associated with independent productions. In recent years the independent film has come to be understood as an arena which is more likely to produce films of 'serious', artistic value. It is also the case that the actors associated with the 'independent scene' are often considered and approached as talented artists whose skilful performances add much to the film. To an extent, this divide between the Hollywood star and the independent actor is underlined by the insistence on privacy, from the media machine, by the 'serious' actor; even when the 'serious' actor is interviewed the thrust of the questioning is more usually about the performances given as opposed to their supposed private lives. I am not saying that this is always the case but there does seem to be tendency here, which is relevant to my argument. In this sense, what is known of the actors in *Crash* is largely drawn from past performances rather than extra-textual knowledge of their lives.³⁰ In this way, assumptions about 'who they really are' may be taken from what is known about them solely as performers.³¹ This being the case, the two most prominent performances to 'feed into' those given in *Crash* are probably Spader's in *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (Dir. Steven Soderbergh, 1989) and Hunter's in *The Piano* (Dir. Jane Campion, 1993). Both of these films attracted attention in terms of performance: Hunter's non-verbal (apart from the voice-over) portrayal of Ada having sparked much critical discussion and Spader's role as the de-sensitised and alienated Graham Dalton won him the Best Actor award at the Cannes Film Festival. Both of these characterizations, in different ways, deal with a lack of human connection, and although Ada and Dalton finally manage to reconnect with humanity

³⁰ This sense of privacy is, of course, another way of avoiding the kind of typecasting that is prevalent in the Hollywood mainstream star.

³¹ It is interesting to consider this idea in conjunction with certain lines of dialogue spoken by Vaughan/Koteas. After the James Dean re-play scene the characters are chased by Traffic Police. When asked by Ballard why they are being chased Vaughan replies: 'they have no idea who we really are'. This line can be understood in a variety of ways not the least of which is in terms of an audience's view upon the performers themselves.

(indicated in their taking up of a heterosexual romance) - a resolution which somehow evades the characters in *Crash* - it is possible that audiences will read these performances against those given in *Crash*.

I am not saying that extra-textual knowledge of a mainstream star is not also somehow performed/constructed for an audience, simply that the illusory aspect of the star's actual and 'essential' characteristics is largely removed from *Crash*: therefore, there is little to 'clothe' the performer apart from what is recognised as already performed - perhaps then the nude body of these performers ironically literalizes their lack of 'star personality'. Although the sense of privacy, previously referred to, could connote that these performers have an unseen inner existence that may further suggest a kind of illusive authenticity, I am reminded more of Jameson's idea that the latest generation of starring actors (he refers, in particular, to William Hurt³²), in the absence of 'personality', have 'something of the anonymity of character acting'.³³ Jameson goes on to say:

This "death of the subject" in the institution of the star now, however, opens up the possibility of a play of historical allusions to much older roles [...] so that the very style of the acting can now also serve as a "connotator" of the past.³⁴

So, there is a sense of surface at play here in which performance is next to performance, rather than a sense in which depth is played out via the inner life of the actual performer. These performers seem to bring a relatively empty body to their parts - the inference being that they are able to 'unfrock' themselves prior to the taking on of a role. However, this sense of absolute nudity in *Crash*, rather than subverting authorial intent (even though it cannot be denied that this potential is present) allows the bodies in question to be re-inscribed - particularly in conjunction with the vehicular technologies also on display. For example, there is a fascinating moment when Remington's outstretched, muscled arms are heavily associated with the bumpers on the front of the car in which she is having sex. So it seems that although the nude body may be understood as 'un-inscribed' there is also a re-inscription

³² Given this reference to William Hurt, who is also strongly associated with Independent cinema, it seems that Jameson is, in fact, referring to the emergence of the 'Independent star' as opposed to the older type of Hollywood star - which is still very much in evidence in more mainstream, big grossing, American pictures.

³³ Jameson, p.20.

³⁴ Jameson, p.20.

here which potentially foregrounds the conceptual amalgamation of human body/technological car. If read in terms of a fetishistic metaphor then there is a confusion as to its originary source - given that there appears to be a kind of feedback loop between car and body - in which each acts as a signifier for the other without a sense in which one is the primary source. A further example of this is indicated by the fact that Ballard, after his first crash, replaces his damaged vehicle with the same model and colour of car that he had driven previously. Although this can certainly be read as indicating that Ballard has a compulsion to repeat the trauma of the first crash, this also implies that he now sees this type of car as somehow an extension of his body (if not his actual body). Likewise, Vaughan is consistently associated with the 'beat-up' Lincoln within which he actually lives, as though it were, indeed, a kind of outer body for him. However, there is confusion as to which 'body' is truly to be understood as expressive of Vaughan's 'inner being'; just as his car becomes covered in his own, and others', bodily fluids, segments of his fleshy epidermis, his organic body is also covered with the tattoo of a steering wheel and marked by the scars of previous crashes.

When considering both the performance style and the activities of the characters in *Crash*, especially given the kind of rampant literalization apparent in the film, I am reminded of recent developments in the area of Performance Art. To look to these developments also seems appropriate given certain of Cronenberg's own comments about the characterizations in the film. In an interview with the director, Gavin Smith asks if the characters in *Crash* are the first (compared to characterizations in his earlier films) to consciously and actively attempt to shape their realities. Cronenberg agrees that this is probably the case and comments:

The characters in *Crash* - their project is a creative one, but it's less formally an artistic process, it's almost performance art [...] to use one's art to explore the purpose of one's existence, while at the same time giving one a purpose. Suddenly seeing your life as an artistic process automatically invests it with some shape.³⁵

These comments suggest that he sees the central characters in *Crash* as akin to current performance artists. Certainly the characters in *Crash* appear to actively insert their bodies

³⁵ 'Mind Over Matter', *Film Comment*, V.33, N.2, 14-29, (p.17).

into this hyper-technologized environment and, in turn, express/perform their experience of this world in a similar fashion to the way in which a performance artist can be understood as working. Aside from the level of characterization it seems that certain mechanisms inherent in performance art can also be seen to be echoed in the actors actual performances in *Crash* and perhaps in the way in which the performances were elicited in the first place (given my earlier comments with regards to how they were encouraged to view themselves on monitors). Richard Schechner, in his book *The End of Humanism: Writings on Performance* (in a chapter charting the shifts in performance stylization within the American Avant-Garde) describes a kind of linear development from 'naturalism to alienation-effect to autoperformance'.³⁶ Autoperformance was basically a term coined to describe the rise in solo theatrical work in the late 1970s and 'the more radical sense of using the one person who is performing as the source of the material being performed'.³⁷ The term also carries with it connotations that the performance is narcissistic in nature; not only is the performer using themselves as source material but is also acting as their own director and audience in the production of an externalisation of their inner being. Perhaps then, a similar mechanism has been attempted in *Crash* - as though the extreme self-reflection, instituted by the constant self-viewing through monitors and tapes, had been encouraged to enact an ironically literal form of auto-performance. Although it is amusing to consider the pun involved in the use of this term in association with this particular film it may also operate to indicate the way in which the car, as a technology, can be seen in association with an extreme form of individualism. For instance, the car appears to allow for individual control, it also creates a hermetically sealed world around the driver, thus separating (and protecting) the driver from direct contact with the outside. The driver of a car, looking out at the world from a privileged position, can also be seen as a kind of modern-day enactor of the extremes of a 'humanist' trajectory. Schechner, in his opening preface, discusses the two sided nature of 'humanism' as, on the one hand, an attempt to preserve the rights and freedoms of human individuals but, on the other hand, 'as an ideology [...] connected to the sense that human being, male human beings especially [...] are the lords and masters of the world'.³⁸ So, within the 'humanist' project lies the assumption that the human being is at the centre of the

³⁶ (Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), p.44.

³⁷ Schechner, p.45.

³⁸ Schechner, p.9.

world - the irony being that, as is revealed in *Crash*, the very technology that allows for an enacting of mastery, of separation, can also be seen as a signifier of that which has ousted the human from a position of such centrality.

