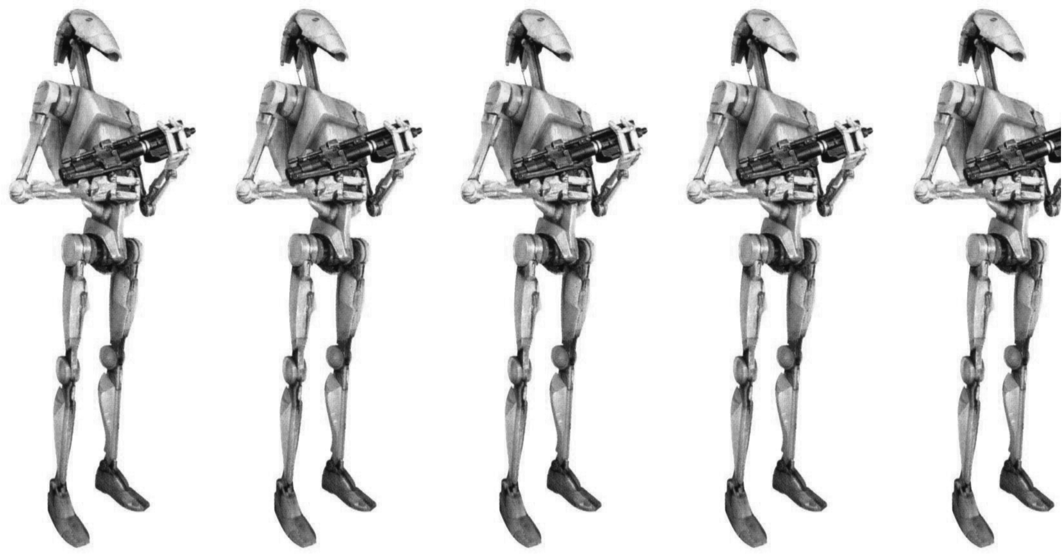

Continuum of the Human

Gretchen Bakke

How better to express the abiding hatred of government, any government, than by sending to Sacramento a robot with a gun?
—Lewis H. Lapham, "Notebook: The Golden Horde"

Why, pray tell, would a robot need to carry a gun? If the gun simply replaced the hand, or was at least integrated into the hand, the hand itself would be a much simpler design project; imagine the finger dexterity necessary for wielding a gun, loading it, aiming it, pulling the trigger. Nor is the phenomenon of a gun-toting metal man limited to the Terminator (from *The Terminator*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*). RoboCop, from the movie with the same title, also carries a gun, which, while holstered inside his right thigh, fails to be integrated in any way into his arm; the same is true of the aptly named "Gunslinger" of *Westworld*.[1] Odder still, all the footmen of the droid army—in the newest generation of *Star Wars* movies (*Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*; *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*; *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*)—also carry guns despite their being extremely simple machines, pared so far

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down that they appear weak, dumb, and disposable. And yet each is armed with a blaster of greater mass than the arm that totes it. In fact, robots, cyborgs, and Hollywood metal men of every sort—soldiers and servants both—almost universally fail to have their sidearms built into their real arms, despite the undeniable practicality of so doing. My initial question in writing this essay was, then: why not? Why would the separability of weaponry and, in many cases, also tools be so vigorously clung to when imagining and depicting future man, regardless of the material, physical substance or bodily shape of that man? And as this investigation gained in both breadth and scope, it became clear that discrete weaponry is only one of many markers in science fiction cinema of a humanness that persists.

Within the rather limited world of Hollywood sci-fi imaginings, a variety of factors—much like the absence of integrated weaponry—consistently indexes human consciousness, human being, human will, and, at the most fundamental level, self-conscious animation or human life. What is perhaps surprising is how often, on closer examination, these elements are *not* those of the physical body converted piecemeal into the machine body; in fact, that story—that of the cyborg or the hybrid human—is more common in scholarship than in the fantastic universes on which it so often relies. This is due, in no small measure, to the fact that much current work on cyborgs, while likely to reference cinematic versions of the phenomena, are also concerned with real-world developments in which the machine and the human are merged: from artificial joints to artificial insemination. The integration of technology into the lived experience of being human follows a very different logic than does the same integration when imagined and depicted cinematically—a difference well illustrated by the gun-wielding robot, a machine highly unlikely to be developed by those scientists actively engaged with the project of building a *real* metal man.[2]

In this essay, I take special pains not to confuse the two worlds—that of the cinematic cyborg and that of real-time, medico-scientific progress, even as I recognize that the two can never be fully divorced. This is because, by isolating sci-fi movie man, cer-

tain trends in Hollywood imaginings, and thus real-world shifts in social anxieties and curiosities about what counts as human, come into focus. And these not only pack an impressive punch when unadulterated but also serve to clarify sometimes muddled arguments about processes of cyborgization that blend what is possible in the realm of imagination, computer graphics, and prosthesis with what today's scientists and engineers are capable of (or even interested in) assembling in the lab. Unlike the diversity within and debates surrounding those scientific practices, in film, the rules for recognizing man and distinguishing the humanness of entities are, in fact, remarkably consistent across the multiple imaginary worlds of Hollywood sci-fi action cinema; the director, plotline, even genre (horror, action/adventure, comedy, drama) have little impact on the patterned regularity of elements and the standardized junctures between them that have, over the past thirty years, become a recognizable continuum of the human.

In this essay, then, I will sketch a map of the degrees and junctures of future man, less to posit or confirm the emancipatory possibilities of cyborg-as-metaphor and more as a means of mapping the ways in which conceptualizations of what counts as human have changed over time. And they have to a remarkable degree. These shifts are clearly articulated within the patterns of narrative, casting, dialogue, and filmic strategy in the past three decades of sci-fi movie making and are, I argue, reflective of what can and cannot count (or even register) as a human within American culture considered more generally. Thus, instead of treating the cyborg as allegory, I will look at how the Human, in the most expansive sense of the term, is made manifest in perhaps unexpected ways;[3] I will speak of spaceships and colored lights; of missing noses, missing heads, and missing suicides; of belly slashes and what goes into (and comes out of) them; of good and of evil; of right hands severed and left arms rebuilt, each of these a marker across the span of the human, who is no less exigent for being imagined. This is the story of man, though woman will enter into it, as he has developed on the screen and for all the world to see over the past three decades.

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Introducing the Human

Deleuzian becoming, as others have pointed out (Gilles Deleuze not the least among them), is the norm in the world of science fiction cinema.[4] The human is always on his way to being something more than human, expanding outward from the bounds of the body (without necessarily rupturing these bounds) until the whole universe in all its infinite—constructed and fictive—detail is representative of him. He is, in essence, that-which-changes, though this change is not always one of growth or internally flowering (or withering away) as is often the case in other cinematic genres. And while the human-becoming of sci-fi cinema is often indexed by physical change, with bits of him chopped off and replaced, interiors revealed and exteriors violated, it is as common that he literally enriches the vast expanse of space with his stuff and his story. Everything—from the color of his light saber to the flora and fauna of an alien planet surface on which he resides—can be (and is) made to represent a quintessential aspect of a particular man expanded into and intertwined with the physical universe he occupies. For example, Darth Vader's Star Destroyer has red propulsion lights in *The Empire Strikes Back* and can in this way be differentiated, without the audience ever becoming consciously aware of the fact, from all the other Star Destroyers with which his is invariably grouped. The hue of a propulsion light on an interstellar transport vehicle is, in this case, expressive of the particularity and single-minded will of one (himself, complexly) "human" passenger.

