TECHNOLOGY/FRACTURED
AN INQUIRY INTO THE CIRCULATION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN CONSUMER CAPITALISM

by

HAMED TEYMOURI

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Department of Fine Arts

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This inquiry seeks to explore historical patterns connecting the development of information technology and its proliferation in the shape of goods and services in post-war America. I take the two Terminator films as case studies in these cultural relations. These films, as many others from the period between the late 1980's and early 1990's, present technology as a threat to humanity. In the case of the Terminator narrative the threat is total, in the sense that machines actually destroy the world to exterminate all humans. The survivors of this imagined war -- those who were not killed by man-made weapons -- face the terror of machine-made weapons. The most fearsome of these are the human-looking cyborgs, the Terminators.

The central argument of this inquiry is that this narrative premise and all of its attendant effects do not produce a viable critique of the rapid proliferation of technology in culture; still less do these films stand to question the cultural and economic arrangements which underlie the production of technological commodities. Works by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Baudrillard constitute the theoretical sources of this argument. In addition, I have borrowed the notion of “fractured identities” from Donna Haraway. I will attempt to show that this notion, very similar to the operation of the Terminator films, fails to substantiate an avenue of critique and liberation. Rather, the notion of fractured identities, appears to serve the logic of consumerism.
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Introduction

"I don't propose to spend any more time arguing your fantasies, Kirk! The Enterprise is ours! Instruct your Transporter Room. We are ready to beam aboard."

"Go to the Devil," Kirk said.

"We have no devil - but we understand the habits of yours..." Still hidden among the rocks, the crystal's red glow brightened as Kang burst out, "I will torture you to death, one by one! Who will be the first? You, Kirk?..."

James Blish

Our society distinguishes itself by conquering the centrifugal social forces with Technology rather than Terror, on the dual basis of an overwhelming efficiency and an increasing standard of living.

Herbert Marcuse

If art styles vary so incessantly, there ceases to be a viable tradition that the artist is carrying on. What is established instead is a tradition of perpetual novelty. Art becomes the ceaseless fabrication of new models. We go to the galleries each season as we go to the salesrooms of the automobile companies -- to see what new lines have been developed. Art styles become obsolete like the old models of cars. Art and artist become assimilated to the production lines of the technical order.

William Barrett

It is a bit unnerving to think that by 1979 the fiction of the notion of style in art had become so transparent that it was no longer even a matter of controversy. Perhaps the controversy of such a statement is lost to the present-day reader. It is becoming increasingly difficult to imagine a cultural atmosphere where most contemporary art practices still associated themselves -- even if only narrowly -- with the legacy of the destruction of Renaissance pictorial space. In the concluding pages of the section titled "Being" in The Illusion of Technique, William Barrett points to one of the most compelling attitudes -- one might say realities -- of the practice of the idea of progress in modernity.

To press culture forward the present must become the past, that is, precisely that which society holds to be its living terms and conditions must die in time. Rituals, values and identities must disappear from the midst of culture such that they can only be remembered or found in records. But, how is this death to occur?

What is a fitting description of this pattern of progress according to contemporary cultural theories and historical models? The two dialectics, spiritual and material, are excellent historical models. But, their strength and accuracy relate to
cosmic time, the aeons of human history. One glance at contemporary cultural theories will show that cosmic time is outdated; intellectual energies appear to be spent on fractional time -- smaller than a second or any metric time unit, since these empirical durations still refer to some idea of event, as a distinct occurrence in the history of the world as such. Even if one were to succumb to the strictest empiricism, an event would still be a summation of the possibilities -- political, psychic, aesthetic, and so on -- realised in a duration of time. A great part of intellectual interest, for the past two or three decades at least, has focused on the fracturing of events. Perhaps it is not so much that intellectual chronology has shifted to the small; regardless of duration, there is -- one might observe in a generalised sense -- a fascination for incompleteness in current cultural practices. The terms of the most up-to-date debates centre, more often than not, on incomplete events, or with the greatest modesty, on incomplete pictures of events. Thus, as a way of living and speaking in society -- within the relations of power and difference -- incompleteness in identities and arguments becomes a tool for liberation.

Freed of the need to ground politics in 'our' privileged position of the oppression that incorporates all other dominations, the innocence of the merely violated, the ground of those closer to nature, we can see powerful possibilities. Feminisms and Marxisms have run aground on Western epistemological imperatives to construct a revolutionary subject from the perspective of a hierarchy of oppressions and/or latent position of moral superiority, innocence, and greater closeness to nature. With no available original dream of a common language or original symbiosis promising protection from hostile 'masculine' separation, but written into the play of a text that has no finally privileged reading or salvation history, to recognize 'oneself' as fully implicated in the world, frees us of the need to root politics in identification, vanguard parties, purity, and mothering. Donna Haraway

The underlying premise here is that a contradictory, fractured existence, an inability and/or refusal to fit the definitions of both centre and periphery, unties the reins of domination, in its many guises, enough for individuals -- in the case of Donna Haraway's discussion, women in particular -- to assume a liberated stance in their personal and social lives.
Insofar as digital/information technology promises to constitute the first material culture to have reached global scope, since the Palaeolithic period, when human(oid)s made similar tools with comparable skill, the cyborg also promises to be a global phenomenon. For Haraway this is a welcomed idea, that people across the world might participate in local resistance against the disparate patterns of oppression and that despite the differences in the various forms of resistance their collective motivation and action will ultimately be cohesive. This implies that the advent of digital/information technology and its resultant social formations and cultural relations have opened the possibility for collective motivation and action on a global scale -- regardless of the political inclinations of these. I take this as a central presupposition of this inquiry: since the end of World War Two, the establishment of a global system of human organisation has emerged, from developments in disparate spheres of thought and action. The most pertinent aspect of this idea, I would argue from the perspective of socially minded critique, is the fear that a global system of human organisation neither promises nor promotes the betterment of life. The annexation of outlying populations and territories in the world by dominant and expanding economic and cultural networks says nothing about the decline of suffering and the need for a more equitable distribution of advantage. Rather, it seems that the absence of the requirement and responsibility for the distribution of advantage facilitates the progress of the expansion of these networks. I take as a further presupposition the argument that to raise the standards of living across the disadvantaged populations of the world -- to bring these closer to living conditions in developed countries -- contradicts the principles of capitalist enterprise, which has, for the past two centuries, been the primary mechanism for the planetary integration of the human species. However, this is not a discussion about globalisation -- a dubious term that bears the quick sound of complacency. The central concern of this inquiry focuses on recent developments -- in the past two decades -- around the notion of the socially conscious and active individual. In particular, I wish to examine connections between the emergence of
digitisation, consumer marketing of information technology and representations of non-conformity and dissidence. In these, the notion of the cyborg serves as a nexus of conceptions about a humanness that has -- or soon will -- transcend historical barriers of difference and populate a globally organised society.8

I am most interested in the conjunctions between instances of socially minded celebrations of cyborgism and the capitalist logic of proliferation and profit. With respect to actual cultural entities, I find that escapist Hollywood cinema is the natural home of such conjunctions - and the science fiction genre being the prime example.9 Not only are these productions aggressively capitalistic and technological, but also great promoters of the imaginary of non-conformity and dissidence.10 To examine the implications of pro-technology social critique within the cultural arrangements of consumerism I turn to cyborgs -- both human and machine -- on the screen and in the Terminator films. These films deliver the promise of entertainment -- in particular, with respect to the special effects of science fiction -- as they insist on the true terror of their apocalyptic vision. That is to say, the escapism of these films relates directly to the ways in which they call upon contemporary social concerns and apocalyptic fears.

Set in 1984, The Terminator recounts the nightmarish ordeal experienced by a young woman living in Los Angeles. Sarah Connor, played by Linda Hamilton, discovers that she has been "targeted for termination" by a human-looking machine sent back from the not-too-distant future. The machine, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, belongs to the year 2029 in a war between humans and a network of machines, which has come to dominate the world by triggering World War Three. Though characterised as lacking human sensibilities, the machine roams freely through the city. The state of urban decay and the cold sarcasm of the minor characters continuously foreshadow the destruction of the coming war. Having killed the two other Sarah Connors listed in the telephone directory, the terminator turns to the protagonist. Her saviour, a man named Kyle Reese also sent from the future, played by Michael Biehn, intervenes in the machine's first assassination attempt on Sarah in a nightclub. From this point on the
plot moves from one chase scene to another. Between these sequences, the time-travel theme takes a sharp paradoxical turn, when the audience learns that Kyle is the father of the man who had sent him through time. John Connor, the future saviour of humanity and Sarah's son, sends one of his lieutenants to protect his mother. The terminator's mission had been a desperate attempt to abort the future victory of humanity, by a "retroactive abortion" of the one who teaches humans to fight back.