Along similar lines to Schechner, Philip Auslander, in his book *From Acting to Performance*, charts the way in which a shifting from a transcendent, logocentric ideal in Western philosophy toward a more de-centered, deconstructed view of the self (as proposed by Postmodern and Post Structuralist theories) has affected theories of the self. Auslander basically attempts to account for the way in which both shifts in philosophical perspective, along with social and cultural changes, have not only altered how a human being is understood but have impacted upon approaches to performance theory and practice. In his opening discussion he states that the very title of his book is meant to suggest how his own interests have developed - following a trajectory from more traditional forms of theatre 'toward a broader conception of performance and its genres'.³⁹ He also notes that:

Whereas modernist and avantgardist theatres of the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries conceived of their work in terms of innovations in acting, subsequent postmodernist innovations have resulted from a reconsideration of the very nature of the activity that takes place on the stage, and the development of performance art.⁴⁰

In a later chapter, he looks at the way in which acting is commonly understood as an expression of the actor's/character's, true, inner self. He refers to 1950s Method acting as an example of a style which was judged in terms of its 'honesty' and 'truthfulness' but then goes on to explore how the recent application of semiotics to performance theory has altered this perception; exposing the performing actor as 'an intertext, not a simple text to be read for "content"'.⁴¹

Auslander seems to argue here that the Method, as based upon the notion that the truth of the performance largely lies in the exploration of a subject's/character's unconscious desires, is basically logocentric. He compares this approach to seemingly more radical, oppositional

³⁹ Auslander, *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism*, (Routledge, 1997), p.1.

⁴⁰ Auslander, p.1.

⁴¹ Auslander, p.29.

styles, which often purport to lay emphasis upon the body (as opposed to the mind) of the performer in attempts to explore the more material nature of being human. But, as he later states:

If, as Michel Foucault and others have argued, a part of the manageable, modern performance theory as a social discourse is to discipline the body, to make it manageable, modern performance theory as a social discourse has managed the body by robbing it of its materiality, subjecting it to the discipline of text, whether the dramatic text or the text of archetypal psychic impulse. Although avant-gardist performance theory frequently claims to liberate the body and thus to challenge the social or political hegemony, it fails adequately to conceptualise this liberation by failing to see the body as ideologically produced.⁴²

In other words, modernist avant-gardist practices still assumed a kind of essentialized body, which, if liberated (often understood as liberation from a particular script or text), could somehow be stripped of overlaying social codes. With what he sees as the failure of modernist practices Auslander, therefore, argues for resistant forms of performance that retain a degree of reflexivity, remain at the level of the superficial, the surface, whilst somehow avoiding a reification of the very surfaces they present.⁴³ Taking his stance into consideration the performances in *Crash*, at one level, could well be seen as resistant, in that there is a definite emphasis on the body whilst not denying the very literal impact of social conditioning. However, given that these performances are filmed (which suggests some form of reification is likely to be taking place) it is probably more accurate to say that the characters in *Crash* can be seen, paradoxically, as attempting a resistive practice through their literal embrace of the cyborgization process.

Rebecca Schneider, in her book *The Explicit Body in Performance*, talks of the way in which certain performance artists appear to 'render the symbolic literal'.⁴⁴ She goes on to say that this, effectively, 'confuses the space between the symbolic and literal reading, and in so doing it both plays with and questions dominant habits of comprehension'.⁴⁵ Throughout her book she is looking at examples of performance artists who, rather than widening the gap between signifier and signified have a tendency of 'making "the gap" [...] apparent by

⁴² Auslander, p.91.

⁴³ Auslander, p.85.

⁴⁴ 'Introduction', (Routledge, 1997), p.2.

⁴⁵ Schneider, p.2.

provoking its implosion across the visceral space of their own bodies'.⁴⁶ She suggests that this use of literality:

Disrupt[s] and make[s] apparent the fetishistic prerogatives of the symbolic by which a thing, such as a body or a word, stands by convention for something else. To render literal is to collapse symbolic space [...] it is to pose [...] a "direct threat" to the naturalised social drama of "comprehensibility". To render literal is also to interrogate the notion that relations between sign and signified are fundamentally arbitrary. Denying the arbitrary, a notion at the very base of modernist and capitalist sensibilities of abstraction and meaning, invites a kind of hysteria, or psychosis of the overly real.⁴⁷

So, unlike a Brechtian approach, which widens the space/gap between player/performance, and unlike certain forms of 'naturalistic' acting in which deeper levels of meaning are played out within the performance, these artists, if I may borrow a phrase from Schneider, 'make the latent blatant'. Schneider also goes to some lengths to stress that the bodies of the performers in question should not be considered as in any way essentialized but remain immersed and entangled within systems of representation - this 'making literal' does not, therefore, divorce them from discursive systems of representation but draws attention to the reality effects of the symbolic.

Schneider's analyses (most obviously in terms of a literalization tactic amongst certain performance artists) can be affiliated to the kind of postmodern aesthetic mentioned at the outset of this discussion. There is a great sense here of a play with surfaces - a play that may ridicule certain metaphors and analogies whilst not denying their power as conveyers of meaning. Certainly, in a comparative reading of *Crash* with some of the mainstream movies discussed in earlier chapters, it could be said that the film distils ideas that remain more latent in other Cyborg films and makes literal the effect of these ideas across the bodies of the performers involved. Of course, the representation of the cyborgization process in *Crash*, as compared to films like *The Terminator*, *Robocop*, *Universal Soldier*, the melding of the human with the machine in this film, is far 'messier' than the relatively 'clean' images presented in the three former examples. Also, in these popular mainstream films, the process of unification with the machine is largely articulated via the central and boundaried body of

⁴⁶ Schneider, p.23.

⁴⁷ Schneider, p.6.

the cyborg. In other words, these images could be said to present the viewer with a kind of re-unification whereas the characters in *Crash* seem to be bound up in a constant process of change and alteration in which their bodies are seen to be more vulnerable and more fragmented. For instance, even if a comparison is made between the now famous shot of Arnold Schwarzenegger's muscled body framed against a Los Angeles skyline (in the opening sequences of *The Terminator*) and the scene in which Ballard's newly disabled body can be seen, on his balcony, looking out across the motorways of the city, then it becomes evident that the bodies at the centre of these two shots are very different. Ballard, although the relatively safe observer of all he purveys, can hardly be seen as a similar figure to that of the strong and masterful Terminator. Ballard's cyborgization does not make of him a macho, armoured, hyper-masculine figure, like the Terminator; instead his newly disabled body is revealed as vulnerable and only enabled through the medical and mechanical technologies that, at this point, maintain its tenuous coherence.

The cyborgs of my mainstream examples (certainly those that are marked as male/masculine) are, on the whole, fully formed. The process of their formulation has generally occurred prior to the opening of the narrative, outside of the frame of the film, or is indicated in brief montage passages - the process of formulation is not, therefore, the main focus of the film. This can, of course, be accounted for simply in terms of the films' release dates - the earlier Cyborg movies (as discussed in the opening chapter) seemed largely bound up with an attempt to recuperate a bounded and defensive form of masculinity. The figuration of a singular usually well muscled and ultra directed cyborg body could be taken to be a visual illustration of these ideas. Later, toward the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, a more 'fluid' notion of the cyborg emerged, (as has been discussed in the case of the T1000 in *Terminator 2*). However, these images were often recuperated in a setting up of one kind of cyborg against another (in a drama of good versus evil), in which the earlier form survived whilst the latter was destroyed. In *Crash*, although similarities can be drawn to the depiction of cyborgs in those earlier films (for example, in terms of how the characters appear obsessively driven) the audience is given little opportunity for comparison with alternative characterizations, or, indeed, performance stylizations: in *Crash* the viewer is immersed in a world in which, with the possible exception of the Car Salesman (who features in only one

scene and whose authenticity is questionable due to his sales role), all participants are working toward a sexualised synthesis with the machine. This, of course, removes the possibility of a good/evil drama and may, in part, account for the apparent lack of moral positioning in this film.