This rampant anthropomorphism of almost everything should not be misunderstood as a failure of the imagination. The expansion of the human into his environment, his monsters, his robots, and his enemies is a sound technique of narrative enrichment. Every planet and every dark alley that is explored, every being and beastie encountered, every Mack truck and speeder piloted becomes an eddy in the flow of the story until the blank slate of space is sprinkled with the vestiges and traces of the Human causing all the universe to seethe with his story.

This is true to the degree that the multiple universes and cinematic codes of sci-fi action films have become experiments in a total anthropomorphism of space and all that it contains. Pin-

ning down what might be the "molar human" in the midst of the various attenuations, diffusions, and transubstantiations of his film self—that is, differentiating man from his machines, transport devices, weaponry, and ambient environment—is not the straightforward project that one might presume.[5] Nor is it necessarily a fruitful way to approach the issue. The simple human, the unmodified man, does display certain characteristics rare among even his nearest neighbors on the gentle slide to the cyborg. But he is in fact a singular creature, one more often indexed in dreams than fully present. Such a simple human is more likely to serve as the starting or ending point of a narrative sequence, an "ideal type" toward (or away from) which some more complex character is transitioning, than as a character in his own right. The molar human, in short, tends to be what is left when superhuman strength, agility, stamina, speed, dexterity, beauty, and so on are subtracted from the superhuman or when machinic addendums are removed from the cyborg. Lieutenant Del Spooner (Will Smith) of *I, Robot*, the savior of the city/world, was just a regular cop before the accident that resulted in his entire left arm being robotized. Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), the man, is Luke Skywalker, the Jedi, minus the artificial right hand. Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn)—the protector designate of Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) in *The Terminator*, as well as her erstwhile lover and father to the savior of humanity—was everything the Terminator was not; he was weak, woundable, capable of distraction; he grew cold and hungry; he was in possession of hope; and he was capable of love and self-sacrifice.

The unadulterated human, that is to say, is much like us—the dreamers and witnesses of cinematic spectacle, replete with weaknesses and embroiled in the petty dramas of real life and, more important, characterized by an absolute dearth of superhuman powers and high-tech add-ons. A pacemaker or a pair of contact lenses simply does not hold a candle to what RoboCop (Peter Weller) has got going on! We, the audience, form the intimate backdrop and the point of contrast to the tales of high-tech becomings and alien animality. Sci-fi movie man, in contrast, is man-becoming; and, beyond this becoming, the human, as such, is a point in narrative time not much lingered on.

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If weakness or non-superhumanness is the trait most likely to characterize the molar human as such, then it is his "seething with story," or the Narrative Capacity of All Things, that marks the far bounds of what might be called "human" life. This life need not "look" human or even, awkward as it may seem, be alive at all; it—like Darth Vader's Star Destroyer—must only be capable of carrying narrative weight. Without story, or narrative capacity, the movie man in all his cinematic complexity and real-world vulnerability simply ceases to exist.[6] What makes the multiple worlds of sci-fi cinema rich, despite these films' lack of attention to the interiority of persons or the development of character, is the fact that this capacity is at times carried by the least likely of objects and characters: witness Johnny Mnemonic (Keanu Reeves), the flattest man on film (even the Terminator has a richer and more accessible inner life than poor Johnny, who dumped his long-term memory in order to free up wetware space in his head for data smuggling). And yet *Johnny Mnemonic* is awash in a world of ideas, innerscapes and implants, info viruses, cold ice, artificial intelligence, cyber animals, and souled computers. It simply *is not* the intricate story of the body-bound being that makes a science fiction movie worth watching. Rather the flotsam and jetsam of setting and story serve to enrich what often appears to be—*and is*—a rather hollow or artificial leading man.[7]

Between these two points—that of pure fleshy vulnerability and that of pure narrative—lie a number of critical junctures, quantum jumps away from the unadulterated man (imperfect human) and toward the machine (the perfect human) or the alien (the perfect inhuman). It is to these junctures and the narratives that thread between them that I now turn my attention.

2001: A Space Odyssey; Enter the Human

The human, as such, is born in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) at the moment that a bone—a tool, a body part—is raised in fury as a weapon: murder committed not with bare primate hands, but with a handheld weapon brought down hard on the head of another,

distinguishing in this moment the future human from the animal he had been. We, the audience, are meant to recognize that weapon-wielding monkey man as us, the first of us, a necessary precursor to all that will follow. The right hand raises the bone; the right hand brings it down hard. Human will and human folly are clearly presented in an animal-becoming-man who is otherwise not immediately *visually* recognizable as "one of us"; he is a precursor until the moment of violent engagement. And though it is this thing that makes a man of him, he is not, it must be noted, a full man. For despite his weapon, his sociality, his independent will, and his maleness, he has no name and no comprehensible spoken language, and his external surface is not smooth (i.e., he is a hairy beast). Thus, to the degree that his killing, and killing by means other than his bare hands, makes him human, the lack of these other things distances him; he is animal-becoming-man, but not yet man himself.

This baptismal (murderous) moment of humanity coming into being in *2001: A Space Odyssey*—the movie that ushered in the genre of the sci-fi epic adventure—is remarkably prescient. Humans, regardless of what form they may come in, kill. No matter how abstracted from a body or condensed into one he may be, human will—that is human "being"—in these films is universally indexed by attempted murder. *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s HAL 9000 (Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer), despite having no humanoid body, kills. SkyNet, of the Terminator films, kills. The Monkey-man kills; Alien kills; Reese kills; Sonny of *I, Robot* kills; RoboCop kills; Luke Skywalker kills; C-3PO kills; even kid-bot David from *Artificial Intelligence: AI* kills. Even if recognizable by no other means, entities in these films are universally indexed as Human via the overt display of a murderous impulse. And this first critical step, as we see in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, is narrative enough. Once the past is established and animal morphs into man, in an instant the scene switches; the next (filmic) moment finds us in space and in the future, floating slowly, so slowly toward the moon.

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Long, Long Ago and Far, Far Away (1978–2005): *Star Wars*; Fleshing out the Continuum

Every race of being that is capable of self-consciously directed action in the *Star Wars* movies shares certain commonalities. First, they are for the most part bipedal, upright, and capable of monadic mobility. While some are a little taller, others a little shorter, possessing sometimes a set of wings or a tail, there is never so much as an extra leg. Nor do sticky or rooted aliens exist. There are literally more varieties of locomotion in a Hong Kong kung fu flick than in *Star Wars*. Second, everyone who communicates does so via some form of audible language — even droids — and this language emanates from something like a mouth. The audience may be privy to the meaning of such utterances only via subtitles, but the fact that communication is happening is clear because, from a formal point of view, it is talk. Third, there are no heads without bipedal bodies; and, fourth, there are no faces other than those affixed to the fronts of heads. If there is a face, there is always also a head: no beings with belly faces; no transport machinery or buildings with heads. Thus, while there is great creativity in the ways in which these elements are combined, there is very little variation in the elements themselves; every single thinking body in these films is within one standard deviation of the human.