In the sequel, *T2: Judgment Day*, distributed in 1991, the audience learns that the first terminator's mission had had two prerogatives. The first and explicit prerogative had been to kill Sarah; the other had been to plant the cyborg's technology in its referential past, so that humans might discover and build upon it. Though this twist is not stated as a conscious action on the part of the machines, it becomes the premise for the second film. The broken bits of the first terminator had been discovered by Cyberdyne Systems, an arms manufacturer. Cyberdyne subsequently produces Skynet, which then triggers WWII, in reaction to its operators' useless attempt to pull the plug. In 2029, Skynet is still desperate to reverse the nearly complete victory by the human "resistance." Another terminator comes back through time, this time to kill the young John Connor, played by Edward Furlong. The killer machine in the sequel is a polymorphous mass that can assume the shape of anything it touches. For the most part, it assumes the appearance of a police officer, played by Robert Patrick. This gives the new terminator mobility and access to police files on its targets. The rescuing hero is a reprogrammed terminator, identical to the original machine. Arnold Schwarzenegger returns triumphant. The reprogrammed machine and John break Sarah out of a mental institution just in time and destroy the new menace in a tank of molten steel.

The notion of the killer machine in the *Terminator* narrative, both as the colossal Skynet and the individual Terminator cyborg, relates to contemporary debates about the Strategic Defence Initiative and individual automated machines. Most importantly, the *Terminator* films depict an imaginary scenario of global self-destruction as they
engage in the same self-destruction by employing their narrated antagonist, information technology, as a representational tool. The Terminator films allow the possibility to have fun while witnessing a vision of how the world might be destroyed at a point along contemporary trajectories in human endeavour. This possibility was unquestionably realised, as the films' commercial success illustrates.

As with any cultural entity, these films both reflect and produce their historical contexts. Throughout this inquiry, the discussion of these films focuses on their cultural value as commodities. The circulation of new technologies through commodity exchange marks the ways in which capitalist logic takes part in the development of new conceptions of humanness. The dramatisation of hypothetical conflicts between human values and the contingencies of a technological world might be read as a register of the threats and fears current in contemporary debates surrounding the rapid proliferation of information technology. By the same token, these and other science fiction films intervene in contemporary conceptions of personhood. In particular, the Terminator films point to contentious issues surrounding national identity in the United States. The feverish revival of the Cold War comes in question when, for example, Kyle Reese calls the Eastern Bloc enemies of the United States "the people on the other side." This description might suggest that people on "all sides" have a common enemy, belligerent technology. Despite this statement, The Terminator goes no further to suggest a method or even the need for reconciling America and its Cold War enemies. In the sequel, the audience discovers that humans will provoke Skynet to start WWIII, only after Skynet proves itself with a perfect operational record of newly automated Stealth fighter planes. This bit of information provided by the reprogrammed T800 suggests that the people in charge of the defence grid refused to allow a network of machines to usurp human control. One might interpret this desperate attempt as an ill-fated assertion of the dignity of human consciousness, at a historical moment when automation had begun to pose serious threats to jobs in factories, offices and laboratories. However, even if this is a valid interpretation, the films do not pursue this question. When the assertion of
humanness appears on the screen, it is characteristically in the form of human control, the individual's right to sovereignty within the arrangements of consumer capitalism.

When renting a motel room and buying supplies, Kyle pays with stolen money. The terminator, on the other hand, simply kills those whom it robs for clothes and guns. The legitimacy of money in commodity exchange recurs in the habits of the young John Connor, who steals from bank machines with a pocket-book computer decoder. This might be read as a statement in relation to the rampant capitalism of the 1980's. The protagonists of these films do not find the prevailing capitalist arrangements of production and consumption unsatisfactory per se, but they do insist on unrestricted mobility for themselves. Thus, similar to their treatment of the time-travel theme, these films construct paradoxical friend/enemy characterisations that seem to miss what would be the sources of the impending doom in the narrative, heightened geopolitical conflicts in the human world. Perhaps, most glaring of all, Sarah attempts to save humanity by killing the scientist responsible for the new generation of central processors. John and the reprogrammed terminator wisely locate the source of the coming war in Cyberdyne Systems. But, no one even hints that perhaps the real sources of global destruction are the geo-political arrangements within which Cyberdyne operates. One of the goals of this inquiry is to show that these paradoxes, present throughout both films, undermine their anti-establishment suggestions.

The Terminator films project particular visions of a technological humanity and a humanised technology. In the Terminator narrative these two entities are, for the most part, enemies. The basic premise of these films is that the conflict between the two camps cannot be compromised. Even when the human "resistance" manages to capture and reprogram one of the terminators, the friendly machine must be destroyed, so as to secure human victory. This inquiry seeks to explore the terms of this conflict and its tenuous resolution in favour of humanity, in the context of the historical development of information technology since the 1980's and the larger context of consumerist culture and global conflict in the post-war decades in the United States. Before delving
into a discussion of the films, I will attempt to delineate the theoretical sources of this inquiry, in the following section. The theoretical formulations, here, revolve around the notion of "fractured identities" -- a term which I have borrowed from Donna Haraway's discussion of cyborgs -- as a description of personhood in the development of technological consumerism in the post-war decades.

Throughout the following arguments, I will draw on critiques presented in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" by Horkheimer and Adorno, One-Dimensional Man by Marcuse, and works by Baudrillard. My contention as to the efficacy of this particular grouping of theoretical sources relates more closely to the cultural phenomena which these authors have observed, than to agreements between their voices. That is, I do not assume that Baudrillard's arguments, surrounding the cultural conditions of the late 20th century in Western societies, agree with the Frankfurt School authors' formulations of structures of oppression and avenues of resistance. In an assessment of their particular stances, I would not find the voices of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse in perfect agreement either. Rather than seek points of unanimity between these authors, I will ground my arguments on a recurring theme in the above-mentioned works. This is the idea of co-option or assimilation, as an integral mode of exchange/interference within the arrangements of liberal democracy and consumer capitalism.

In itself, the idea of co-option is certainly not a grand statement. Liberal democracy and consumer capitalism co-opt positions of resistance and critique, such that current social arrangements integrate strategies of dissent and thereby manoeuvre through the transformative disruptions, which these strategies attempt to produce. And yet, what might be counted as the current social arrangements do not stay constant through these exchanges and inferences. The operative term on this point is "negotiation," the give and take between the prevailing forces and norms of society and those who seek to undermine them. For the purposes of this inquiry, I draw a historical trajectory of critiques of cultural co-option, at one point marked by Horkheimer, Adorno
and Marcuse in the early post-war decades and at another marked by Baudrillard in the later decades of the 20th century.

At the earlier point, I find an explication of the more general ways in which co-option figures in post-war American culture. Here the success and perpetuity of co-option largely depends on an endemic lack of self-reflexivity on the part of the population. Consumers' lack of self-reflexivity buttresses the strategies of the culture industry. That is, society does not clearly understand the methods through which its best hopes for betterment are continually swallowed by those who stand at concentrations of power and reap the highest profits. Given this, knowledge about the operation of co-option constitutes perhaps the most important ingredient of social transformation. This is not to say that Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse are altogether optimistic about the prospects of social transformation, but rather, that their formulations of the idea of co-option might be counted as viable strategies of resistance and critique, in their own historical moment. This cannot be said of the latter historical point marked by Baudrillard's works. Baudrillard, to a large degree, argues against the viability of these strategies. In particular, his formulation of the notion of simulation spells the impossibility of affecting social change through the mere knowledge, however keen, of the operations of co-option. Yet, his arguments do not refute the theorisation of co-option. Rather, Baudrillard expands these theories and presents a highly complex picture of the vastness of the methods and means of co-option in Western cultures. In a sense, Baudrillard produces a vision of cultural co-option as a formidable obstacle and amplifies the widely-noted pessimistic tone of the Frankfurt School authors.

One might argue that in Baudrillard's works the idea of self-reflexivity, as both a right and a responsibility of the socially active individual, has disappeared into two opposing extremes. On the one hand, self-reflexivity has become greatly depleted through the continuation of the cultural practices of entertainment and profit; on the other hand, it has become morbidly hypertrophied through the perpetual stress of the idea of progress, especially in the form of postmodernism. I would argue that the
Terminator films also operate at these two extremes. These films have proven to be highly entertaining and profitable, even as they project highly anti-social and outright destructive images and sentiments under the slogans of social critique. In this sense, these films, and especially the shifts that occur between them, from a low-budget experimental film to a massive blockbuster, count as poignant examples of the cultural conditions enumerated by Baudrillard. As valid as this evaluation might be, I would also argue that it nonetheless says little, in as much as the same can be said of a great many other cultural entities from the historical period of these films, the 1980's and early 1990's.