So, in *Crash* the cyborgization process is revealed in startlingly literal terms as the bodies of the performers become not only associated with, but literally entangled with, the technological bodies of the cars. Of course, there is a sense in much recent performance art in which the frame marking off the activities of the artist from reality is disrupted - not simply because their bodies are often the raw material used in the creative process but also in the sense that their work relies on strong links to their actual, their lived, lives. For example, many of the artists mentioned in Schneider's book can be understood to be re-playing roles they have 'played', or continue to perform, in reality. One of the better known artists, discussed by Schneider, is Annie Sprinkle, whose work can be regarded as a kind of extension of her role as prostitute and pornographer. As a prostitute, as both seller and commodity, Sprinkle has previously taken up a role which emphasises the way in which the sexual act can be understood to conflate the subject/object positioning of the participants involved. In a similar fashion, the cyborgized actants in *Crash* can be seen as both subjects and objects, which not only speaks to the way in which performance pervades the lives of these characters but also introduces levels of contingency largely by suggesting that there is a certain performativity inherent in their acts. In other words, these are not the slave subjects of a mechanised and industrialised world (as can be witnessed in a film like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* [1926]) nor are they the contentedly serviced and compliant subjects of a technologized environment that provides for their every need (as can be seen in the similarly 'blank' or underplayed performances witnessed in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968]) but are active participants within a technological world. In some respects, it is this very activity, taking place as it does in that liminal space *between* the technological and the human that marks these characters as cyborgs: they refuse to be separated from their environment, they are not marked apart from it, as are many of the characters in previous Science Fiction movies. Perhaps, this further suggests that their environment has encouraged them, allowed them, to become performers (with the literal and the figurative also

compounded here). This is foregrounded, in particular, through Vaughan's use of photography and both documentary and fiction film footage in the creation of his 'projects'; in recording or re-playing events the characters can be said to become performers and directors in their own lives. Aside from the reference here to the way in which recent ocular technologies may create a panoptic environment in which subjects feel constantly observed (and aside from a foregrounding of filmic self-reflexivity), is the sense in which the characters of *Crash* use their new-found status as performers to actively reinsert themselves into a world which, prior to their crashes, constructed them as passively alienated.

INTERNALIZING PERFORMANCE

Given my earlier comments concerning an association between Existentialism and Performance Art it would seem that the very title of Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* suggests not only a commenting upon ideas of being human but on how that being comes to be enacted within a technological environment in which what is real and what is simply imagined as real is indeterminable. If the central tenets of Existentialism are understood as bound up with an emphasis on 'individuality' and 'agency' then, in a similar way to *Crash*, it may seem that this film, initially, proposes a model of being human that could be read as totally self-determining - a kind of extreme version of a 'humanistic' project. Jean Paul Sartre (whose name is probably most associated with the philosophy of Existentialism) stated that 'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself'.⁴⁸ Before his conversion to Marxism (which ostensibly came with his writing of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in the early 1960s), Sartre's philosophy emphasised 'subjective' experience as the locus from which arises our understanding of the world and, through self-reflection, an understanding of ourselves. He saw 'man' as the centre of his own universe believing that '*existence* comes before *essence* - or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective'.⁴⁹ He, therefore, rallied against certain of Freud's notions; in particular the idea that individuals are, in some ways, led by

⁴⁸ *Existentialism and Humanism*, Philip Mairet trans., (Methuen, 1948), p.28.

⁴⁹ Sartre, p.26, Sartre's emphases.

unconscious drives and desires that are ultimately pre-given and beyond their control. In connection with this Sartre stated: 'The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion [...] He thinks that man is responsible for his passion'.⁵⁰ In fact, he believed that Freud's formulation of the unconscious was entirely false and that, 'blaming', or explaining, human actions in terms of unconscious or original drives is simply an act of 'bad faith' (this, basically, being a kind of lie that an individual, within the boundaries of their own consciousness makes to themselves in order to escape the responsibility of freedom).⁵¹ In talking of his ideas of an 'existential psychoanalysis' he stated that it 'rejects the hypothesis of the unconscious; it makes the psychic act coextensive with consciousness'.⁵² So, for Sartre, the reasons for a particular behaviour, or choice, could be ascertained, consciously, by the subject (notably this equation omits an outside analyst in its emphasis on self-analysis) and, in this regard, he went on to state: 'We are not dealing with an unsolved riddle as the Freudians believe; all is there, luminous; reflection is in full possession of it, apprehends all'.⁵³

Taking these comments into consideration, and seeing Sartre's formulations alongside the Freudian paradigm, there is a sense here in which what were previously believed to be deep seated instincts/drives are rising to the surface in Sartre's account - in some respects, he seems to level out Freud's depth modelling of subjectivity. By discounting deterministic structures Sartre believed that human beings are, ultimately, left with a freedom to choose; to make conscious decisions, for which they are responsible.

Sartre also renounced the notion of a God (all-powerful and overseeing), perhaps implying that man was his own God. However, he did not discount the notion of a certain form of transcendence but stated that this was 'not in the sense that God is transcendent', rather, linked to a kind of striving in which man projects himself into the future; in which 'man is

⁵⁰ Sartre, p.34.

⁵¹ Reference can be made to chapter 2, 'Bad Faith', *Being and Nothingness*, (Routledge, 2000 - 1st ed. 1943), pp.47-70.

⁵² Sartre, p.570.

⁵³ Sartre, p.571.

thus self-surpassing [...] he is himself the heart and centre of his transcendence'.⁵⁴ He went on to say:

This is humanism, because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also because we show that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realisation, that man can realise himself as truly human.⁵⁵

This may sound as though the Existentialist philosophy, as proposed by Sartre, does not account for any limiting factor in the making of individual 'choice' but, as David A. Jopling points out, Sartre's later work looked at the way in which these freedoms operate within the bounds of certain human limits (in recent years these limits have been explained in terms of our biochemical, neurological, and even more recently, genetic make-ups). As Joplin puts it: 'This means that we are free to choose who (but not what) we are'.⁵⁶ As Joplin goes on to explain, in his interpretation of Sartre's work, the transcendental creative force, that appears to be the source (or perhaps, I would argue, it would be more accurate to say 'sign') of human agency, enables the individual to determine their own identity. This making of 'man' as their own personal project, is, however, to be understood as having an holistic element, in Sartre's later work, in that it does not discount our relation to others and to the material world.

As will become apparent in the following readings of the film, much of this Existential philosophy has resonance with the performances and subject matter of *eXistenZ*. However, it may be that choosing 'who we are' is not the only freedom open to us any more, as cyborgian technologies increasingly promise us choice in terms of 'what we are'. Sartre likened our capacity to formulate our own identities to the creation of an artwork, to the relationship between the conscious artist and their material, but in *Crash* the characters can be read as using their own bodies to shape their identities. Therefore, the divide between artist and material is conflated but the way in which this is articulated is shown to be consciously achieved by the actants. In a sense, by bringing this existential component into play,

⁵⁴ Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ Sartre, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁶ 'Sartre's Moral Psychology', *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, Christina Howells ed., (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.105.

Cronenberg highlights a clashing of deterministic elements/notions with existential freedom. In *Crash*, although analysis of the performances is very revealing, this is largely played out in bodily terms. In *eXistenZ*, however, whilst Cronenberg makes use of bodily imagery to suggest a certain holistic notion of the human being, the focus is mainly placed upon the psychological aspects of this clashing.

Certainly, the kind of Virtual Reality technology referred to in *eXistenZ* (both as it exists now and how it is imagined to exist in the future), has been discussed by various theorists in ways that suggest that it offers a greater degree of individual agency to the user - as though Virtual Reality inherently allows for a playing out of the kind of subjectivity Sartre postulated. However, in her account of the politics underlying the popular publication *Mondo 2000* (an American periodical that provides commentary and information on the latest happenings in 'cyberspace'), Vivian Sobchack comments that it 'implicitly resolves the sixties' countercultural "guerrilla" political action and social consciousness with a particularly privileged, selfish, consumer-oriented, and technologically dependent libertarianism...the liberation politics touted in the pages of *M2* are the stuff of romantic, swashbuckling, irresponsible individualism'.⁵⁷ Her assessment, whilst noting the supposed agency allowed by Virtual Reality technologies, continues, in this vein, to critique the individualist (and, according to Sobchack, masculinist) extremities of the publication's vision of this 'new world'. So it would seem that although Virtual Reality, certainly as described in this publication (and, I would say that this is still prevalent in many of the discourses surrounding Cyberspace), may allow for the expression of a self-determining subjectivity (of the kind Sartre postulates) it appears to ignore any kind of social responsibility. As Jopling points out, Sartre's ideas of a human freedom operates within the bounds of certain biological and socially constructed limitations, meaning that:

We are free [...] to lay out the ground plan of our way of life, within a range of given determinants and situational constraints. We are also free, within certain bounds, to remake ourselves, and the assumption of alternative ways of life, life plans, and moral outlooks always remains a living option.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ 'New Age Mutant Ninja Hackers: Reading "Mondo 2000"', *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, Mark Dery ed., (Duke University Press, 1993), p.574.