Star Wars is not alone in these biases. The "head, torso, two arms, two legs" body structure (of which the legs are the most likely to be expended with), spoken language, the face-in-place, and upright mobility — as well as other indicators that include, but are not limited to, blood, a nose, a proper name, maleness, the ability to dream, intraspecies sociality (often marked by the ability to lie), nonintegrated weapons, a smooth exterior, and a manifest will (often signified by a red light) — are the fundamentals of what might be called the human prime (human′) — that is, the human at a single degree of remove from the molar human. In contrast to the molar human, who is in possession of all of these characteristics, the human′ is almost always lacking one. The representative of the techno union (whose head looks like a tooth) in *Attack of the Clones* is pointedly lacking a nose, as are the fishy ambassadors

from the trade federation. RoboCop, while given to dreaming, has no blood. And the Terminator, who at times comes very close to exhibiting every characteristic marking the human as such, is never in possession of a proper name. Despite the great potential here for cataloging and quantification, what is important about each of these elements within the lifeworld of the human′ is that each element, as it is gained or lost, is a vehicle for story. While, as previously mentioned, narrative capacity is the cinematic sign of humanity, narrative in sci-fi cinema is not truly that of human drama but that of human′ drama, and human′ drama is located precisely in the shifting collection of these specific attributes. Thus, while we know immediately that a man without a nose is not a man per se, his gaining a nose, or a proper name, or the capacity to dream (RoboCop, for example, gains all three) is the thrust and suspense of his story. Inner life, romance, and marital strife are the petty stories of the unaugmented.

Interestingly enough, each of these elements is of more or less equal weight, with the notable exception of integrated weaponry (which will be discussed at some length below), and they can thus be treated quantitatively. Should one, for example, want to construct a fictive matchup of beings as per *AVP: Alien vs. Predator*, though any like contest will do—say, Yoda versus RoboCop, or Johnny Mnemonic versus Jabba the Hutt, or Alien versus Darth Vader—one can satisfactorily predict via simple addition:[8] (1) that the one with the fewest molar human attributes will kill with the greatest impunity and initial success; (2) that the one with most such attributes will triumph in the end; and (3) that the one with fewer human characteristics will always be evil, and the other, regardless of how far he himself strays from the molar human, will be good.

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Take for example, Alien (seen first in *Alien*) and Darth Vader; despite their substantial differences—occupying, as they do, the two different ends of the continuum (one is clearly a monster and the other a cyborg)—both exhibit myriad attributes of the human′. Both kill, so we know right off the bat that they are Human in the most expansive sense of the term. Both also have the requisite "head, torso, two arms, two legs" form; both have

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the face-in-place (though neither has a nose exactly, and yet, on closer examination, both have two noses: Alien's second on its inner head, Darth Vader's on his radically different inner head); and both have a smooth exterior of consistent material (though Alien's is properly speaking "skin" and Darth Vader's is plastic and Naugahyde or, arguably, leather).

But here Darth Vader begins to distinguish himself as quantitatively (and thus also qualitatively) more human. For despite the fact that he never bleeds (which Alien does), he has a distinct interior, a comprehensible spoken language, intraspecies sociality, and a proper name (in fact two), all of which Alien lacks. Of course none of this matters, really, because Alien is in possession of the trump card: his weapons are integrated—from burning acid blood, to claws, to the very parasitic act of being born, Alien kills without ever grasping hold of a gun. In *AVP: Alien vs. Predator,* the only viable weaponry that our fearless and lucky heroine (the human Alexa Woods [Sanaa Lathan]) can actually use to counter Alien's ferocious attack is one of his own claws, cut from his body and lashed to a stake (this done for her by Predator, who, despite various and sundry superhuman powers—and this is a movie spoiler, so close your eyes if you do not want to know—carries a gun).

Of all the dramatic cleavages and reconstitutions that characterize science fiction cinema's narrative transitions, the one that holds the most weight and is in almost universal employ is the loss of a hand. And, in concert with this, human(prime)ness is often first revealed via an artificial or mutant arm. Think again of Darth Vader, if you will. He has his hand sliced off in *Return of the Jedi*, and he is a changed man. The empire is defeated, good triumphs over evil, and the entire universe is liberated from the dark side of the force—all because one man′ lost a hand (and gained a name and a nose). It is to the impact of the loss and replacement of hands and arms on the story of the human-becoming that I now turn my attention.

Parsing the Human

1973: *Westworld*; The Importance of Hands

When I first began this essay, it was because three distinct patterns of story and person in sci-fi movies had not only caught my eye but had become so glaring that a continued avoidance of them was impossible. The first was the fact that when androids lost their heads, those heads continued to express the particular robotic personality of the whole machine. This was as strikingly odd to me as the second trend (about which I have made much ado): that of robots, androids, and cyborgs carrying their weapons rather than having them built in. The third narrative pattern, which I will discuss here, is that of the severed hand, seen first in 1980 in *The Empire Strikes Back* when Luke loses his right hand to the swift fall of Vader's luminous blade. In the *Star Wars* films, this narrative (and physical) juncture, denouement if you will, is repeated in *Return of the Jedi*, when Vader loses his right hand to Luke's now superior swordsmanship, and in *Attack of the Clones*, when Anakin loses his right hand in a battle with the evil Count Dooku. In every case it is at this moment, and at this juncture between hand and arm, that each man loses himself; and, when he finds himself again, it is not only as a new man—Luke becoming Jedi, Anakin becoming Vader, and Vader becoming Anakin again—but also as a new sort of narrative container. For with each loss of a hand, the delicate balance of powers that characterizes that epic universe of long, long ago and far, far away tips, and—regardless of whether this slip is toward the dark side (Anakin's lost hand) or the light (Luke's and Vader's lost hands)—man, machine, and narrative structure all swivel on a juncture that is the right wrist, the providence of humanity hinged on a single swing of a light saber.[9]

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Were these the only exemplars of the phenomenon of the severed hand, I would be less inclined to place much emphasis on it. (The universe of *Star Wars* does, after all, have its own, by now fairly complete, mythology.) However, myriad other films use precisely the same device and same bodily juncture to mark: (1) the passage out of the innocence, wholeness, or integrated being of the human; and (2) the counterpunctual coming into being, or at least obviousness, of a new version of the man, most often—though not

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always, as we have seen with Vader—as a cyborg or human′. In fact, of the sixteen movies taken into serious consideration in this essay, ten feature the severing and replacement of a hand or an arm as a major plot device—eleven if one includes *Westworld* (1973), the movie that put hands on the map as the *only* site on the body where one can visually distinguish an android from a human. Or as John Blane (James Brolin) points out to Peter Martin (Richard Benjamin) as they ride on their super 1970s hovercraft toward a much-anticipated holiday at Western World (a cyborg-inhabited Wild West theme park), "They haven't perfected the hand yet." Blane holds up his own human right hand to demonstrate. This moment is echoed later in the film in a "hospital" for the wounded and malfunctioning androids, sexbots, horsebots, and snakebots of Western World. Here, a strangely ridged and awkwardly splayed right hand fills the screen, wafts of smoke emanating from it and curling away into the air. This articulation of marked visible difference between the hand of a human and the hand of the human′ has the interesting, perhaps inevitable, effect of causing those watching the movie to spend an inordinate amount of time staring at the hands of every character introduced. Is the floozy real or only a sexbot? Is the barkeep real or only an android? What of the sheriff? The damsel in distress? The eviscerated woman in a toga, and so on? And, in most cases, the unnatural ridges and lumps of the hand—which nevertheless do not prevent it from very effectively wielding a six-gun shooter or a sword—are not revealed, leaving the audience not so much in suspense as self-consciously aware of their own striving for a clear differentiation of men from machines, a differentiation that is pointedly not provided.