From the perspective of a cultural critique, it might be more interesting to open a space between the theoretical frameworks of the Frankfurt School authors and Baudrillard for the purpose of analysing these films. In particular, the applicability of the arguments developed in the works of the earlier authors to the Terminator films illustrates the historical perpetuity of the operation of co-option, as formulated in "The Culture Industry" and One-Dimensional Man. Given this observation, I hope to show that the kinds of cultural relations which are delineated by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse -- connections between cultural entities in the arenas of representation and the circulation of commodities -- are valuable for assessments of cultural phenomena belonging to later historical moments. That is, while working with Baudrillard's formulations surrounding the pervasive operation of co-option, the boundless reiteration of simulacra and the seemingly hopeless odds of resistance and critique, it is not only still possible but also important to explore the perpetual tensions in the exchanges/interferences of liberal democracy and consumer capitalism.

It is here that I turn to Haraway's arguments. In "A Cyborg Manifesto" Haraway identifies promising possibilities for cultural interventions, in recent technological innovations. These interventions would serve to disrupt the ceaseless reiteration of "the normative" and transform the terms and conditions of the circulation of commodities. Haraway's proclamation of new methods of resistance and critique is valid and
important in as much as the advent of information technologies throughout culture has opened many new possibilities for contact and exchange between humans. However, "A Cyborg Manifesto" appears to neglect the historical lessons of co-option. This I would argue, might be connected, somewhat paradoxically, to the theoretical framework of Baudrillard's works -- one might count several other postmodern and/or post-structuralist authors here as well. Precisely because of its emphasis on the absolute pervasiveness of co-option, Baudrillard's vision of current cultural conditions facilitates over-enthusiastic assessments of "new" possibilities for cultural intervention, either in academic works, such as "A Cyborg Manifesto," or in commercial productions, such as the Terminator films.

This is not to say that Haraway's work can be equated with James Cameron's films. The value and significations of each of these cultural entities, in themselves, is not the point here. Rather, this connection between an academic exploration of the notion of the cyborg and two cinematic productions of a war between humans and machines relates to the ways in which the imaginary of new technologies channels through the prevailing arrangements of liberal democracy and consumer capitalism. In particular, the emphasis on the impotence of historical strategies of resistance and critique in postmodern discourse facilitates -- perhaps dictates -- the adoption of new strategies, which ostensibly fit the social exigencies of the present historical moment. To put it simply, this becomes a matter of staying ahead of co-option, of propelling the edges of resistance and critique. The critical point though, it seems to me, is that the gestures and habits which accompany this move from "older" strategies to "newer" ones can and have become co-opted as well. Hence, it is perhaps more important to emphasise the validity -- not to mention accuracy -- of a critical position with regard to specific cultural entities and phenomena, than to insist on the progress of critique categorically. This inquiry seeks to articulate such a critical position -- between a seemingly unlikely group of theoretical sources -- with regard to the Terminator films.
Articulating such a position, caught between different critical perspectives, primarily serves the purposes of a historical analysis. Returning to the image of a historical trajectory of criticism, these critical perspectives -- the Frankfurt School authors, Baudrillard and Haraway -- are especially insightful in as much as they represent different historical strategies of theoretical intervention. This inquiry takes up these strategies with reference to the representational and narrative strategies employed in the Terminator films. That is, I find the validity of referencing these seemingly disparate critical voices in the films themselves. Admittedly, this method places well-reserved restrictions as to the scope of the conclusions to be drawn here. Certainly, the summary aim of this inquiry is not to assert the presence of a cohesive line of argumentation between the cited authors. By the same token, this inquiry will not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Terminator films. Throughout the following discussion, these films will be assessed as case studies for a number of perspectives on the critique of cultural co-option. My contentions is that the complexity of these films, as cultural phenomena, not only makes them applicable to a multiple of critical perspectives, but also demands such a multiplicity, to serve as a historical grounding.

Given this, it is also important to avoid what I find is a convenient way of overlooking contradictions, which is simply to take them for granted. With respect to this point, my goal is to explore the contradictions, which arise through the interpolation of the theoretical sources here, in the films, that is, in their representational and narrative strategies. In particular, I will attempt to illustrate the ways in which contradiction, as a representational and/or narrative statement, might serve to facilitate the integration of dissenting messages into consumerist relations of entertainment and profit. More specifically, this will be an exploration of the historical patterns which highlight the proliferation of information technology, the cultural relations which mark the enlistment of popular critiques of technology into the marketing strategies of technological commodities.
1. Persuasive Techniques

On the one hand, Haraway’s formulations of fractured identities and liberation seem quite convincing. In a cultural atmosphere of extensive surveillance and classification, an incomplete identity -- incomplete identification -- can be an obvious asset to anyone who wishes to live and think freely. Perhaps, an incomplete identity is the only way to personal freedom in consumer capitalism. Yet, even if incompleteness and contradiction are viable means toward personal freedom for an individual in contemporary culture, they do not seem to provide a convincing rhetoric of defence against the consumption of conceptions of humanness into the swift appetite of the market.11 Incompleteness and contradiction are not remedies; they are the symptoms of the deep malaise of “the postmodern scene.”12 In fact, there is a sinister, though implicit, ideological statement in the very notion of personal freedom for the individual, in the sense that it signals the abandonment of the direct pursuit of the notion of freedom for humanity. In their respective matrices of signification, personal freedom for the individual and personal success for the entrepreneur are coterminous.13 In a cultural atmosphere that increasingly dissolves the relevance of the personhood of the individual -- by the observational and calculating powers of technological communication and exchange to reach and grasp the many as quickly as the one -- the formulation of the fractured identity, as the nexus of liberation, is categorically incapable of responding to the most persistent questions surrounding the future of liberty and humanness.

No longer a material entity, the postmodern body becomes an infinitely permeable and spatialized field whose boundaries are freely pierced by subatomic particles in the microphysics of power. Once the veil of materiality/subjectivity has been transgressed (and abandoned), then the body as something real vanishes into the spectre of hyperrealism. Now, it is the postmodern body as space, linked together by force fields and capable of being represented finally only as a fractal entity. The postmodern self, then, as a fractal subject -- a minute temporal ordering midst the chaotic entropy of a contemporary culture which is winding down, but moving all the while at greater and greater speeds.

Arthur Kroker and David Cook14
In the age of electronic information machines the freedom of contradictory identities is a revision of the myth of frontier life. Identity itself is the frontier to explored, mapped and staked out. With the proliferation of consumerism in the post-war decades, and the innovation of identity-oriented commodities, goods and services catering to individual “lifestyles,” personhood is no longer a domain to be controlled through tyranny, but rather a market and a resource to be capitalised. The regimentation of the self-professedly rebellious no longer comes at the end of a rifle but rather through the subtle, unbounded and merciless flow of capital. The apparent ineffectuality of dissidence through the adoption of incomplete and contradictory identities is not the result of a wicked conspiracy to disempower postmodern dissidents. Rather, it is modernity itself that negates the very languages of liberation that it had once locuted. Baudrillard explicates this point in a discussion of the collapse of modern value structures.

Nothing is truly reflected any more -- whether in a mirror or in the abyssal realm (which is merely the endless reduplication of consciousness). The logic of viral dispersal in networks is no longer a logic of value; neither therefore is it a logic of equivalence. There is no longer any such thing as a revolution of values -- merely a circumvention or involution of values. A centripetal compulsion coexists with a decentredness of all systems, an internal metastasis or fevered endogenic virulence which creates a tendency for systems to explode beyond their own limits, to override their own logic -- not in the sense of creating sheer redundancy, but in the sense of an increase in power, a fantastic potentialisation whereby their own very existence is put at risk.

Jean Baudrillard

The incompleteness of identities and events, even as a mere observation in cultural analyses and theories, relates directly to the prevailing notions and representations of terror, current in the last two decades. Here is a link between the intellectual contests of academia and the destruction and nihilism that are prevalent in popular culture. The fixation on the incessant and characteristically premature collapse of traditional avenues of resistance is the language of apocalypse in our time. The action of the destruction of the cultural forms surrounding the ideas of resistance and change is twofold: the actual erasure of existing cultural entities and relations, and the
subsequent representational record of this erasure. Since the purported collapse and dispersal of Western meta-narratives in the decades following World War Two, the populations of Western cultures have not had a metaphysics to interpret the world through. Without the benefit of a pervasive worldview, articulated in the thoughts, actions and social formations of a population -- especially within the rubric of the Church, state or party -- the self-reflexivity of media, the intrinsic processes of representation, becomes a continual interrogation of the integrity of the population's beliefs and attitudes. As the expansion of the cultural territory of capital invested in new technologies comes up against sacred grounds, the manufacturers of information -- the media and the academia -- deploy aesthetic strategies, often borrowed from avant-garde traditions, to desacralise these grounds. Through these means, it appears, established conceptions of humanness are set upon the vicissitudes of new technologies. While their underlying prerogatives are more likely to be strictly economic, the changes which then precipitate through wide-ranging social formations and cultural relations appear in the name of cultural progress, pluralism and that distant echo of Enlightenment, open-mindedness.