⁵⁸ Jopling, p.105.

However, taking into consideration Sobchack's comments, it would seem that Virtuality is sold as offering an extended form of freedom to the subject that ignores, or does away with, the limits of both biological and social subjectivity. On the other hand, if the dominant, or populist, discourses surrounding Virtual Reality are to be believed perhaps this indicates that 'man', having been given ultimate freedom is, ironically, revealed as 'driven' by basic Freudian drives - namely the sexual libido and the death drive. As Sobchack's account of *M2* makes plain, Virtual Reality is here being sold as playing to those basic drives (if the predominance of violent and sexual imagery in the publication is anything to go by). Of course, this would seem to indicate that the freedoms on offer are at the expense of the female/feminine and that the drives/desires being played to appear to be masculine/male. However, if, these 'drives' are now being articulated in terms that raise them to a conscious level then arguments that naturalise patriarchal power are undermined.

Seen as the latest form of immersive entertainment (as a sort of 'next stage' on from the type of immersion supposedly offered by film - particularly of the mainstream, Hollywood variety) then Virtual Reality is often sold on the basis of how the audience/player is 'now' able to interact with the world on offer. But, as will become evident, this association with a 'free willed' form of individuality is also complicated by the film's narrative and various moments when the 'players' individual agency, or at least, their assessments of their own power to control events, is brought into question. Therefore, the title could also be read as a kind of ironic commenting upon 'individualism', in a revealing of just how controlled and constructed being human (or the enactment of human being) has become. Further still, perhaps the rather heavy handed 'openness' of the ending of the film is meant to indicate that agency does, indeed, lie with the audience; in that it is finally up to the audience of the film to decide what is diegetically real and what is not. Of course, in this respect, what is foregrounded through the use of this device, in this context, is the way in which this new cyborgian technology makes a lie of older models of humanity; models built on truth and authenticity. I would argue that even though the particular configuration of the melding of human and machine seen in the film does, indeed, challenge those older models it does not simply replace them with other models but, instead, brings to the fore the fictionality at the

heart of humanity's 'model-making' projects. This need not be seen as a nihilistic move but instead as a move that aims to 'chip away' at the core of humanistic ideologies.

The film opens with a scene in which avid and excited 'players' are attending the premier 'tryout' of the eponymous Virtual Reality game. The diegetic audience are introduced to the game's creator, Allegra Geller (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh), who announces that 'eXistenZ is not just game'; after which several volunteers are chosen to 'product test' the alternative reality on offer. Each player is plugged into a gaming 'pod' (a fleshy computer, resembling some kind of inner organ, built from organic material) via an 'umbycord' which is 'jacked' into the players' 'bioports' (a surgically created 'anus-like' hole) which allows for connection directly into the human nervous system. Just as the game is apparently about to start a protester makes an attempt on Allegra's life and, in the process, injures her 'pod', containing the only master copy of the game. Allegra, thus, goes on the run with only a young and inexperienced security guard, called Ted Pikul (played by Jude Law), for protection. Having discovered the injury to the pod Allegra decides that the damage can only be assessed by playing the game and persuades Pikul to enter this virtual world with her. Pikul, being an apparent novice, having never undergone the 'bioport' operation, agrees and, as the game proceeds, it becomes increasingly difficult for players and audience to detect what is meant to be understood as 'real' and what is actually taking place in the gaming world. Even the central characters' own actions are brought into question when each professes to be overtaken by the actions necessary to the role they play within the game scenario. In other words, although the trajectory of the game is dependent upon who is playing (due to the pod's access to the memories and supposed desires of each player) there is a sense in which the standard roles, and characterizations, set up within the various scenarios, meld with individual players. For example, at one point, Pikul claims to be shocked by his own words and actions - whereupon, Allegra informs him that this is due to his 'character set up' and explains that certain dramatic turns are required of him to 'advance the plot'. In an obvious reference to the function of characters within a classic Realist film, it is assumed that 'action will spring primarily from *individual characters as causal agents*'.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, *Film Art*, (Fourth Edition), (McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), p.82, Bordwell and Thompson's emphases.

As the game progresses Pikul continues to declare his amazement at his own actions and this reaches a climax when he admits to an urge to murder an oriental waiter. Allegra's response, at this moment, is to inform Pikul that 'It's a genuine game urge - something your game character was born to do'. Later Pikul exclaims: 'Free will is obviously not a big factor in this little world of ours' - to which Allegra responds: 'It's like real life - there's just enough to make it interesting'. The confusion that all this sets up for player and audience alike spirals until, at the end of the film, a member of the diegetic audience, when facing his apparent death, asks if they are still in the game.

In his book, *Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace*, Douglas Rushkoff describes his meeting with a number of young 'gamers' (they are reportedly in their 20s) in New Jersey.⁶⁰ He says of these players that they 'live the way they play, and play as a way of life'. Rushkoff goes on to describe the type of 'fantasy role playing game' (known as FRPs), in which they are involved; which could be understood as a forerunner to the type of FRPs now played on the internet or via 'game consoles'. Rushkoff states that players must behave according to their 'character profile'. The game has no set rules but merely acts as an 'interpretative grid' within which the players improvise (in a similar way to an acting exercise). The object of the game is not only 'to keep their characters alive' but also to create entertainment largely by 'getting into trouble and then trying to get out again'.⁶¹ The players are, therefore, encouraged to create a number of dramatic (often adversarial) situations in which they can, ostensibly, work through their character. Rushkoff goes on to describe how these players appear to have extended their experiences of the gaming world to encompass their actual lives (something that he describes as a 'designer reality') and he comments that, to these players, 'everything on the explicit order is a game - arbitrarily arranged and decided. [The players] have adopted the cyberian literary paradigm into real life'.⁶² The literary paradigm he is primarily referring to is that set up in the Cyberpunk novels of the 1980s and Rushkoff goes on to state that 'Fantasy role-playing served as a bridge between the stories of cyberpunk and the reality of lives in Cyberia' (throughout his book he uses

⁶⁰ Chapter 15, 'Playing Roles', (Flamingo, 1994).

⁶¹ Rushkoff, pp.243-244.

⁶² Rushkoff, p.251.

'Cyberia' as a term which appears to refer to both reality and fantasy).⁶³ So, in a similar way to Sobchack's analysis of a certain 'cyberian discourse', Rushkoff's account indicates the degree to which Virtual Reality and, in particular, virtual game worlds have not only been understood to offer up a libertarian freedom but, as he also suggests, somewhat paradoxically, 'the ethos of these fictional worlds' and the performed behaviour that ensues from the playing of these games, can actually become the reality that the player lives by. It could, therefore, be said that the players 'internalize' their performances to such an extent that they become their game characters. On the other hand, of course, it could also be that the game itself simply acts as a mechanism through which the players can disavow certain of their own 'urges', desires and even actions.

Howard Rheingold takes up the idea that players within a Virtual Reality environment are, indeed, prone to 'internalize' various traits of the characters they take on within a given world. Rheingold, like Rushkoff, is focusing on a similar type of fantasy game scenario - only these are played on the Internet and are known as MUDs. He goes on to describe them as:

Multi-User Dungeons - imaginary worlds in computer databases where people use words and programming languages to improvise melodramas, build worlds and all the objects in them, solve puzzles, invent amusements and tools, compete for prestige and power, gain wisdom, seek revenge, indulge greed and lust and violent impulses...kill - or die.⁶⁴

Rheingold also claims that users 'testify passionately that the feelings they have about their characters and worlds are real to them, and often quite intense'.⁶⁵ By drawing upon a number of critics and theorists, he goes on to speculate that the media saturated environment of modern living has brought about, what he terms as, a 'social saturation' which has led to an internalising of a vast number of characteristics and roles. In this respect, he states: 'Our selves have become "populated" by many others'.⁶⁶ His assessment here is reminiscent of a popular understanding of a kind of schizophrenic state - giving rise to the notion that several identities reside within the same mind/body. There is a history, particularly in Hollywood's

⁶³ Rushkoff, p.252.