With the inclusion of *Westworld*, three-fourths of the sci-fi blockbusters of the past thirty years feature the hand as *the* definitive site for illustrating the artificiality, deconstructability, and reconstructability of the human. This is a tremendously high rate of prevalence for an absolutely unlauded and unacknowledged plot device. And, over time, it has become fairly nuanced in its deployment, so that by 2004 and *I, Robot*—remember, if you will, that Lieutenant Spooner has had his left arm, shoulder, and lung replaced by robotic prostheses—there is a fairly consistent set of

variations for gender and race, and these variations appear, more or less, cotemporally with new series of trends in head-body relations and the integration of weaponry (i.e., the two other dominant trends of the sci-fi action film). Most, though not all of these new trends, are marked by right-side/left-side alternation, which I will go into in some detail below.

First, however, a critical distinction. In the *Star Wars* movies, the hand that *we see* severed is the same hand that *we see* replaced by a mechanical prosthesis (Vader's "machine" hand, note, remains missing, as he dies soon after its removal). In all cases subsequent to *The Empire Strikes Back* in 1980, when we see a hand or an arm cut off, it is, as with *Star Wars*, always the right hand; but when the machine/mutant is revealed inside of, or attached to, the human, there is a slow slide to the left. *Terminator 2* is the last film that, to my knowledge, uses a right-side revelation of human′ identity, and even here it is not the right hand but the right shoulder that is used. Some details are in order.

In *The Terminator*, Arnold Schwarzenegger (the T-101) folds back the flesh on his right forearm to reveal for the first time that he is really a machine on the inside (this even before we see the shining red light of his left eye). This scene, in which skin on the wrist and forearm is slit open to expose metal tendons/pistons sliding back and forth when the digits are stimulated, is so strikingly similar to the first revelation of Luke's new machine hand at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back* that it is difficult to believe that the director James Cameron is not simply quoting the earlier movie. In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the forearm is once again the part of himself that the T-101 chooses to reveal to a skeptical (and recently shot) Dr. Miles Bennett Dyson (Joe Morton) to prove that he is a robot from the future. In this case, however, it is the *left* forearm that he slices open; he then uses his right hand to pull off the flesh as if it were a glove, displaying a blood-besmirched wonder of engineering identical to that which Dyson has back in his lab as Cyberdyn systems.[10] Dyson is, in that moment and at that juncture, convinced that his work, along with the original terminator's CPU and left arm, must be destroyed in order that the coming apocalypse might be avoided.

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In contrast, the liquid metal T-1000 (Robert Patrick), in this same film, is revealed to be human′ when he is repeatedly blasted in the right shoulder by a shotgun-toting T-101. What is amazing about this scene (when the dynamic metal innards of the T-1000 are first shown) is not so much that the arm is used as the primary revelatory site of artificiality, which by this point (1991) is standard sci-fi symbolism (also having been used in *Videodrome* [1983] and *RoboCop* [1987], two cases to which I will return), but that the T-1000 runs forward while shooting with his left hand so that his right shoulder can be shot open without interrupting his fire. At no other time in the movie does he shoot left-handed. The choice of the right hand, wrist, or arm as the point of a clearly revealed juncture between human and human′ is not, and ought not to be, construed as arbitrary.

Though ubiquitous as a site of narrative transition and thus also of dramatic revelation, the hand tends to serve two separate purposes within science fiction films. These, while complementary, are not necessarily overlapping. First, the hand is something that, like the head, is often cut off, marking *in every case* a major shift in a film's narrative. Second, the hand is a site at which artificiality is revealed. After *RoboCop*, these two functions cease, almost entirely, to overlap. In *Terminator 3*, for example, the T-X (Kristanna Loken) is revealed to be a machine when she thrusts her ever-so-briefly damaged left arm up through a pile of rubble, and we (along with the hapless John Connor [Nick Stahl] who is locked in a kennel) watch as the liquid metal of her "flesh" runs up the more standard robotic skeletal structure of her arm, coating it from elbow to fingertips in the slick shine of mercury and shifting mimetically in the process to flesh, fingernails, and the unmarred red leather arm of her jacket. We are shown, via this arm, the artificiality of the human to which it is attached; the arm itself, however, is never divorced from her body. Likewise, in *Total Recall* (1990), when the good Doug Quaid (Schwarzenegger again) is betrayed, an act of duplicity which leads straight away to the death of the leader of the Martian resistance, it is by a mutant cab driver who had been trusted implicitly by members of the resistance because he had a false left hand (which, when screwed off, revealed an extra

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long, skinny, mutant forearm and a four-fingered "real" hand). Here again the audience is shown that a person easily mistaken for human is in fact human′ via a revelatory hand, without that dramatic moment, so familiar from the *Star Wars* movies, of the original hand being visibly sliced off.

RoboCop is, in fact, the last film in which we, the audience, actually bear witness to the severing of the right hand, the destruction of which, a third of the way into the movie, results in Officer Alex J. Murphy's death and sets the scene for the narrative action of the rest of the film. Thus when the lead bad guy, Clarence Boddicker (Kurtwood Smith), traps the earnest Murphy in an abandoned factory during his first day on the job in a new precinct, pushes him down onto the poured cement floor, and trains his gun on the helpless officer instead of just shooting him dead, Boddicker lingers, slowly tracing Murphy's entire body—legs, heart, head, dallying a moment on the crotch—with his gun, selecting with the utmost care which piece to blow off first, and then, when he comes to the right hand, Boddicker pauses . . . and shoots, exploding that hand in a cloud of blood. And as Murphy gasps in pain, Boddicker laughs, saying, "Well, give the man a hand." A statement that is followed by a pregnant pause before the whole gang of bad guys simultaneously open fire, demolishing Murphy's entire right arm and also, not incidentally, killing him. We, the viewers, see the right arm pulverized, and, some five (filmic) minutes later, we witness the right "replacement" arm, wheeled into Murphy's, now RoboCop's, field of vision. And although it is not yet attached to his body, we are given to know—through his CPU-guided brain and augmented eyesight and hearing—that that machine arm is him.[11]

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RoboCop, like *Westworld*, is a film devoted to discussions of hands, and, like the *Star Wars* movies, its plot twists and turns around the removal and the reconstruction of the right hand and, through that, the expression of self. RoboCop becomes Murphy again, albeit Murphy′, because Officer Anne Lewis (Nancy Allen), his former partner, recognizes him through a right-hand manifest personality trait—that of twirling his gun before holstering it—and insists that RoboCop respond to his proper name, that is,

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Alex Murphy. From this point onward, RoboMurphy regains, one by one, almost all of the constituent elements of the human listed above—from a face and a nose to dreams and intraspecies sociality. In fact, the narrative structure of the film—while nominally one of corruption, murder, and revenge—can be equally read as *the quintessential drama* of the human′.