Alternately, the simulacral self-reflexivity of media operates to assure audiences that they will stay informed about where they stand in the constellations and contestations of events, large or small. Amidst this uprootedness and fluidity there is yet a profound certainty: consumer/corporate capitalism. The certainty and permanence of capitalism are not only the experience of its immense apparatus, but also the rigours of its simulated anthropology. Capitalist societies afford their individuals positions in an empirically regimented co-ordinate system of social identity and power. Technological culture encourages and rewards its participants, such that they conceive of the total set of possibilities in their lives in terms of calibrated social relations. The failure to comply with the introduction of a technological array of new habits, tools and tasks -- whether conformist or oppositional, depending on the affiliations of the individual -- becomes a weakness, an indicator of cowardice.
Today, in the prosperous warfare and welfare state, the human qualities of a pacified existence seem asocial and unpatriotic -- qualities such as the refusal of all toughness, togetherness, and brutality; disobedience to the tyranny of the majority; profession of fear and weakness (the most rational reaction to this society!); a sensitive intelligence sickened by that which is being perpetrated; the commitment to the feeble and ridiculed actions of protest and refusal. These expressions of humanity, too, will be marred by necessary compromise -- by the need to cover oneself, to be capable of cheating the cheaters, and to live and think in spite of them.

Herbert Marcuse

Though published nearly forty years ago, Marcuse's explication of the precariousness of the social position of refusal and non-participation is a powerful reminder to caution against miscalculated -- perhaps exaggerated -- formulations of liberation and social transformation. One might add, however, that since the publication of *One-Dimensional Man* the look and behaviour of those who dress and act to show their refusal and non-participation have been integrated into the established and profitable circuits of consumption. The resultant state of affairs is an absurd cultural condition where outright and vociferous theatrics of non-conformity become so profitable that record companies insist on total control over the publication of songs full of anger, hate, misery and desperation. This is not to be judged as an intrinsic condition of technological life -Benjamin's culture of mechanical reproduction -- or even of the arrangements of liberal democracy. The legitimacy of fear and weakness as a stance in contemporary culture cannot even become a question unless it is welded onto the question of participation in consumer culture, which is also a question of participation in the technological invasion of humanness. Hence, one's inability and/or refusal of identification along the spectrum of centre/periphery and conformist/oppositional is no escape from destructive political and cultural battles that ultimately serve to locate new prospects for capitalism -- incomplete and contradictory goods and services for suitable identities. Whereas participation in the networks of established political arenas affirms the bedrock illusion of liberal democracy, non-participation reflects primarily in the statistics of participation. Liberal democracy and consumer capitalism focus on and
dramatise the moments of deferred autonomy - when individuals are solicited for the exchange of their “buying power,” as in advertising, or their political voice, as in voting. Consumerist societies do not choose ways of life that change their commodities or policies that change their governments. Rather, they choose commodities that change their ways of life -- hence products as “lifestyle” objects -- and governments that change they policies. Similarly, consumerist societies do not and cannot choose a humanness that changes technology, but rather a technology that changes humanness.30

Capitalism has for long set about to transubstantiate values into exchange value. Digital and information technologies greatly expand the possibilities for breaking this process of transubstantiation into daily lives. Hence the erasure of structures of class difference -- the same might be expressed with varying degrees of gender and racial lines of difference -- neither for the better nor for the worse. No one stands to gain or lose from this erasure in itself. The gain and loss register in another field of thought and signification. Above all, this gain and loss should be measured with respect to the question of humanness, the self-reflexivity of consciousness. Digital and information technologies produce cultural relations -- patterns of action and communication -- that promote the surrender of self-reflexivity to machines and systems which have been raised to maximise the fiscal and material efficiency of human participation at every turn, ranging from the daily life cycle and family life to the various levels of education, health care, entertainment and so on.

The surrender of self-reflexivity takes place in the face of a surge of indifference in the transubstantiation of value into exchange value. An analogy of this indifference might be found in Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” the force that supposedly moves through society and history without unfounded prejudice. With digital and information technologies the analogy becomes more tangible. It comes alive with the sequential logic of computer code, the language of conjunctions.31 The populations of Western societies -- North America in particular -- have since gained fluency in this language. It is a matter of success in society, not only as an entrepreneur, but rather, in almost all
capacities of social life. One might argue that this is no less than the digitisation of consumers -- individuals who need the amenities of technological life individually, and who are exceedingly easier to organise and predict in an atomised state. As long as each individual is an isolatable producing and consuming unit, consumer capitalism can and must intervene in all social relations. Within the cultural relations of consumerism, to be an individual is to be individuated.

The city housing projects designed to perpetuate the individual as a supposedly independent unit in a small hygienic dwelling make him all the more subservient to his adversary -- the absolute power of capitalism. Because the inhabitants, as producers and consumers, are drawn into the center in search of work and pleasure, all the living units crystallize into well-organized complexes. The striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

The cry for a return to collective sentiments, traditions and rituals is useless at best and reactionary at worst. The problem is that there is no problem, there can never be problems any longer. Discontent and the potential for sabotage and strike will never cease to be a threat to capitalism. But, this threat dissipates as the use of force and the display of aggression become the prerogatives of machines, from automated satellite-guided missiles to videogame consoles.

Technology has changed human beings from children into persons. However, every advance in individuation of this kind took place at the expense of the individuality in whose name it occurred, so that nothing was left but the resolve to pursue one's own particular purpose. The bourgeois whose existence is split into a business and private life, whose private life is split into keeping up his public image and intimacy, whose intimacy is split into the surly partnership of marriage and the bitter comfort of being quite alone, at odds with himself and everybody else, is already virtually a Nazi, replete both with enthusiasm and abuse; or a modern city-dweller who can not only imagine friendship as a "social contact": that is, as being in social contact with others with whom he has no inward contact.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

Participation in society, including its victories and losses, is increasingly moving towards electronic media, where we plug into games and conversations. In sports for example, the din and fury of a stadium comes to living rooms, first through radio and television and finally through videogames. The phenomenon of athletics is incredibly democratised. Now, the proverbial weakling can be the national Nintendo football
champion. People might plug into games and conversations until the index of ordinary human life nearly disappears from the material world. The complexity and confusion of human existence retreat from the concourse of living things to data banks, keyboards and screens. What remains in the material world will be the pure sequential logic of machines that locate, identify, dig, extract, build, destroy, repair, maintain, divide, replace and recycle matter for us. Just like advertising, consumers will live on the surface of corporate machinery as shoppers, customer service agents, floor managers, executives, commentators, inventors, critics, entertainers and educators. Though founded on industrialism, this state of affairs is a move away from the thinking of mechanical mastery in the world.

Humanity could hypothetically continue to direct its greatest energies -- imagination, invention and construction -- towards furthering mechanical mastery. However, it appears that the populations of the most industrialised regions have shifted their historical path, whence building and caring are retreating from the material world into private minds. Technological society now strives for informational mastery. Whereas mechanisation served to distance and free production from human physiology, digitisation serves to do the same from human psychology. The flickering divide between physiology and psychology in current cultural relations is delineated by the vicissitudes of digitisation. There is no one physiology or psychology; these are determined by the material conditions of production and consumption. Computers liberate production from the "weaknesses" of the mind, as machines have done with the body. The machinery of production still aspires to alleviate human toil, by assuming the responsibilities of memory, organisation, calculation, communication and ultimately thought.

The idea of progress has disappeared, yet progress continues. The idea of wealth that production once connoted has disappeared, yet production itself continues more vigorously than ever. Indeed, it picks up speed precisely in proportion to its increasing indifference to its original aims. Of the political sphere one can say
that the idea of politics has disappeared but that the game of politics continues
in secret indifference to its own stakes.

Jean Baudrillard\textsuperscript{39}

The emptying of the idea of progress returns to the populations of consumerist
cultures, who are bent on finding the new, the next instalment in the endless
succession of products, techniques, complaints and theories. It could be then that the
familiar morbidity of our times is a reflection of the self-perpetuating drive of modernity.
There is enough concentrated power in Western societies -- whether in the state
machine or corporations -- to exercise oppression. However, one might ask alongside
numerous theorists, if oppression is exercised, why is it tolerated? Furthermore, if the
arrangements of liberal democracy and consumer capitalism serve as the mechanisms
of oppression and cultural destruction, and if these arrangements have existed in a
state of increasing proliferation, at least in the post-war period, how might one account
for the absence of categorical ruptures in society and culture within a population that is
convinced of its liberation? These questions are posed here not to be answered, or even
explored as such, but rather, to stand as a critical backdrop for the arguments
presented.