⁶⁴ Chapter 5, 'Multi-User Dungeons and Alternate Identities', *The Virtual Community: Surfing the Internet*, (Minerva, 1994), p.145.

⁶⁵ Rheingold, pp.155-156.

⁶⁶ Rheingold, p.169.

and television's images of the schizophrenic, that has come to explain the dysfunctional mind as severely fragmented - the patient/character is shown to move between alternate identities, unaware of the existence of each. As mentioned in chapter three, there has also been a recent explosion in diagnosed cases of multiple identity (referred to as DID), which may well, in part, reflect current obsessions and anxieties concerning the authenticity of identity. In applying these notions to *eXistenZ* it would seem that the film is dealing with a type of schizophrenia evident in the taking up of the 'character profile', but here the players are largely aware of the process taking place and could be said to embrace the actions/emotions that their introduction excites. For example, toward the ending of the film, after the scene in which they have critiqued their own performances, the lead protagonists are revealed to be assassins sent to kill the creator of the game. This echoes the actions set up at the opening of the film/game and is explained, in a kind of retrospective reading on the part of the audience, by the game within a game scenario. In addition, at this point, the game's creator (Nourish) appears to take on the role of a therapist/analyst in deciding to discuss further the violence shown toward the fictional creator (Geller), during the test run, in their de-briefing session. The creator's comments here suggest that the two leads, having gained entry into the game and proximity to him, were already undercover assassins which, in turn, explains the thrust of the game's narrative (the pods having tapped into, and brought to the surface, the hidden desires of the players). However, this ending, in keeping with the rest of the film, is ambiguous, as an alternative reading might suggest that the two leads were so affected by the game and, having internalized their character profiles, have now *become* undercover agents. Whichever way the ending is read, the Virtual Reality game world on offer can be seen as a plot device that allows for the articulation of diverse character traits within the one person. In this way, the film, whilst referring to schizophrenic characterizations, as commonly depicted in association with Virtual Reality, almost works to de-pathologize a schizophrenic characterization by making it acceptable within the narrative set-up. Therefore, although there is undoubtedly a questioning concerning the authenticity of various identities, the film strangely 'naturalises' this by implying that it is the inevitable outcome of a cyborgian self.

As Claudia Springer has pointed out, in a number of recent films that feature Virtual Reality 'cyberspace is constructed as an instigator of wild instability, and simultaneously as a

therapeutic device to restore conventional order'.⁶⁷ In this sense, it seems that cyberspace could be understood as threatening to conventional ideas of a fixed or unified identity but, in the mainstream films that Springer cites, she notes how this threat is contained through an 'asserting [of] the primacy of "the real", of restoring or attaining an identity that exists "outside" of the electronic arena'. She goes on to comment: 'This is an essentialist resolution that hinges on the assumption that an individual is defined by a single true subjectivity'.⁶⁸ Of particular interest is her reading of *Johnny Mnemonic* in which she states that 'the film takes Johnny from fragmentation to unification, and defines the process only in conventional terms of a resolution of the oedipal crisis and attainment of heterosexual romance'.⁶⁹ What Springer succeeds in pointing out here is the way in which a traditional, depth modelling of the authentic self wins out against the threat of the post-humanist, postmodern, subjectivity as played out, and contained, within the cyber-technologies featured in these films. It is notable that the performance given by Keanu Reeves in *Johnny Mnemonic* (as previously discussed in chapter one) is highly reminiscent of those seen in *Crash* (in the sense that subtextual enactings are avoided, giving a sense of vacancy) but this is explained, in the narrative, by Johnny's 'dumping' of long term memory in order to make room for his implants. The inference here is that Johnny is cut off from his own inner drives (those associated with the psychoanalytic model) and is left totally reliant on a technological environment to guide his actions. It is therefore only when he regains his authentic/psychoanalytic self that he regains his real freedom. In *Johnny Mnemonic* then the psychoanalytic assumptions of the true human being remain largely unquestioned. The divide between the real and unreal world being upheld, seems to equate here to the annexing of alternative forms of human being to the realm of the fantastic and the unreal - it is as though the imagining of alternative forms of subjectivity is not allowed to impact upon the 'real' human subject but is confined within a virtual realm. In comparison, it would seem that the Virtual Reality technology in *eXistenZ* is constructed in a more progressive and questioning way than it is in *Johnny Mnemonic*. An earlier film, not discussed by Springer in this article, is also worth a comparative mention at this point. The narrative of *Total Recall* (Dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1990) is reminiscent of the

⁶⁷ 'Psycho-Cybernetics in Films of the 1990s', *Alien zone II: The spaces of Science Fiction*, Annette Kuhn ed., (Verso, 1999), p.206.

⁶⁸ Springer, pp.214-215.

⁶⁹ Springer, p.213.

closing moments of *eXistenZ*; by the end of the film the Schwarzenegger character is so affected by his memory implants (which could be read alongside the 'character profiles' of *eXistenZ*) that he chooses to retain the implanted identity. However, in this film our protagonist simply replaces one unified and fixed identity with another. The various identities that he plays out in the film are kept separate and, although he reaches an awareness of their existence, do not impact upon his final sense of self - which, once again, is signalled in the attainment of heterosexual romance.

The immersive aspects of the game world can be understood as having encouraged the internalization of various aspects of a character profile and throughout *eXistenZ*, in a similar manner to *Crash*, there are constant references to films and film performance. The character profiles are thereby likened to familiar stereotypes in film genres and even the progression of the game is, albeit ironically, associated with standard, generic plots. For instance, in a scene in which Pikul has had an illegal bioport implanted, the mechanic who fitted this turns on Allegra, claiming that her dead body is worth millions to an underground movement. Allegra attempts to talk him out of killing her by saying: 'Do you really expect them to hand over five mil. cash...don't you ever go to the fucking movies'. To which, the mechanic, called Gas (played by Willem Dafoe), replies: 'I like your script - I want to be in it'. It is as though Allegra attempts to take back control of the narrative by indicating what the outcome of his actions are likely to be - as though the game plan were analogous to a standard movie plot. This strategy fails because the character playing Gas reverses her logic by indicating his willingness to be a part of this plot - to fulfil his character's function simply in order that he have a part, that he become involved. It could be assumed that had he succeeded in killing her he would also have become a more central character in the unfolding story - but, as it is, he fails and is therefore left behind as the narrative continues to follow Allegra and Pikul. At this point it becomes evident that the players/characters are, in fact, vying for control of the narrative - as though each desired a larger and more central role in the game. This is, of course, not dissimilar to the kind of game play that both Rheingold and Rushkoff discuss in the FRPs and MUDs. Rushkoff implies that the organiser of the FRP group he interviews is, in fact, in control of the game's trajectory (it is his story) when he comments that he is

‘unable, it seems, to accept a role in life other than “Gamemaster”’.⁷⁰ Further to the issues of control and power evident in MUDs, Rheingold notes how ‘[g]aining the power to modify the environment in which the game takes place is a primary goal for newcomers’ in these Virtual worlds.⁷¹ It is as though the players of the FRPs and MUDs wanted more than simply to function as actants within these world - their goal appears to be the attaining of a kind of omniscience analogous, perhaps, to the director of a film (or the kind of formal omniscience assumed by many a classic realist, Hollywood, narrative film). If *eXistenZ* is foregrounding this element of the role-play game then it seems that authorship is the real goal of the players. However, authorship is shown to be an illusive prize in the film because the degree of interaction allowed by the game means that ultimate control over the narrative’s progression is in a constant process of being fought over. The intentions of the characters, their motivations, along with their functions, cannot, it seems, be read accurately even by the game’s creator (Yevgeny Nourish).