And, perhaps not unexpectedly, *RoboCop* marked the end of an era. Never since has the human-human′ drama been rendered so thoroughly (from the severed hand to the incremental [re]acquiring of self), in large part due to the fact that after 1987, the moment of severing is simply no longer depicted. Humans′ like Lieutenant Spooner (*I, Robot*), the duplicitous mutant (*Total Recall*), the T-101 and the T-1000 (*Terminator 2*), and the T-X (*Terminator 3*) are still all revealed *as* human′ via an artificial arm, but no one—save Anakin Skywalker (in 2002 and in 2005)—*ever* loses a hand again.

There are two ways to read this trend of revealing the human′ without depicting the transition from the weaker molar human form. The first is that after 1987 the particular drama of man becoming machine is no longer the part of the Human story that captivates the attention of mainstream audiences to blockbuster sci-fi action films. The fourteen years between *Westworld* in 1973 and *RoboCop* in 1987 saw a real-world upsurge in the integration of man with machine; this was the period of the personal technology explosion, and fears about what the mechanization of everyday life might do to the human exploded right along with it. But by mid-1993 and the arrival of the first post-RoboCop blockbuster robot movie (*Terminator 2*), the integration of men into machines was more or less an ordinary part of real life. The notion that men might betray many of the qualities of machines (for example, hairlessness or a "smooth exterior surface," became increasingly the norm during this period) and vice versa (the idea that machines are in many ways human) had permeated American culture to such a degree that it ceased to be startling when an ATM machine would say something like "Hi, how can I help you?," and it instead started to be startling to meet a car without power steering, or a college student without a computer, or *anyone* without a

Walkman. It is arguable that by the turn of the millennium, most of the molar humans making up the film audience were themselves (unspectacularly) human′ with cell phones screwed into their ears and palm pilots augmenting their memories. Logically, then, as the machineness of men began to be taken for granted in the real world, the narrative focus of sci-fi films changed, becoming increasingly explorations of what sort of men′ these machine men might actually be.[12]

There is, however, another compelling explanation for why, after 1987, the critical hand-severing juncture between the human and the human′ is no longer depicted: there was a shift in who, in these movies, actually displays the artificial (now) left arm. Beginning with *Total Recall* in 1990, though the white man is still the hero, central protagonist, and ur-representative of the Human, it is increasingly only black men, and women of all races, who screw off their hands or slip up their sleeves to reveal those inhuman left arms. That is to say, the story of how "we" were transformed from human to human′ is no longer necessary because the human′ is increasingly represented by beings who *were never* considered to be human to begin with. A radical claim perhaps, but one so consistently supported by the movies made since 1990 that it is, like robots carrying guns, impossible to ignore.

Before 1987 and RoboCop, sci-fi cine-humans came almost exclusively in one color (white) and the human′ in only one gender (male), and even when women did have parts to play in these films—which, unlike black men, they often did—it was only ever the male who embarked on the process of becoming other. This is what I like to call "The Luke and Leia Postulate," and it is a trend that endures to this day. For despite shifts in the roles allotted to mechanical females within the genre of the sci-fi action flick—from that of the occasional sexbot (*Cherry 2000*) to that of the "terminatrix" (*Terminator 3*)—she is still never transformed within the narrative of a single film; she is what she is from the opening credits to the end. Witness the Oracle (an example of the rarely seen black woman) in *The Matrix* movies, who is, along with the Architect, the most explicitly static and enduring character in the trilogy.[13] Woman—and this is universally true—simply does

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not become other to herself in the way that man does, even black man, and so she *cannot* be a narrative container in the way that he is.[14]

RoboCop, then, once again marks the end of an era, for already in *Total Recall* (1990) we are confronted with a black man-becoming: that treacherous taxi driver with the mutant left arm mentioned above is black. *Blade* (1998), a grandiose vampire fairy tale for the new millennium, is based entirely on the story of a black man who is not quite a man becoming—like RoboCop before him—recognizably and compellingly human′. Lieutenant Spooner (*I, Robot*) is of course the prime example of this trend. His left arm is entirely prosthetic with superhuman strength and stamina, making him undeniably human′; and yet the moment of transformation, while having marred his psyche significantly, happens before the film's beginning. We see him in his own dreams as he was before, hammering helplessly, two-fistedly, at the glass window of his car as it sinks into deep waters. And we see him after, scars radiating across his almost superhumanly handsome chest, which, when it gets smudged, he fixes with a can of brown spray-paint "skin." His left arm marks him as human′, but he is as human as the human′ comes. And Sonny—the white robot costar with a proper name and a penchant for dreaming—like Spooner exhibits every single characteristic of the human′. By 2004 and *I, Robot* there has been an undeniable and radical integration of the two categories. Again, everyman, even the black man, is by this point human′. The story then, for the same reasons as those mentioned above, must change, shifting from that of man-becoming-machine (human-human′) to human′-becoming–something else. What that something else is can be revealed, as is often the case, via a scalpel slicing through the skin of man.

2003: *Terminator III*; Enter the Belly of Man

Driving down the road in the desert south of Los Angeles in a truck stolen from a veterinary clinic (with, locked in the back, the vet—one Katharine Brewster [Claire Danes], the future wife of John Connor and the coleader of the resistance in the coming war

against the machines), the Terminator turns to Connor and asks for a cutting implement. Connor complies, pulling a scalpel out of his backpack (as if it is the most natural thing in the world to be carting around a scalpel) and handing it to the Terminator, who uses it to cut open his own belly. He makes a wide circular cut, pulling the flesh away to expose his battery pack, which is smoking prodigiously in that old, broken-down car sort of way. "I'm powered by two hydrogen fuel cells," he says. "My primary cell was damaged during the plasma attack." Reaching into his belly, he unceremoniously pulls out one of the hydrogen cells and tosses it out the window, where it explodes in the desert with all the force of a miniature hydrogen bomb. Unlike the first two films, in which the Terminator's machine innards and thus his essential robotness is exposed via the arm (the right first and then the left), and unlike in the exposure of those newer generations of Terminators, whose metal interiors are also revealed first via the arm (the right for the liquid metal T-1000 and the left for the female model T-X), in this movie, our first view of the machine inside the man′ is in through his belly.

Much has been written about man-becoming-woman as the not-so-secret undercurrent of the most macho of film genres, from mainstream action movies to the B-slasher, and this is because it is undeniably the case. Equally so in science fiction films in which it is difficult to get around the fact that with every jump in the technological reconceptualization of the male body, he becomes more female. This is evident not just in his willingness to open his belly and take things out of it (and stick things into it), a trend I will elaborate in greater detail here, but by a host of other factors as well, from his progressive slimming and smoothing to his overt sexualization and racialization.