Having said this, I venture to elaborate briefly on some of the ways in which the
idea of apocalypse might inform these questions, for example, through cinematic
representations of global destruction. In the arenas of representation within Western
cultures, apocalypse is not only a recapitulation of the Christian cosmos, but also of its
own historical reality. Apocalypse is something of a narrative perpetual machine, set to
work and programmed to quicken at the end of humanity and history, to \textit{be} the end of
humanity and history. Once the life of humanity - and humanness as a whole -
becomes thus vectored the Beginning and the End short-circuit into the most rigid
teleology, such that it no longer suffices to say that all that precedes the end derives its
meaning from the conclusion, but rather, that all but the end exists in a vacuum of
meaning. The historical reality of this paradigm is the fact that Western Christian
societies have lived at the threshold of apocalypse; ready for the sudden and unexpected arrival of the Messiah, they have been apocalyptic. Moreover, embedded in this apocalypticism is the most profound co-opting force, a principle of assimilation that might stand as a general paradigm for social formations at large. As a fundamental aspect of Western belief systems, the apocalypse perfectly anticipates the disintegration of the social fabric of its historical presence. Its narrative projects the disintegration of Christian society as the inauguration of apocalypse. It seems that a new dialect has emerged since the 1980's in the Western-Christian language of apocalyptics. This new dialect for the representation of global destruction, epidemic social dysfunction and human annihilation is the self-reflection of an emergent conception of humanness. The infiltration of technology into the bulwarks of humanness is the condition of this phenomenon.

In the final decades of the 20th century and perhaps since the end of World War Two there has been a sense that what fell to destruction in the latest orgy of progress was something perhaps categorically vital to civilisation. The mathematical space of Renaissance art is certainly a sizeable historical entity, so are kingship, geocentricism and a great number of other obsolete notions. Yet, the most spectacular of fears is one that imagines humanness itself as the murder victim of modernism. Apocalypse is the moment in history when humanness becomes obsolete, when humanity becomes the weakest link in the civilisation it has spun. According to the historiography of modernism this will be a time when progress will be retarded by humanness. Loud in the clamour of postmodernism, technology tells us that consumers are already there, on the threshold of the final movement from human existence to some other existence. Perhaps the next sovereign of the food chain will be not of flesh at all. After all, machines are faster, more efficient and durable and soon will be smarter than humans. And, the mention of creativity is useless, because even art has been assimilated to the neurotic logic of technique, a losing strategy for humanists.
On the surface of things, it is abundantly clear that traditional conceptions of the uniqueness of humanness - as the solitary example of intelligence and consciousness - are losing ground in culture. The evidences are often so multifarious that one can hardly separate the loss of specific cultural norms, native to various societies, from the gradual depletion of something inherent -- if one may dare generalise -- to humanity. Technology has for long served to bring distant regions and population under the control of a more materially advanced centre. This was the shape of the political world at the height of Western colonialism. Since the end of World War Two the vectors of colonial power and oppression have dispersed. Certainly, technology is still the central determinant in the arrangements of political advantage, whether in economic or military engagements. However, the historically firm link between the distribution of advantage and the framework of national boundaries has come loose and perhaps stands to all but disappear in the foreseeable future. In a world of rapidly progressing and proliferating technological order, cultural relations dissolve the borders of nations, as they do with bodies. In as much as bodies and personal lives are infiltrated by technological devices -- design principles and use functions -- national entities are also invaded and rearranged through the economics of the production and consumption of technology. These patterns appear at the surface of deep and turbulent debates around the political configurations of the individual and the world, the fate of the nation-state and national identity, the development of multi-national corporate capitalism and so on. For the purposes of this inquiry it suffices to say that with respect to the development of technology a theoretical connection must be established between the advent of so-called fractured identities and the dissolution of pre-WWII colonial arrangements. It seems that this matter can be viewed from two perspectives: firstly, there is the complex global network of production and consumption that threatens to override existing premises for identity, whether personal or national, except for participation in the transfer of capital and commodities; secondly, there is the
individual position of the consumer within culture and the technological entanglement of personhood and consumerism.

Despite their beliefs in the supernatural, humans everywhere have been the keepers of their cultures. This right to build and keep is precisely what was at stake in colonial relations. Imperial powers insisted that they were better builders and keepers, and on a material level they demonstrated their betterness. Though unacceptably cruel for enlightened postcolonial sensibilities, it is not difficult to see how this demonstrable betterness at building and keeping was held as proof for an inherent superiority on the scales of humanness. Europeans and North Americans even insisted on keeping what their colonial subjects had previously built. Having said this, discounting cruelty as mere aberration is also cruel. Europeans used their cannons and diplomatic guile against their neighbours, so why would they not deploy these in their colonial conflicts. The only difference is the force of arrogance and chauvinism that the imperialists could afford against adversaries who could not return the indignities convincingly. What has appeared as an enduring pattern of conflict between cultures of disparate technological advancement is fast becoming a different kind of war. Here I am not referring to changing cultural attitudes, bolstered by progressive legislation, which in unison claim to aspire to a kinder, more enlightened human society. As sincere as these claims might be, they abide by the necessary fact that they coincide with the relatively inclusive logic of current global economic relations. The powers that be, as it were, do not fundamentally disagree that all humans are equal in rights, privileges and potential. In as much as all humans are potential consumers, they will truly be equal once the economic arrangements of consumer societies have conquered the planet. With the advent of credit and the ensuing fluidity of finance, the machinery of capital becomes increasingly miniaturised, less tangibly intrusive and far more accommodating towards the varieties of social organisation across the world. These could be as divergent as the clan states of the Persian Gulf, the warlord governments of sub-Saharan Africa, Western socialist states -- such as in Scandinavia -- and various dictatorships around
the world. "All that capital asks of us is to receive it as rational or to combat it in the name of rationality, to receive it as moral or to combat it in the name of morality."46

The question remains, if we are on the way to consumerist equality/sameness, what is the vehicle that carries us? Corporate culture claims that the vehicle is capitalism itself, with its infallible assertions about human nature and natural law. The argument here is that we are in essence capitalistic animals; capitalism is the realisation of the essence of humanness. Needless to say, this answer is not sufficient.

Despite its so-called triumph, since the fall of the Eastern Bloc, there is no uniformity of economic attitudes and practices even among the populations that have the longest histories of capitalist arrangements. More importantly, the millennial prospect of global capitalism entails not only the calculated continuation of imperialistic relations of difference, power and profit -- though without the lately impractical notions of biological racism and cultural exclusivism -- but also the emergence of a fast-rising structure of domination, of persuasion and profit, within the populations of capitalist countries, in particular the United States.

Neither a represented people nor a legitimate sovereign is now the issue. That political configuration has given way to a contest in which there is no longer any question of a social contract: a transpolitical contest between an agency oriented towards totalitarian self-reference on the one hand, and sardonic or refractory, agonistic and infantile masses on the other (masses which no longer speak, though they chat). This is the hypochondrial condition of the body devouring its own organs. Powers - states - have set about destroying their own cities, their own landscapes, their own substance and, indeed, themselves with a fury that can be compared only to the fury they once directed towards the destruction of their enemies.

Jean Baudrillard47

International consumerist equality under capitalist globalisation certainly enmeshes with the furore of awareness and pro-action surrounding the conventional constructions of difference along race and gender. But, there is more to this furore than goodwill and hard work. Postmodern debates examine the pervasive experience of disintegration and fracturing in culture, in the lives of individuals. For an author, such as Haraway, this disintegration and fracturing is the precondition for the possibility of a transformed humanness, one that categorically rejects the dispensation of advantage
and power through hitherto conventional constructions of difference. The validity of Haraway’s arguments rests on the belief that humans are fundamentally beings of gender and race, that the foundation and totality of everyone’s relations to others and to the world in general is a being of gender and race. Needless to say, this belief is not unfounded, however it lacks the kind of articulation that would allow for an accurate description of the position and probable future of the very fractured identities in question. I would argue that even though, from a critical standpoint, the constituencies of race and gender are inextricable from existence, in regard to the question of humanness at this moment in history, there is a need for a debate that does not classify and qualify its arguments and statements systematically along the discourses of race, class and gender. Within this debate, one could hope to address the ways in which every identity is assailed by the manufacture of a technological -- and purportedly global -- humanness. In the actual world of consumer capitalism, the cyborgs in Haraway’s discussion are the assemblages of innumerable corporate marketing strategies for redefining and equipping populations toward greater and more profitable consumption; the cyborg is a conduit for the totalisation of consumerism, such that the designation of individuals as consumers will no longer be an accident of the place of one’s birth, but rather the truth of one’s being. Cyborgism is the anatomy of global consumerism.