Just prior to exiting the game, there is a scene in which opposing activists seem locked into a battle situation. As the main couple stands on a nearby hillside the audience see them framed against the explosions and fires created by the warring factions. During this confusing fracas, shouts are heard: ‘Death to Realism’. This is followed by another character stating ‘You can see everything from up here - the victory of Realism’. The battle for control over the narrative, and by extension the ‘interpretative grid’ by which the real is understood, is literally taking place at the end of this game. Allegra’s and Pikul’s position on the hilltop simply mirrors the supposed position of authority posited by the omnipotent narrator/viewer, so common within filmic Realism. It is as though they were being tempted by this seemingly God-like position/perspective to accept the truth of what they are being told but, as becomes apparent, the twists and turns of the story do not end here and the audience is led back to a more multi-perspectival understanding.

⁷⁰ Rushkoff, p.253.

⁷¹ Rheingold, p.149.

To a degree, the possibility of a multi-perspectival approach is displayed in the scene immediately following the 'product test'. As mentioned in my opening comments, this is the section of the film when performance is most obviously brought to the fore and, interestingly, it is really the only scene in which there is an assumption of sub-textual undercurrent; this is signalled largely, in a contrast to the rest of the film, by an insistence on a kind of awkward, or overly polite, etiquette amongst the characters. Although this could be read as signalling that the players have now dropped their performances, this awkwardness also implies that the characters, having exited the game, are now veiling their desires in their interaction with the other players. Rather ironically then, their social performances come to seem rather stilted and unreal. During the scene, the game's designer and his female assistant chair a discussion session in which the players comment on their experience of the game and their own performances within it. All the players sit on a platform, in a semicircle, and rather self-consciously go through a process of self-criticism (almost as though this were a 'director's notes' session which is common in late rehearsal periods of a play). Notably, the player who undertook the role of Gas, within the game, comments: 'I was really bummed out at first - I got knocked out of the game so soon'. But this is soon followed by another player's commendation of his performance and there is a round of tentative applause, which appears to both embarrass and appease him. Another player then states: 'I sucked - but you guys (referring to Allegra and Pikul) were great - you were like game divas. Personally I think you both deserve to win'. This young player seems to elide the quality of their performances with their ability to compete within the gaming scenario - once again, bringing to the fore the competitive element within the game and implying a hierarchy in the perceived importance of the characterizations undertaken (and, by extension, a hierarchy in the power wielded by those characterizations). Having said that, it is still notable that the young player feels that both Allegra and Pikul deserve to have won - signalling a possible move away from the idea of a single winner (although they could be read as the 'heterosexual coupling' necessary to restore order and to bring a Hollywood narrative to closure). A further elision is implied in Nourish's comments when he responds to Allegra's admission 'the game picked up on my ambition to be like you' in allowing her the role of, what she terms, the 'star designer'. Nourish appeases Allegra by saying: 'you were so good in that role that I suspect it won't be long before Pilgrimage [the game manufacturer] is after you to sign a design contract'. His

comments suggest that her very performance of the role necessarily indicates that she can take on this position in reality. Certainly, these kinds of comments could well be understood in conjunction with the Method style of acting, in the sense that the game taps into the players' 'emotional memory' and can therefore be seen as displaying certain aspects of their 'self'. However, the degree of self-reflexivity employed by the players, as apparently displayed in this scene, also suggests a greater degree of contingency and a conscious play in their performances. In other words, whilst the game allows for the 'playing out' of a Freudian model of subjectivity (the game bringing to the surface the unconscious desires of the players) this is foregrounded as framed both within the fictional world of the game and, by extension, the fictional world of the film; the Freudian model therefore comes to be bound up with narrative and character construction rather than being understood as authentic.

Richard Schechner, in his tracking of a movement away from Humanism in performance, argues that, in these postmodern times, 'the domain of theatre is not, as Stanislavski thought, psychology, but behaviour',⁷² and perhaps this statement may lead to a more accurate 'characterising' of what the players of the game seem to be experiencing. In saying this, in similar respects to my reading of the performances in *Crash*, I am not denying referentiality is built in (particularly to Realism and the central tenets of the Method style); simply that a further reading is possible by bringing into play more recent performance theory. For instance, Schechner's comments above also marry well with what is known of Willem Dafoe's performance practices and career. Philip Auslander, in a discussion of Dafoe's close association with a performance collective, known as The Wooster Group, notes how their productions are not so much based on character enactments but 'performance personae'. He describes how The Wooster Group's personae 'occupy an ambiguous territory, neither "non-matrixed" performing nor "characterization"' in which it becomes difficult for an audience to detect what is performed and what is genuine.⁷³ Auslander describes how, for Dafoe,

⁷² 'The Crash of Performative Circumstances', *The End of Humanism: Writings on Performance*, (Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), p.111.

⁷³ 'Task and Vision: Willem Dafoe in LSD', *Acting (RE)Considered: Theories and Practices*, (Routledge, 1995), p.306. By 'non-matrixed' he is referring to a model of acting created by Michael Kirby. Kirby suggests a kind of continuum of acting, in which he maps 'not acting' onto 'non-matrixed' performance and, at the other end of the scale, 'complex acting' onto 'matrixed' performance. An account of his model can also be found in *The End of Humanism*, under the title 'On Acting and Not Acting', pp.43-58.

'performance is essentially a task, an activity: the persona he creates is the product of his own relation to the "paces" he puts himself through in the course of an evening'.⁷⁴ These performances are, according to Auslander, very self-reflective, with the result that the acting processes are de-mystified and, at the same time, the separation between role, person performing and performing person is blurred. This type of configuration arises from, as Auslander states: 'The Multiple, divided consciousness produced by doing something with the knowledge that it is being observed, while simultaneously observing oneself doing it'.⁷⁵ It seems that although tentative links can be made between the Wooster Group's practices and the Stanislavskian/Method approach (namely the emphasis on the 'self' of the performer in the production of performance), as Auslander goes on to elaborate:

The creation of persona from self results in a measure of self-understanding, although both process and product are bound by the idea of performance: persona as performing self/understanding of oneself as performer.⁷⁶

What seems evident from his comments, apart from the way in which the performances are, simultaneously, a display of the processes in coming to those same performances, is the way the Wooster performances stress a kind of therapeutic element in which the act of performance does not lose its connection to the assumption of psychological underpinnings. However, there are marked differences between this approach and the Method; not the least of which is the way in which each performer seems to become their own director/analyst. This is not to say that the Wooster performances are without formal structure, simply that this structure is more 'task' than character driven. Therefore, the individual performers have a 'function' but this arises dynamically from their interaction with the group members rather than from a script or single author. In fact Auslander makes an interesting comment concerning any semblance of characterization in the Wooster pieces, stating: 'There were characters, but so slightly delineated as to function almost as "subtext"'.⁷⁷ Of course, Auslander's perception of an 'underlying characterization' could simply have arisen from his own imposing of formal traditions upon the performances but, more interestingly, what his comments here suggest is a kind of tension between residual elements of a humanist

⁷⁴ Auslander, p.307.

⁷⁵ Auslander, p.307.

⁷⁶ Auslander, pp. 309-310.

⁷⁷ Auslander, p.306.

paradigm of self and an emerging multicentricity. For example, Auslander explains that, having demystified the technical processes of acting ‘the central issue of mediation, of what intervenes between performer and audience, is raised’.⁷⁸ So, one way of viewing this mediation, I would suggest, is in terms of a questioning of the very paradigms by which human nature is understood. In applying some of this extra-textual knowledge to *eXistenZ* it could be said that this ‘mediation’ is foregrounded in the film. Of course, in the film it is the Virtual Reality technology which becomes the literal mediator, on a number of levels, and whilst the players are shown to embrace its ‘freedoms’ they are also shown to be in a process of negotiation between the new and the old: ‘winning’ may be associated with the old order but ‘playing’ seems to be the emergent feature. If winning is associated with a humanist hierarchy then play, in this context, can be associated with multicentricity.