Briefly then, a catalog of the most obvious of shifts in the manliness of cinematic supermen during the past twenty years. First, there is his slimming. This can be traced in the *Terminator* series alone, as the megaman Terminator—while burly in all three films—faces progressively smaller, more complex, and more adept enemies until, by the final movie (2003), he admits that he is obsolete and very likely to be bested by a woman. A later example is the

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slight, pale, almost effeminate Neo (*The Matrix*), the first man we actually see being birthed from the womb of a machine. Second, there is his smoothing. Neither Lieutenant Spooner nor the Terminator (both men whom we see naked) has a tick of body hair on him, much like the machine surfaces that man has come to emulate but very much unlike classic white male models of masculinity that demand the hirsute (such as professional wrestlers). Third, there is his overt sexualization: the human′ is increasingly (and blatantly) portrayed in ways that are hetero- (as well as the much commented on homo-) erotic. And finally, there is his racialization: black men are by the early 2000s as likely, if not more likely, to appear as the cyborgian man′ as are white men.

This depiction of super men′ as small, smooth, sexy, and/or black is, in each case, not only an elision of earlier models of virile masculinity but something of an affront to them. To return to my earlier point, it could also be said that the severing of the right hand serves as an allegorical castration, a slicing off not only of a body part but of that part most symbolic of human will. It is, after all, the right hand that shoots the gun which kills the other and makes man human, very much like another part of man which is far less likely to be portrayed in a PG-13 blockbuster.

These are movies that are, in essence, about male bodies and the stories they tell, how they expand into space, how they are converted piecemeal into objects or products, how they learn and how, most important, both the man-body and the man-being are becoming-other. The fact that the story of man-becoming-machine has now grown thin and the human′ is always already the normative starting point for sci-fi cinematic narrative in no way implies that processes of transformation have slowed. It is simply that a third becoming, one more alien than Alien and more outrageous than machine, has come into narrative play. Man′, in these films, is becoming-woman, as any Deleuzian might have predicted, and yet it is still stunning at times to witness how clear the symbolic arrows pointing one to this conclusion are. Not only is the gun hand of man sliced off, but now a hole has opened up in his belly, a new site for the storage of both his weaponry and, as we shall see, his mind and the peculiar intelligence of man-becoming-woman.

Back, then, for a moment, to the Terminator's belly. Dimly but distinctly illuminated by a thin green light, there are bits of blood and clinging flesh, a couple of power cells, and some shadows cast in red, but mostly it is green in there. This is decidedly odd, for inside the Terminator the light has always been red. His eyes are red; his vision (when we see though his eyes) is red; his blaster shoots in red; and yet here, midway through the third film, his belly glows green. A seemingly trivial shift, it is true, but shocking in the red-and-blue-illuminated world that James Cameron created, a color schema so strong that one can read the relative positioning and power of characters in *every* scene from elements so slight as the color of a backpack, a jacket, or the car being driven. If someone is driving a red truck toward someone else's blue motorbike, it is pretty clear who should be bustin' some ass to get out of the way, and not just because of the relative size of the vehicles or persons involved. Blue is innocence and relative weakness; red is single-minded will toward task completion. Even the most basic signification of "life" in machines that lack most, if not all, of the other characteristics of the human′ is, in many cases, indicated by the red "switched-on" light. All of the battlebots in the Terminator movies, the demo-bot in *I, Robot,* and numerous other machines a hair's breadth away from being classified as "dumb" (like cars, telephones, or answering machines) have their very consciousness signified by this red glow in the eye, on an instrument panel, on the shoulder, or from any of numerous other nooks, crevices, or translucent parts of their bodies.

In this context, the green light in the Terminator's belly is shocking in its incongruity. Equally out of keeping with the order of things is the fact that, when the T-X pushes her left arm up through that pile of rubble for all to see her "innards," a strong blue light emanates from her every metallic nook and cranny. Blue light is, for possibly the first time, here used to signify not weakness per se but female power explicitly—what Linda Williams, speaking of monsters, refers to as "the power and potency of a non-phallic sexuality" in explicit contrast to male power, universally signified by red light, which has up to this point (2003) been the *only* significant power in narrative play.[15]

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One would expect, given the implicit meaning of red (will) and blue (vulnerability), that woman would indeed be blue light signified. What is remarkable, then, in the T-X's inner azure glow is not that it *is* blue but that, *despite it being blue*, she is explicitly the stronger, smarter, and more capable of the two terminator units deployed in the film; the T-101—the Arnold model—is obsolete, he tells us, selected for this final mission because of Connor's sentimental attachment to the 800 series of which he is simply one of thousands. Blue in this instant undergoes a revolutionary shift in attributive meaning. This is, to my mind, possible only because two other equally inviolable cinematic codes have been simultaneously broken in the person′ of the T-X: (1) she is female; and (2) her weapons are built in. In her right arm, she houses both a conventional flamethrower and a plasma blaster, which shoots out debilitating pulses of electric blue. Secreted in her right index finger is an R2-D2–type interface device—which looks suspiciously like a metal spike—that she uses to communicate with and control other machines. And her left arm morphs handily into a buzz saw, which she also occasionally uses—true to slasher-film form—to kill people.

Before 2003 and the advent of the T-X, the female′ with built-in weapons is such a minor cinematic trope that it is easier to overlook than to notice. There are, to my knowledge, but two examples. In the first, Douglas Quaid in *Total Recall* uses a robotic woman-suit armed with a "head bomb" to smuggle himself onto Mars. When the suit malfunctions, rather rudely disgorging him and thus attracting the unwanted attention of Mars security, Quaid simply detaches the head and tosses it at the unsuspecting guards. She—who is just a head—looks up at them; smiles; says, "Are you ready for a surprise?"; and then explodes, blowing a hole in the glass-walled Mars dome and causing a fair number of superfluous characters to be sucked out onto the planet's surface where we watch them die by having their own heads explode in a nice bit of cinematic echo. The second appearance of a lethal woman is in *Terminator 2* when the T-1000 briefly takes the shape of Connor's foster mother, Janelle (Jenette Goldstein), who extrudes a mammoth knife from her left arm to slice, rather graphically, the

head of her simpering husband. Neither of these women is even remotely attractive; the woman-suit is fat and muumuu-clad, and Janelle is a frazzled, harried, suburban wife. This trend, however, changes with the T-X and the making explicit of female (blue) power; she, like the male′ terminators that preceded her, is a fine specimen, as is also, in her peculiar woman-as-disembodied-head sort of way, the malevolent, fiercely blue VIKI (Virtual Interactive Kinetic Intelligence) of *I, Robot.*

Before we come to the terminal VIKI—the final woman of the final film, demonic den mother and evil uplink par excellence—I would like to turn my attention briefly to a man, Max Renn (James Woods), who is, in his own strange way, a precursor to these women with exploding heads and integrated weaponry. Renn—the lead character of David Cronenberg's masterful and disturbing horror–sci-fi crossbreed *Videodrome*—is an unabashed example of man-becoming-woman. Renn, a simple molar human male at the film's start, is the director of a small Canadian cable access TV station that broadcasts mostly lowbrow porn, though he is on the prowl for something with a rougher edge, more grit, and fewer togas. What he finds is *Videodrome*, a snuff program out of Pittsburgh, which changes him (the very flesh of him, as well as the entire increasingly hallucinogenic reality in which he lives) into something other. Much has been made of Cronenberg's oeuvre and the notion of the new flesh, and I will not go into it here, because what is most relevant and truly remarkable about Renn is that, for much of the movie, he has a gun conjoined to his right hand.[16] The hand itself, however, was never severed; it was whole when Renn stuck it into the mammoth slit in his stomach, pushed it around in there while moaning in a sort of sexual agony, and pulled out the gun—a weapon obtained by unusual means (first, in fact, it arrived in the post, and for a while it was in his jacket pocket, but in the end it was the stomach that disgorged it), but a normal weapon nonetheless until it begins to send out roots.