2. Killer Robots

I trace the beginnings of the literal conception of the consumerist cyborg to the early 1980’s and the first Reagan presidency. It was around this time that technology in the guise of the chief attribute of a host of consumer products was launched. It was also at this time that military imagination seized technology in its perhaps purest form, for the conception of the defence of nation and freedom. On the whole, it was during the early 1980’s that the rumour of technology’s superiority to humanity began to spread into the actual lives of people. After all, automation became a threat to industrial jobs --
soon to threaten other sectors -- in these years. As glorious and possible current optimistic visions of a futuristic high technological world might be, the beginnings of that future were far from glorious. The technological world -- taking for granted that it is a world and not the manufacturing of a global advertisement scheme -- was launched in a particular place at a particular time, the United States after years of détente. The crises of America, two decades ago, brought about the present-day technological order of life. It was from this time that technological society began to relinquish its identity as the builder and keeper of this world and accept colonisation by supposedly intelligent machines. Nonetheless, there are no actual cyborgs yet. And so, perhaps instead of celebrating or mourning the advent of the cyborg, it is more pertinent to pursue a better understanding of the path of technological culture.

From Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse we learn that cyborgism as a way of life, rather than the manner of one's bodily composition, began decades ago. With this historical knowledge we can hope to cut through the gleeful celebration of cyborgism and explore the source and rationale of an increasingly pervasive attitude towards technology -- an attitude that presents itself as a "relationship" -- enshrined in terms and phrases such as "help menu," "interface," and "user friendly" -- and hence becomes doubly self-destructive as a social phenomenon. The problem does not rest on the hopefulness of the idea of an intelligent machine. Rather, it rests on the fact that the idea of machine intelligence has come to redefine human intelligence and humanness as a whole, such that -- taking for granted that truly intelligent machines are future realities -- among the most technologically advanced populations, since World War Two, humanity has been organising itself according to what would/could be the hypothetical sociological realities and laws of cyborgs.

Perhaps, the best examples of this point are the ways in which computers coordinate tasks and procedures in a rapidly increasing number of human affairs, ranging from the most mundane, such as communicating through electronic mail, to the most complex, such as drawing market forecasts through computer simulations. This is not
to say that computers present an unnecessary or unwelcome intrusion into human life, but rather, that computers are not neutral tools, for the advancement of their users' goals -- as manufacturers' and retailers' advertisements suggest. Similar to any tool, computers demand fairly prescribed sets of actions from their operators. In as much as the actions produced while operating a computer are mostly mental, one might argue that the usage of these electronic machines fosters particular kinds of mental behaviour. That is, the most politically enfranchised people in the history of humanity have accepted to live within arrangements that propagate a consciousness which is increasingly tuned to sequential logic -- a negation of existence.

In terms of the legibility of historical evidence, this phenomenon presents its clearest traces in the history of production and consumption in post-war America. One finds the most compelling traces in "cultural" products, representation and especially cinema. Here, social attitudes and fears come forward in representations of destruction that simultaneously terrify and thrill their audiences. As the recent history of apocalyptic films produced in Hollywood illustrates, the double function of terror and thrill fuels the escalation of cinematic representations of destruction. Box office success and rapid developments in cinematographical techniques come together in repeated visions of sweeping destruction. This is not to say that films ranging from *The Terminator* and *Hardware* to *Demolition Man* and *Independence Day* represent a cohesive cultural phenomenon. Rather, insofar as representations of technological destruction -- destruction through and of technology -- inform and are informed by the idea of technological progress, each of these films might be examined in terms of the continual interrogation of Western conceptions of humanness by the panoply of new technological products and assemblages, which have pervaded Western societies in recent decades. On one extreme, science fiction films propose a symbiotic relation between humanity and technology. The *Star Trek* series and films are perhaps the best examples of this. The symbiosis may not be all peaceful though, as in the case of *Robocop*, but it still appears as an inevitability. On the other extreme, technology
appears to be entirely maleficent, in films such as *Westworld* and *Hardware*, for example. Symbiosis or the belief that technology will unceasingly serve human needs and desires collapses when machines seem to have a mind of their own, a mind which harbours only the thought of human destruction. *The Terminator*, from 1984, belongs to the latter category. This film's narration goes so far as to delineate this premise word by word, in the brief though apocalyptic speech delivered by Kyle Reese to a horrified Sarah Connor. I am most intrigued by the forceful insistence of this premise, which aptly paralleled James Cameron's wish to produce a definitive cyborg film. One might surmise that *The Terminator* is in part a message or reminder, to precisely those voices who are too hopeful in their visions of symbiosis. At a historical moment when the United States appeared to have stepped onto the threshold of a panorama of uncertainties -- both utopian and dystopian -- with the relatively late infiltration of automation in American society, *The Terminator* produced a glaring image of technological terror, all the more convincing because of its terrific reception. As sound as this reading of *The Terminator* might be, this film must be reconsidered in view of its sequel. To begin with, the sequel is a blockbuster adaptation of the plot line of a more or less experimental film. The question here, though, is not whether James Cameron and Gayle Ann Hurd betrayed their own vision and “sold out.” I would argue that the question of “selling-out” is in some sense irrelevant. Viewed within their contexts these two films, *The Terminator* and *T2: Judgment day*, appear to operate through sets of cultural relations that override their discrepancies in political vision. That is, these two films may speak in disagreement with one another, while both exist within processes in the development of technology as a cultural paradigm, such that their discordant voices at once celebrate the technological invasion of humanness.

These two films, among the numerous apocalyptic science fiction films produced in Hollywood since the 1980's, strike me as the best examples of a particularly meaningful intersection of trends in current cultural and economic relations surrounding technology, war, and altogether an emergent conception of humanness in
consumerism. Set in 1984 and 1991, the two plots of the Terminator narrative work in close connection to an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear in America, surrounding national and world events. Undoubtedly, the year 1984 carries Orwellian resonances in an apocalyptic narrative. In conjunction to this literary reference -- and more central to the first plot and its cultural context -- 1984 was the year of Reagan’s re-election, hence a response to anticipations about the continuation of fierce anti-Soviet military and foreign policy. The early 1980’s were a return to intense Cold War relations, a renewal of the imaginary of global annihilation both in official rhetoric and popular culture. Whereas up to the Reagan era the frightening power of nuclear weapons and modern warfare as a whole had been locked safe as a defensive last resort -- at least in the American public mind -- in the 80’s nuclear war became fundamentally more immanent with the possibility of a pre-emptive strike by the United States. It was not so much that nuclear war had become more probable in the imagination of America, but that nuclear war had become more justifiable. The absolute horror of global annihilation had become a reasonable scenario for the resolution of East-West tensions, a historical choice that America could accept within the parameters of its national identity. This shift in the conception of nuclear war from the darkest last resort scenario to a calculated attack was more than a matter of military strategy, the logistics of mutual destruction in hypothetical conflicts; the cultural internalisation of nuclear war, as a foreseeable event in American history, enmeshed with popular thinking about trends in geopolitics, ecology and especially America’s own social fabric.

Amidst these concerns was the role of technology in human destiny. The proliferation of technology in the shape of automobiles and household appliances, in the early post-war years, infused the idea of scientific advancement with the righteousness of “the American dream.” In the lives of common people technology proved itself to be a great promoter of Americanness. As America’s triumph against fascism receded into history, the progress of technology increasingly came to be seen as a malevolent -- though essential -- presence in society. Insofar as the military-industrial complex stood
unchallenged at the leading edge of scientific advancement, technology was and continues to be invariably tainted with the troubled memory of American military history, from Hiroshima onwards. The automated killing machine, the Terminator, embodies the notion of technology as destroyer, in pursuit of humanity and robbing its future.\textsuperscript{60} In the \textit{Terminator} films the destruction of the world is twofold. The machines lay to waste both nature and civilisation. The synthesis of flesh and machine, nature and artifice, found in the cyborg, extends to the shape of the world ruled by Skynet. The Terminator, in turn, represents “the perfection of the sovereign rational subject.”\textsuperscript{61} Within the varieties of humanness, the immediate victims of this usurpation are those who know themselves as sovereign rational subjects and whose reality is categorically evolutionary, hence guided towards some form of perfection. Generally speaking, these are the population of industrialised countries. More specifically they are Americans, for whom the idea of perfection is tangible in their conception of superiority as a national identifier. The Terminator’s excellence as a manufactured product thus breaks into the world to remove, at last, the subjectivity of the consumer from the logic of production/profit and the ideal of perfection ingrained therein.\textsuperscript{62}

The Terminator “will never stop.” In the fight scenes of the first film, the Terminator’s fantastic power and endurance come forward as the terror of its presence in society. Though mostly a fast-paced action film, subtler, more complicated, aspects of the notion of a sentient killing machine also appear, throughout the slower sequences. Firstly, we learn that the construction of the T800, the villain in the first film, retains the beneficent or “human” aspect of technology in its fleshy exterior; this is its most terrifying design principle. In a sense, this is a cynical revision of the ergonomics of a good machine. The Terminator’s design twists the idea that a machine should serve human needs and fit within human endeavours.\textsuperscript{63} Furthermore, while the film’s narrative designates the Terminator a cyborg, there is no blend of metal and flesh in the T800. The Terminator emerges from a fire, stripped of its flesh and still unstoppable. This cyborg is only a killer robot designed to infiltrate “the resistance” with the aid of
human camouflage. The terrible truths of the T800 are the endoskeleton and the neural-net computer. The T800 imitates and excels the mechanics -- including computational skills - of the human body with machinery and circuitry. The organic aspect of its being is the final touch in a symbolic set of functions, in particular speech and upright posture, that present the T800 as a superior soldier in a human war. Here, the machines usurp the position of a militaristic humanity, to become the supreme agents of the planet. In *The Terminator*, the celebration of technology as a great tool of social betterment -- underlined by the need for securing “the right to the pursuit of happiness” with a network of satellites and ICBM’s -- turns into a grim mockery of human hopes and dreams, where machines advance ever faster in a destroyed world.