Schechner discusses the emergence of a multicentric order, in his writings on postmodern subjectivity, when he states that this is one of the qualities bound up with our recent adaptation to the ‘modern period’. He goes on to describe how this emerging paradigm displays itself and how it impacts upon our subjective natures in saying that;

Because there is no centre there must instead be an order of relations, not a hierarchy or a pyramid or a circle with a centre point, but more like [...] whorls, and constantly shifting but totally interrelated patterns of movements [...] All observations are participations. And all participations are creations.⁷⁹

He also talks of an ‘alternation of flow and reflexivity’ as common to this emerging new sense of subjectivity and goes on to say:

Sometimes we’re in it, sometimes we’re out of it. Even when we’re out of it, we’re in it; and even when we’re in it, we’re out of it watching ourselves in it. A very theatrical way of doing things.⁸⁰

Schechner’s assessment of a postmodern subjectivity here is not only highly reminiscent of the Wooster performances but of what seems to be emerging in *eXistenZ*. It is also interesting that he talks of a ‘parallel integration and elaboration of night brain and day brain’ in his descriptions of a dream workshop that he ran in 1977 and he describes how, through

⁷⁸ Auslander, p.307.

⁷⁹ Schechner, p.120.

⁸⁰ Schechner, p.122.

the experimental exercises, the participants elided the differences between waking and dreaming consciousness.⁸¹ Throughout his description of the workshop there is a similar sense in which, perhaps in the shifting from one paradigm of human psychology to another, the unconscious, the hidden, the deeper levels of human brain activity are brought to the surface.

Throughout the analysis of both *Crash* and *eXistenZ* what has become apparent is a certain play with the older 'depth' formulae of human being and visions of a constantly emerging, surface driven, techno-human. Whilst many of the mainstream Cyborg movies present the viewer with an already constructed/re-embodied version of future subjectivity and lived experience Cronenberg's two films here leave open any sense of a final outcome or finalised state of being. To a large extent, the films' own focus upon performance, along with my analysis of the performances involved, seems to allow for more contingency in the evolution of the techno-body: the performative aspects of performance are here emphasised not in the sense that an older, 'deeper' subjectivity is re-introduced into the realm of the technologically constructed world, but in that a sense of uncertainty and possibility is kept in play. However, like the performance artists described by Schneider, there is no denial of what is predominantly at stake here - namely the dismantling of a male/masculine subjectivity and the phallic power associated with it; the re-mantling of which is but one of the possibilities on offer. In many of the mainstream Cyborg movies of 1980s there was a sense in which technology was posed as the literal threat to not only older concepts of human subjectivity but to human life itself. While this idea is certainly played out in both *Crash* and *eXistenZ* (in *Crash* it seems that the attainment of a cyber-subjectivity ultimately brings about literal death whereas, in *eXistenZ*, it is the retro-realists, associated with a more traditional view of humanity, that threaten death) there is a sense in which a techno-body melding does not necessarily obliterate the human but simply changes what has previously been understood as being human. Certainly Cronenberg appears to borrow from other, now familiar, mainstream models of the Cyborg film (along with some borrowing from Cyberpunk), which can be read as a kind of commenting upon them, but, beyond this, his own performance within the realm

⁸¹ Schechner, p.123.

of the Cyborg movie brings with it some alternative and, perhaps, more interesting visions of living as a human being in this postmodern, technological world.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis I briefly outlined how the figure of the cyborg can be placed against a theoretical and generic background. Although I suggested ways in which the cyborg can be seen as a kind of extension of the robot or android, in Science Fiction, I also stated that it marked quite a departure from these figurations. In terms of what appears to be most at stake in the presentation of the cyborg, its genealogical threads may be more accurately traced back to figures usually associated with the Horror genre. For instance, as was suggested in chapter two, the vampire of Gothic Horror can be seen as an earlier forerunner to the cyborg, due to the way in which both can be understood as composite beings. As Cyndy Hendershot has argued, they can both be seen to represent a return to an earlier 'one-sex' modelling of the body. In her reading of *Blade Runner*, Hendershot goes on to argue that the vampire body, like that of the replicant, undermines 'any belief in clear-cut difference between men and women'.¹ It is this 'clear-cut' division between the male/female, masculine/feminine, that the cyborg disrupts. In the place of portrayals of separate, mechanical, humanoid entities in Science Fiction, the cyborg represents a melding of the mechanical or technological, with the human - thereby threatening further divisions upon which the humanist subject has been built. So the hybrid-cyborg also threatens to disrupt clear-cut divisions based upon racial differences. Although, once again, this disruption may be kept to a minimum in some of the films I discussed in chapter three, the case of the orientalized cyborg proves interesting. In some respects, certainly in terms of representational practices, there is a sense in which a Western experience of contemporary living is displaced upon this figuration. Seen this way, even though these oriental figurations are marked apart in terms of race, they may more thoroughly represent the confusions and complexities allied with the West's experience of technological postmodernity.

As has become apparent throughout this thesis, many Cyborg films appear to go to great lengths to 'contain' the threat that this figuration presents. For example, in chapter one the hyperbolically masculine cyborg can be read as an attempt to shore up the very divides that this figure challenges. Likewise, discussion in chapter two

reveals how gender dichotomies, if hardly affirmed by the cyborg, are reconfigured in terms of gendered generic divides. However, in both these cases it seems that attempts to recoup a dichotomous structuring (at some level) may either be seen as unsuccessful in containing this figuration, or simply serve to reaffirm the extent to which the cyborg contravenes traditional structures/models (on both a microcosmic and macrocosmic level). Perhaps, then, whilst offering a strong challenge to some of the central tenets associated with the Science Fiction genre, the cyborg is simultaneously confined within it? If the celluloid cyborg is thereby seen to speak to emerging postmodern subjectivities then is its potential diffusion held at bay by restricting its depiction to Science Fiction? The cyborg thereby seen as quarantined within a genre which is associated with fantasy and with the future rather than the present. However, as discussed in the introduction and suggested throughout my readings of the films, the cyborg cannot be meaningfully contained in this way either. As Haraway pointed out the cyborg is a 'creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction', and can therefore be recognised as traversing the boundaries of generic fiction.²

In terms of its cinematic portrayal, the cyborg of Science Fiction can be seen to impact upon other figurations, in other filmic genres. Although I have kept most of my intertextual analysis focused upon Science Fiction film, I have also touched upon the way in which this figure may be seen to operate outside of the genre. As far as the last chapter is concerned, apart from the manner in which *Crash* seems to be ambiguously placed within the realms of Science Fiction, this can perhaps best be located in the influence that Cronenberg's work has had upon films outside of the Science Fiction genre. For instance, in chapter four I briefly pointed to the way in which *The Game* can be seen in alignment with both *Crash* and *eXistenZ*. In some ways this may indicate that more radical elements inherent within Cronenberg's work are recuperated here - through a kind of re-working of the themes and images presented in his films. On the other hand, this can also be understood as a kind of dissemination of Cronenberg's cyborgian portrayals - however 'watered down' these images may appear to be in the process, the cyborg seems to have infiltrated other

¹ 'Vampire and Replicant: The One-Sex Body in a Two-Sex World', *Science-Fiction Studies*, V.22, N.67, (1995), 373-398, (p. 337).

filmic genres. In fact, the now familiar trope of the virtual being becoming embodied in the diegetically 'real' world (in films like *Virtuosity* and *Grid Runners*) can be taken as a metaphor for the way in which the cyborg (as a creature enacted within the bounds of a genre most highly associated with the fantastic) is breaking out into realms more easily allied to 'realism' and the 'verisimilar'. This suggests that the figure of the cyborg can currently be seen to stand at the epicentre of shifts in cinematic portrayals. To explore this further reaches outside the bounds of this thesis, but does serve to indicate future areas of research in which the cyborg may be usefully analysed within a broader cinematic framework.

In many respects, the wider implications that this study may indicate has largely been enabled by the focus upon performance and performance theory. In this way I have attempted to locate, within film studies, visions espoused by the likes of Haraway and Hayles; to mark, in more concrete terms, how the figurations from Cyberpunk may be seen to be somewhat literally, as well as figuratively, enacted by the celluloid cyborg. In addition, this approach also underlines just how the study of cyborgian representations can be seen to inform understandings of postmodern subjectivities and human identities. In compiling this thesis I have not sought to rebuild divisions but have actively attempted to dispute and dispel them. In this sense, I have endeavoured to bring to this study a cyborgian approach - one that does not deny existing paradigms but also recognises the mutability of such models.

² Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (Free Association Books, 1991), p.65.

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The Accused (Dir: Jonathan Kaplan, 1988)
Alien (Dir: Ridley Scott, 1979)
Aliens (Dir: James Cameron, 1986)
Alien 3 (Dir: David Fincher, 1992)
Alien Resurrection (Dir: Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997)
All About Eve (Dir: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950)
American Cyborg (Dir: Boaz Davidson, 1992)
Android (Dir: Aaron Lipstadt, 1982)
Apocalypse Now (Dir: Francis Ford-Coppola, 1979)
Arcade (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1994)
Bad Day at Black Rock (Dir: John Sturges, 1955)
Black Belt Jones (Dir: Robert Clouse, 1973)
Blade Runner (Dir: Ridley Scott, 1982)
Basic Instinct (Dir: Paul Verhoeven, 1992)
Cape Fear (Dir: Lee Thompson, 1961)
Cape Fear (Dir: Martin Scorsese, 1991)
Captain Blood (Dir: Michael Curtiz, 1935)
Cat On a Hot Tin Roof (Dir: Richard Brooks, 1958)
The Cell (Dir: Tarsem Duandwar, 2000) .
China O'Brien (Dir: Robert Clouse, 1988)
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Dir: Steven Spielberg, 1977)
Crash (Dir: David Cronenberg, 1996)
Cyberjack (Dir: Robert Lee, 1995)
Cyber Tracker (Dir: Richard Pepin, 1994)
Cyber Tracker 2 (Dir: Richard Pepin, 1995)
Cyborg (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1989)
Cyborg Agent (Dir: Richard Franklin, 1992)
Cyborg 2: Glass Shadow (Dir: Michael Shroeder, 1993)
Cyborg 3 (Dir: Michael Shroeder, 1994)
Cyborg Cop (Dir: Sam Firstenberg, 1994)
Dances with Wolves (Dir: Kevin Costner, 1990)
Demon Seed (Dir: Donald Cammell, 1977)
Devil in a Blue Dress (Dir: Carl Franklin, 1995)
Enter the Dragon (Dir: Robert Clouse, 1973)
Eve of Destruction (Dir: Duncan Gibbins, 1991)
eXistenZ (Dir: David Cronenberg, 1999)
Fatal Attraction (Dir: Adrian Lyne, 1987)
A Fistful of Dollars (Dir: Sergio Leone, 1964)
For a Few Dollars More (Dir: Sergio Leone, 1965)
The Forbidden Planet (Dir: Fred M. Wilcox, 1956)
Ghost in the Machine (Dir: Rachel Talalay, 1993)
The Game (Dir: David Fincher, 1997)
The Godfather (Dir: Francis Ford Coppola, 1971)
The Godfather: Part 2 (Dir: Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)
The Godfather: Part 3 (Dir: Francis Ford Coppola, 1990)
Good Guys Wear Black (Dir: Ted Post, 1979)
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Dir: Sergio Leone, 1966)

Grid Runners (Dir: Andrew Stevens, 1995)
Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (Dir: Stanley Kramer, 1967)
Hardware (Dir: Richard Stanley, 1990)
Heatseeker (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1994)
Indecent Proposal (Dir: Adrian Lyne, 1993)
I Spit On Your Grave (Dir: Meir Zarchi, 1977)
It Came From Outer Space (Dir: Jack Arnold, 1953)
Johnny Mnemonic (Dir: Robert Longo, 1995)
Kickboxer 2 :The Road Back (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1990)
A Kiss Before Dying (Dir: Gerd Oswald, 1955)
A Kiss Before Dying (Dir: James Dearden, 1991)
Knights (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1992)
The Lawnmower Man (Dir: Brett Leonard, 1992)
Lawnmower Man 2: Beyond Cyberspace (Dir: Farhad Mann, 1995)
Lethal Weapon (Dir: Richard Donner, 1987)
Lethal Weapon 2 (Dir: Richard Donner, 1989)
Lethal Weapon 3 (Dir: Richard Donner, 1992)
Lethal Weapon 4 (Dir: Richard Donner, 1998)
Mad Max (Dir: George Miller, 1979)
Mad Max 2 (Dir: George Miller, 1981)
Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome (Dir: George Miller, 1985)
The Magnificent Seven (Dir: John Sturges, 1960)
The Man Who Fell To Earth (Dir: Nicholas Roeg, 1976)
The Matrix (Dir: Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999)
Mean Guns (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1997)
Metropolis (Dir: Fritz Lang, 1926)
Mortal Kombat (Dir: Paul Anderson, 1995)
Nemesis (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1993)
Nemesis 2: Nebula (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1995)
Nemesis 3: Time Lapse (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1996)
Nemesis 4: Cry of Angels (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1996)
The Net (Dir: Irwin Winkler, 1995)
Nikita (Dir: Luc Besson, 1990)
Nineteen Eighty-Four, (Dir: Micheal Radford, 1984)
Now Yoyager (Dir: Irving Rapper, 1942)
Peeping Tom (Dir: Michael Powell, 1960)
The Piano (Dir: Jane Campion, 1993)
Predator (Dir: John McTierman, 1987)
Prototype (Dir: Phillip Roth, 1992)
2001: A Space Odyssey (Dir: Stanley Kubrick, 1968)
Rabid (Dir: David Cronenberg, 1976)
Raging Bull (Dir: Martin Scorsese, 1980)
Rebel Without a Cause (Dir: Nicholas Ray, 1955)
Robocop (Dir: Paul Verhoeven, 1987)
Robocop 2 (Dir: Fred Kershner, 1990)
Robocop 3 (Dir: Fred Dekker, 1992)
Rollerball (Dir: Norman Jewison, 1975)
Romper Stomper (Dir: Geoffrey Wright, 1992)
Scanners (Dir: David Cronenberg, 1980)
The Searchers (Dir: John Ford, 1956)

The Servant (Dir: Joseph Losey, 1963)
Sex, Lies and Videotape (Dir: Steven Soderburgh, 1989)
Shaft (Dir: Gordon Parks, 1971)
Shivers (Dir: David Cronenberg, 1975)
Starman (Dir: John Carpenter, 1984)
Star Trek: The Motion Picture (Dir: Robert Wise, 1979)
Star Trek: The Final Frontier (Dir: William Shatner, 1989)
Star Trek: First Contact (Dir: Jonathan Frakes, 1996)
Star Trek: Generations (Dir: David Carson, 1994)
Star Trek: Insurrection (Dir: Jonathan Frakes, 1998)
Star Trek: The Search for Spock (Dir: Leonard Nimoy, 1984)
Star Trek: Voyage Home (Dir: Leonard Nimoy, 1986)
Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan (Dir: Nicholas Meyer, 1982)
The Stepford Wives (Dir: Bryan Forbes, 1974)
Strange Days (Dir: Kathryn Bigelow, 1995)
A Streetcar Named Desire (Dir: Elia Kazan, 1951)
Streetfighter (Dir: Steven De Souza, 1994)
The Sword and the Sorcerer (Dir: Albert Pyun, 1982)
TC 2000 (Dir: T. J. Scott, 1993)
Techno Sapiens (Dir: Lamar Card, 1994)
The Terminator (Dir: James Cameron, 1984)
Terminator 2: Judgment Day (Dir: James Cameron, 1991)
Tetsuo (Dir: Shinya Tsukamoto, 1989)
That Man Bolt (Dir: Henry Levin, 1973)
Them! (Dir: Gordon Douglas, 1954)
Tomorrow Never Dies (Dir: Roger Spottiswoode, 1997)
Top Gun (Dir: Tony Scott, 1986)
Total Recall (Dir: Paul Verhoeven, 1990)
A Trip to the Moon (Dir: George Méliès, 1902)
Tron (Dir: Steven Lisberger, 1982)
Universal Soldier (Dir: Roland Emmerich, 1992)
Videodrome (Dir: David Cronenberg, 1982)
Virtuosity (Dir: Brett Leonard, 1995)
Westworld (Dir: Michael Crichton, 1973)
The Wild One (Dir: Laslo Benedek, 1953)

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