In what may be the classic cinematic moment of male flesh penetrated, Renn, sitting on the floor, watches this weapon grow into his arm, sending out steel runners that pierce his fingers and wrist and worm their way into the tendon structure of his forearm.

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And then comes a familiar scene: Renn looks into the flesh of his own wrist, and we the audience look with him (as in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Terminator,* films that flank *Videodrome* by two years on either side); what he sees there is metal in the place of sinew, tendon, and bone. From this point onward in the film, the gun becomes more and more a part of him, changing from an integrated external weapon into something undeniably phallic, veined and purple where once his hand had reigned supreme. But the metamorphosis does not stop with the simple metaphor of a hand stuck into the yawning vagina of man, becoming a gun-phallus (by means of which, not incidentally, he assassinates a number of people); rather, it continues to change until Renn's hand is a truly monstrous thing, attached and yet foreign to him. This is the new flesh. And Renn, who begins the film by being sucked into that darkness of unkempt sexual desire, ends it with suicide via the right hand, gun-hand, dick-hand, monster-hand, each of which has come into being in turn and via his wide open belly.

Certainly, Renn is a fine example of what Carol Clover terms "a male in gender distress,"[17] but as a Human (that is to say, as a narrative container) his body is the physical site at which man-becoming-woman and the integration of weaponry are themselves first cinematically conjoined. And this, as we see some twenty-odd years later, is a trope that still holds tremendous narrative tension and cultural discomfort. The Terminator himself, the most manly of men, sliced open his own belly, not once but twice; and, sticking his hand in there, extracted first one hydrogen power cell and then, at the film's end, the second. This weapon from the belly of man plunged into the raging mouth of the T-X proved to be the *only* weapon truly capable of defeating her, as, deep beneath a mountain in the California desert, the Terminator, holding her tight by the wires trailing from her severed lower half, jams that final power cell into her mouth while she howls with the voice of a lion in heat, blue light pouring from her every chink. And then with the quiet "whumph" of an underground nuclear test, they are both, as one, decimated. There is, then, in the end, one last belly to enter and one last seething blue woman to kill.

2004: *I, Robot*; The Ghost in the Machine

I have deliberately limited myself in this essay to Hollywood fantasies of the Human, with a patent emphasis on stories in which man and machine come together in their myriad cyborgian and robot forms, rather than on those of alien-becoming or those derived from other national film traditions. However, many of the most interesting, delightful, and disturbing cinematic stories of man-becoming-machine (and vice versa) have emerged from Japan. These I have excluded for the simple reason that they always have a slightly different spin on the posthuman, man-becoming-machine than the tales Hollywood tells. Most noticeably, Japanese films have consistently concerned themselves with the soul of the machine—or the Ghost—which does not, by and large, figure in the American blockbuster. The (American) Human, regardless of his span, or his becomings, tends to be object based. He is made of flesh and metal, of starships and planetary ecosystems, of light sabers, plasma blasters, and rifles. And while he may expand and contract in space, in will, and in personality via the insubstantial element of colored light, even the blips and blinks of red and blue (and the occasional green) coexist with a physical object symbolic of the body.

In recent years, however, Hollywood's reluctance to address what the late Dr. Alfred Lanning (James Cromwell) in *I, Robot* refers to as "the bitter mote of a soul" has given way somewhat, and a small panoply of Ghosts have emerged. Skynet—the A.I. whose coming into consciousness the Terminator films are devoted to trying to avoid—is just such a ghost. It is not a consciousness borrowed or uploaded into the net, but a consciousness that congealed into being from a program. Skynet—unlike the blue-lit, disembodied, female head of VIKI, or the much less menacing yet identically indexed (blue-lit, disembodied, female head) Ghost in the Machine from *Johnny Mnemonic*—is neither gendered, colored, nor embodied. For all intents and purposes, Skynet is not represented at all except via its extensions: the myriad robo-men, robo-jets, and robo-tanks in which it is incarnated in its war against the humans. Thus, just as the human′ has evolved to the point that it encompasses every element of the molar human (plus superhuman

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powers), so also has the Ghost in the Machine come to disembody the other extreme of the continuum: Skynet pointedly fails to exhibit any characteristic of the molar human, with the possible exceptions of intraspecies sociality and manifest will.

I, Robot's evil all-controlling uplink VIKI splits the difference between pure Ghost and human′, reproducing in spades the new characteristics of woman′ first witnessed in *Terminator 3*. Her life force is signified by blue light, and indeed there is very little to her aside from this light (which comes in three shapes: line, cube, and orb). And although she is limited to a beautiful head, she is clearly identified as female, despite having no body of which to speak. When Susan Calvin (Bridget Moynahan) points out VIKI's positronic operating core (the orb) and names her, Spooner asks in mild disbelief, "THAT is a she?" This question Calvin easily answers in the affirmative, and, in the next instant, we are given VIKI's face—beautiful, female, multiple, one on each facet of the VIKI cube—and we hear the sweet modulation of her voice. She is explicitly female, though her body is the building, the blue light of perpetual observation, and the thousand upon thousand NS5s newly released into the city of Chicago. These are her servants, and yet they are also her, sharing her single-minded will and working as one to fulfill the logic of her mind. As with the example of Skynet, when machines act as both slaves to and the embodied form of a self-conscious artificial intelligence (i.e., Ghost), they glow with a deep inner red. The NS5s form a hybrid between the male and female of the human′: their mind (blue) is always visible through their translucent heads, and their will (red) glows forth from their translucent torsos. These are both indices of VIKI, their blue orb brains being simply smaller versions of her mammoth suspended positronic operating core, and their red will clearly (up)linked to her—a fact proclaimed from every billboard and many a human mouth throughout the course of the film.