Inadvertent global suicide, the consequence of human artifice, leaves the protagonists of *The Terminator* in a position of heightened individualism as the defenders of a pathetic and thankless society. The terms of engagement in the war against the machines change radically in the sequel. The villain in *T2*, the liquid metal T1000, reveals a fundamental leap in the development of Skynet’s “new order of intelligence.” The enemy is no longer artifice -- the mechanical armature that has come to life -- rather, it is the artifice of artifice. The T1000 also has a life, the pure fiction of its surface and the pure mobility of its fluid mass. Thus, whereas the T800 still belongs to the order of tools, mechanical slaves, the T1000 has attained its sovereignty by assuming a reality that negates humanness. The T1000 kills not only by ending biological life, but also by erasing humanness even while one is still alive. Here, the perfect simulation of the physical appearance of a living human drives an absurd wedge between the appearance of life and the material reality of being alive, “a monster of some diabolically other Nature.”

Mechanical automata still played on the difference between man and machine, and on the charm of this difference -- something with which today's interactive and simulating automata are no longer concerned. Man and machine have become isomorphic and indifferent to each other: Neither is other to the other.

Jean Baudrillard
In 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the formally polarised world of super-power relations, the military/destructive significance of technology was transformed. To put it simply, the decades long excuse for arms build-up almost suddenly evaporated. With the resignation of the purported chief of “unfriendly” countries -- and anti-capitalist “unfriendliness” in general -- the structural integrity of America’s “defensive” position in a hostile world came undone. To take a cynical -- though no less realistic -- view, a new kind of unfriendliness had to be located, in order to sustain the military-industrial complex; America needed a new “public enemy number one.” Saddam’s Iraq quickly filled this position and crystallised what had until that time been an auxiliary line of enemy mongering, highlighted by such figures as Castro, Khomeini and Qadhafi. Saddam became the supreme manifestation of the evil ruler bent on world destruction. His deplorable treatment of Iraqi’s matched his chemical and biological weapons facilities. Towards the end of 1990 and through 1991, Iraq’s explosion into the media left an irreversible mark on the conception of technology in America; technology appeared as an enemy of humanity, both in the construction of Iraq’s image as an unacceptable threat to world security and the conflagration of the Gulf War. The perception/reality of this double phenomenon -- the potential destructiveness of Iraq and the actual destructiveness of America - was representational and highly technological in itself. It has been argued that the advent of this technological perception/reality is the true -- or in any case the most worrisome -- destructive power that threatens humanity. The technologies of representation clear perception for the possibilities of technique, thus making reality itself a space for directed utility. Theoretically speaking, this entails the obliteration of perhaps the last and most sacred bastion of humanness, the dignity of seeing the world with one’s own eyes. In the science fiction imaginary of the Terminator narrative, the terror of the technologies of representation in the T1000 surpass the threat of the mechanical enemy, the T800, if for no other reason, simply because by 1991 -- in particular with
the Gulf War -- technological advances had introduced a more terrifying vision of
destruction into history, the destruction of identity. Technology's presence in culture
did not release the burden of violence and destruction upon the dissolution of the bi­
polar world. Rather, to follow Heidegger's formulations, the misconceived essence of
technology burst forth, more powerfully than ever, into lives. The technologies of
representation began to unravel the endgame of technology, the clearing for technique,
where humanness itself becomes the space to be cleared.

Given the plots of the Terminator films, the fact that the action is
characteristically violent and oppositional -- simply in the sense that there are mutual
enemies who fight -- one might first ask about the identities of the opposing sides. Who
is fighting whom? Who are they in the films and whom might they represent in the
world of their audiences. The questions as to why they fight each other and what the
implications of the depiction of this fight are must be delayed. Films such as these
intentionally lack the kind of self-reflexivity that would allow for a direct exploration of
these questions. The answers to these are remote, because the spectacular surface of
the films obscures them, also because the plot cunningly seals the questions with quick
and facile answers. The plot tells us that humans and machines fight because each
wants to destroy the other. The depiction of their war, in turn, appears as nothing but a
kind of reportage about the future of the world; this is established by the text and
narration at the beginning of both films. The next question, then, might be to ask
about the purpose and the meaning of a cinematic report about the future of the world,
during the historical moment of these films. Special effects science fiction films
invariably reveal themselves as technological products. The awe-struck question, "how
did they do that?", uttered at the sight of a spectacular visual miracle, exemplifies this.
The social fears surrounding technology -- especially the central terror of the erasure of
"reality" by cybernetics and electronic simulation -- return to the films themselves.
The fact that the Terminator films do not take up this issue directly speaks, first and
foremost, of their lack of self-reflexivity. Purportedly, the films only depict the terror of
technology, the imagined war between humans and machines; they never say that they are part of the terror. I would argue that the Terminator films would be in the war between humans and machines, if there ever were such a war. These films exist as cultural products, in the sense that they are neither mere reflections of historical realities nor historical realities in themselves. They are events that profess themselves to be depictions of events, history as cultural commodities.

This lack of self-reflexivity operates simultaneously in two modes. In one respect, the films wash their hands clear of arguments surrounding the notion of responsibility in cinematic representation. The depiction of violence in both these films, especially the sequel, is so gratuitous as to undermine the possibility of a critical note against the phenomenon of social violence. Similarly with the cynical depiction of official ineptitude, the ignorance and feebleness of the police, the failure “to serve and protect” becomes nothing but a gory joke. The collapse of law enforcement is not a point of concern in itself in the Terminator narrative; it is merely an obstacle in the way of the protagonists. In fact, were the police to be better equipped to deal with the Terminators, the central position of the protagonists would be undermined. The collapse of law enforcement is a necessary evil for the realisation of the characters’ that we are to cheer for. The films say nothing about the fact that our applause at the sight of civil terror directly relates to the collapse of civil society as well; a society where those who cannot defend themselves like Kyle and Sarah must turn into the skeletons that crumble under the march of the machines. It is especially interesting that the circuitous time travel plot of these films facilitates this sort of critique. The fortunes of the protagonists wane and wax in these films as they do in most stories, but here the moments of triumph and defeat are so tightly wound together that they are inseparable. If we are pleased by the triumph of the Connors, then we must, upon reflection, smile at the Terminators’ invasion into history; without the killer machines there would be no time travel and hence no John Connor. Nonetheless, the temporal inflections multiply and threaten to become self-serving.
That is life -- very hard, but just because of that so wonderful and so healthy. This lie does not shrink from tragedy. Mass culture deals with it, in the same way as centralized society does not abolish the suffering of its members but records and plans it...Tragedy made into a carefully calculated and accepted aspect of the world is a blessing. It is a safeguard against the reproach that truth is not respected, whereas it is really being adopted with cynical regret.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