This linkage of the hordes of NS5s to the manifest will and intelligent life force of woman in *I, Robot* is a subtle accomplishment, a human′-becoming-woman with none of the violence or horror of *Videodrome*'s Renn's similar becoming twenty years earlier. And just in case the grace of the transformation is lost in the driving sense

of evil manifest by the NS5s as a collectivity, we, the viewers, are given Sonny, a human′ who carries half the narrative burden of the film. Visually, Sonny is indistinguishable from the rest of the NS5s—except that his eyes are blue and theirs are amber—but internally he is as different as different can be. First, he does not have an uplink to the external mind of VIKI, and, second, he has a second positronic brain in his belly, which, working in concert with the brain in his head, gives him the power to think independently. It grants him, in short, free will. He can comply or defy as the situation demands. He is a flexible, white, male human′ with the glowing blue "power and potency of a non-phallic sexuality" in his belly. For indeed, this man′ is explicitly lacking a penis of his own, and, more important, when he sticks his right hand into the security force field to extract the killer-nanites that will put a gray end to the mind of VIKI, his super strong alloy allows him to keep his right hand intact. It is wounded, but not severed, though we were shown moments before that a normal NS5 would be disintegrated by even the briefest of contacts with the "security field."

The story of the Human is not finished, but it has, with *I, Robot,* come to a resting place (which will no doubt be shattered in the next film, or perhaps the one after that). Woman is nestled now in the belly of man, and man walks the world with the mind of woman; souls are born into machines, and men are born of their wombs; black man-becoming-machine is, at long last, represented as quantitatively (and therefore also qualitatively) equal to white-machine-becoming-man. As the narrative capacity of the human expands, in myriad tiny shifts, the other is ever more integrated into the self, and this occurs at the inevitable expense of all that was once held to be invaluable. From film to film, thirty years gone by, man simply is *not* what he was, nor will he be what he is now in thirty years time as humans continue to expand along the continuum, swelling it slowly but inevitably as we grow.

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Notes

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1. Films discussed in this essay are *2001: A Space Odyssey* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, UK/US, 1968); *Artificial Intelligence: AI* (dir. Steven Spielberg, US, 2001); *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, UK/US, 1979); *AVP: Alien vs. Predator* (dir. Paul W. S. Anderson, US/Canada/Germany/Czech Republic/UK, 2004); *Blade* (dir. Stephen Norrington, US, 1998); *Cherry 2000* (dir. Steve De Jarnatt, US, 1987); *The Empire Strikes Back* (now also known as *Star Wars: Episode V*, dir. Irvin Kershner, US, 1980); *I, Robot* (dir. Alex Proyas, US, 2004); *Johnny Mnemonic* (dir. Robert Longo, Canada/US, 1995); *The Matrix* (dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, Australia/US, 1999); *The Matrix Reloaded* (dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, US, 2003); *The Matrix Revolutions* (dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, US, 2003); *Return of the Jedi* (now also known as *Star Wars: Episode VI*, dir. Richard Marquand, US, 1983); *RoboCop* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, US, 1987); *Star Wars* (now also known as *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, dir. George Lucas, US, 1977); *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* (dir. George Lucas, US, 1999); *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones* (dir. George Lucas, US, 2002); *The Terminator* (dir. James Cameron, US, 1984); *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (dir. James Cameron, France/US, 1991); *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (dir. Jonathan Mostow, US/Germany/UK, 2003); *Total Recall* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, US, 1990); *Westworld* (dir. Michael Crichton, US, 1973); *Videodrome* (dir. David Cronenberg, Canada/US, 1983). Mention is also made of *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (dir. George Lucas, US, 2005), though it was released after this essay was completed.

2. For more on this, see most especially Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_*

OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience (New York: Routledge, 1997).

3. Throughout this essay, when speaking of this "continuum of the human," I will capitalize the term *Human* to index both the scope of the term and the entity it describes, while also offsetting it from simpler, unadulterated human beings.

4. See especially Hassan Melehy, "Images Without: Deleuzian Becoming, Science Fiction Cinema in the Eighties," *Postmodern Culture* 5 (1995): muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v005/5.2melehy.html; Charles Stivale, "Mille/Punks/Cyber/Plateaus: Science Fiction and Deleuzo-Guattarian 'Becomings,'" *SubStance*, no. 66 (1991): 66–84. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

5. The term *molar*, used to refer to "molar entities" or "molar humans," I borrow from Melehy, "Images Without."

6. The notion that the human is at its most essential a bearer of "story and shape" is taken from Caroline Walker Bynum's superb treatise *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone, 2001), esp. 180–89.

7. The issue of how one performs a cyborg or acts a machine is an interesting one (though outside the scope of this article), but it has been argued that the flat affect of Keanu Reeves, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and others is not simply "bad acting" but rather an attempt to communicate what a machine man might actually be like. See especially Christine Cornea, "David Cronenberg's *Crash* and Performing Cyborgs," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 52 (2003): 4–14.

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8. Darth Vader and Alien have odd things in common, one of which is that they both have physical offspring with human women. This is remarkably uncommon. In sci-fi action films, almost all procreation is—more or less obviously—single male reproduction. Witness Jango and Boba Fett (not to mention the entire clone "Jango Fett" army) in *Attack of the Clones*, Alfred Lanning and Sonny in *I, Robot*, and so on. For a more detailed explication of this phenomena, see Linda Mizejewski, "Action

Bodies in Futurist Spaces: Bodybuilder Stardom as Special Effect," in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science-Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1999), 152–72.

9. Interestingly enough, this trope of transformation first indexed by the loss of a hand is abandoned in *Revenge of the Sith*. Here, if one loses a hand, one dies. No longer a precursor to man-becoming, the severed hand might as well be the severed head, for in each and every case it is the harbinger of permanent death.

10. It is the right hand and CPU of the Terminator that rests under tight security at Cyberdyn systems, as only the right hand and a small portion of the head were left undestroyed at the end of the first movie. Regardless, the resemblance between the skeletal structure of bloodied left hand (still attached) and the right, in the laboratory, is sufficient for Dyson to recognize quite clearly what it is that he is looking at.

11. For a more detailed analysis of *RoboCop* in relation to everyday fantasies of violence and gender identification, see also Anne Allison, "Cyborg Violence: Bursting Borders and Bodies with Queer Machines," *Cultural Anthropology* 16 (2001): 237–65.

12. Carol Clover also notes the distinctness of the period 1974–86 as regards the narrative development and plot devices common to slasher films, though her period of comparison is pre-1974/post-1974, while here it is 1973–87/post-1987. See Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations*, no. 20 (1987): 187–228. See also her book-length work on the same topic, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1992).

13. It should be noted that black women do not exist in American blockbuster science fiction cinema until *The Matrix* when the Oracle comes along. And thus it is too early to say what exactly black women will or will not develop into.

14. Much has been written about race and gender in mainstream Hollywood cinema. The essays that most critically informed this project, especially as regards the role of the black man, are Sharon Willis, "Mutilated Masculinities and Their Prostheses: Die Hards and Lethal Weapons," in her *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 27–59; and Lia M. Hotchkiss, " 'Still in the Game': Cybertransformations of the 'New Flesh' in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 52 (2003): 15–32.

15. Linda Williams, “When the Woman Looks,” in *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Williams (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1984), 90.

16. In addition to the articles already cited above, see Scott Bukatman, “Who Programs You? The Science Fiction of the Spectacle,” in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), 196–213.

17. Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 194.

{Author bio TK.}