These films' lack of self-reflexivity becomes more glaring with a view to technology and special effects as a technological medium for story-telling. To begin with, the political premise of both films -- only inherited in the sequel -- is that technology is a threat to society. In 1984, when Terminator was released this was valid and timely, with the sense of urgency surrounding Star Wars, the real life vision of Skynet. The films show us how technology might become a nearly unstoppable enemy to human existence. We witness the terrifying ordeal of the heroes as they overcome an enemy that walks undetected in society and destroys all barriers -- human or not -- that stand before it. The Terminator, as a social phenomenon, already belongs in its own referential past. As a cybernetic unit, the Terminator's social reality is violent and alienated, and hence, closely linked to the three punks it kills at the beginning of the film, especially in conventional categories of identity. And yet, there is nothing to say that the Terminator's intentions and actions are diabolical, despite the fact that its eyes glow red in its menacing metal skull. The Terminator simply follows its programming. In the sequel, John learns to appreciate his future enemy's point of view. Programmed to protect John, the Terminator nearly kills two bystanders who rush to respond to the young Connor's call for help. The scene devolves into characteristically brutal comedy. The two men who come to face the cyborg narrowly escape death, simply because John had not yet discovered the magic of sequential logic, "[his] own Terminator." Once he learns that the T800 has been reprogrammed to obey him, John commands the Terminator first to stand on one leg and then to stop killing people. The first command goes unquestioned; the second one presumably conflicts with the cyborg's programming. The Terminator asks "why?" "I am a terminator," it reminds the boy. Perhaps, the older John Connor had no compunctions about random murder.
Moreover, the young Connor fails to produce even the simplest reasons for not killing. He says “just trust me on this.” The validity of the machine’s encoded sequential logic stands in the face of a choiceless leap of faith, for the prevention of random murder. The need for the preservation of human life becomes as mysterious/irrational as the tears shed at the end of the film, when the T800’s life must be taken. Emotional sensibilities aside, this construction of machine logic and its application to the question of human life negates the anthropological fact of millions of years in the evolution of a social animal, that humanness categorically cannot abide by random murder. Unable to compute the command, the Terminator henceforth merely cripples people. The audience should be comforted and amused to know that the dozens of characters with destroyed knees and shins “will live.” This act of faith, just trusting John, subsequently assures us of the ultimate humanness of the cyborg -- when it discovers why humans cry -- and secures its position as the protagonist in the sequel. Thus, it becomes possible to understand why Sarah sees that “of all the would-be fathers that came and went over the years, this thing, this machine was the only one that measured up” for her son. She identifies the Terminator as the best possible partner in her life’s path, which centres on the protection of her son.

Whereas in 1984 the Terminator was the absolute manifestation of the enemy, the spectre of high-tech war mongering, in 1991 it was the best and only choice. High-tech war had since become an accepted fact. More importantly, in the sequel the spectatorial pleasure of the Terminator’s manner of violence and destruction is internalised. The cyborg’s ability to takes bullets, walk through walls and out of fires, see in the dark and imitate voices become the special effects that “we” are to cheer for, rather than shrink from. In T2 the fictional high-tech world, including its threats, is taken for granted. Sensitivity towards organic humanness -- captured by Sarah and Kyle’s love affair and the methodical sex scene, in the first film - is no longer an issue. A new generation of technology, fluid, non-mechanical and simulacral, had come to represent the ultimate threat to humanness, to come forward in cinema. Ironically, the
technology of the film converges with the technology of the antagonist, the new Terminator. The computer animated special effects push the sequel towards a more literal representation of the threat of technological annihilation, recalling that cinema is not only a massive industry, but also the chief medium of story telling in North America. Films like the two Terminator installations promote an assemblage of cultural relations — from the production of films to home entertainment units and general merchandising — where the attraction and value of stories, even their ability to communicate to their audiences, becomes intrinsically dependent on technology. It matters much less if the story is weak and altogether lacks the conventional hooks, as long as the formulaic pleasure of effects are satisfactory. In a film such as The Matrix we see that the idea of the film camera — as the machine that looks out into the world and records images whereby it relates to us, humans, in as much as we look out into the same world — has been almost completely disassembled. The hugely positive reception of The Matrix illustrates that we are better pleased to watch computer animations of snapshots of the physical world, motion pictures that have been shot in the electronic space of computers. I would argue that this is the first true valorisation of cyborg subjectivity in cinema. The characters in The Matrix are not projections of the actors’ bodies. They are not even stunt doubles. They are simply ones and zeros in electronic data banks and animation programmes. In other words, they are in the matrix.

Whereas in The Matrix this phenomenon is a foregone conclusion — in as much as consumer demand insists on the best special effects — in the Terminator films the trend is still in the making. In particular, to follow Horkheimer and Adorno’s arguments concerning the co-option of non-conformity, we see a shift in the conception of subjectivity between these two films. In the first film, Hollywood has already assimilated rebellion, the position of the outsider, as a viable identity in the construction of cultural imaginaries. This is something that Horkheimer and Adorno had not yet observed. The Hollywood rebel of their time was characteristically tamed, before he/she could be
absorbed. *Terminator 2* pushed this further; the position of the outsider -- in this case a biker -- is not merely assimilated as a highly profitable cinematic icon; it is filled by the character of a cyborg, an entity that is only superficially human. It is precisely this shift in the construction of the hero/protagonist that becomes a literal statement -- though mostly silent -- in *The Matrix*, where the reality of that which we recognize on the screen as the hero/protagonist is quite literally the visual record of the action of a set of computer programmes. And, the fact that this hero/protagonist only exists for us in cinematic space makes the threat of its announcement in the world even greater, because cinema is the chief machinery of consumerist sentiments and dreams.

The co-opted cinematic cyborg, layered through the production of the film and the projection of the image, is another fractured identity. Admittedly, Haraway's notion of cyborg individuals with fractured identities references specific sets of issues around difference and power in society. The question still remains, given the culture industry's ability to assimilate non-conformity, as to whether this notion is a viable position of resistance at all. The history of the *Terminator* films, the drastic shifts between the budgets and marketing strategies of the two films, and the ways in which both enmesh with their cultural contexts points to a negative answer. In fact, more than ten years after the release of *T2*, it seems that fracture of identities through society is a given. To a great extent, the Baudrillardian society of simulacra necessitates the fracture of its persons. This is not say that identities have ever been entirely "whole," but that, perhaps these days a more pertinent discussion would centre around the contingencies of resistance in cultures where the tools and methods of communication increasingly instil disembodiment and simulated multiplicity in human relations. The *Terminator* films for one provide a very troubling picture of non-conforming fractured identities. To begin with, the succession of events, the narrative structure that operates in each film and spans both, rests on several layers of contradiction -- mainly the temporal absurdity of the time-travel premise, but also the numerous contradictions in the constructed intentionality of the central characters. Sarah Connor, Kyle Reese and the
T800 in the sequel produce actions and traverse situations such that they appear to stand against their professed/constructed motivations and intentions. The multiplicity and contradictoriness of Kyle's character development is a revealed fact in the first film. We learn that despite what he tells Sarah about the future -- Skynet, the war, and the Terminators -- his true reason for being there, in the film, is the fact that he has always loved her. This complicates the development of both Kyle and Sarah as protagonists, in particular the assignment of the one who must destroy the enemy. The contradictions of Sarah are subtler and more enduring. She knows what the future holds, and her intention is to act in the best interest of humanity by averting that future through any means necessary. She is the mother of the future saviour. She must protect her child. Between these two sentences lies the signature of the deepest contradictions in these films. Sarah must protect John Connor despite the fact that he is her son, and she is his mother despite the fact that he is the only hope for humanity, and that he has assigned her specifically for this multiple identity -- mother and protector/warrior -- from his messianic heights in the future. Sarah is the most "human" among the central characters, but she is also the nearest to a machine among the humans. She is a machine that must and will learn and adapt once she has received her primary instructions. In this light, the sequel is a brilliant exposition of the development of a human's realisation of her mechanical powers, the ability to engage her enemy with high-tech weapons. Sarah is a cyborg, not so much as a blend of flesh and metal -- even though her military accessories certainly point that way -- but rather, as a synthesised entity, self-manufactured according to a military design that forges body and mind together with the pleasure of the ergonomics of a weapon. Linda Hamilton is still attractive in T2, but her seduction is that of a beautiful gun. Yet, despite the fact that she manages to escape her asylum/prison without rescue, she is unequipped to face the new Terminator, the liquid metal T1000, and fails or breaks down when her humanness comes in the way of her algorithms, especially in her plot to assassinate the scientist Dyson.
In these films, the condition of the technological world is taken for granted. The prevention of doom does not come forward as some sort of enlightenment with regards to the path that humanity appears to have taken. Enlightenment belongs to the protagonists only. Everyone else is hopelessly lost. Horkheimer and Adorno understood this when they pointed to the calculated impossibility of participation in the leading roles of the culture industry.\textsuperscript{89} Audiences cheer for Kyle, Sarah, John, and even the T800 in the sequel, because these look like ordinary people from the heart and soul of the nation, not the elite or the cultural margins, like the pseudo-punk T800 in the first film. Yet, according to the terms of the plot, these very same ordinary people would populate the ranks of unwitting cannon fodder. And so, these films encourage viewers to applaud their own ineffectualty in the final battle for humanness, a battle that had presumably already begun.\textsuperscript{90}

3.\textbf{SEQUENTIAL LOGIC}

Human beings are not efficiently designed for a capitalist system of production. The higher the technology, the more expensive the human component of production compared to the mechanical.

Eric Hobsbawm\textsuperscript{91}

The promise of human companionship as reciprocity is immediately cancelled by the reality of communication as radical isolation.

Arthur Kroker and David Cook\textsuperscript{92}

Post WWII cultural relations have opened the atmosphere for the ascent of the cyborg, and a particular kind of cyborg at that. To trace the recent history of the Hollywood cyborg one finds the most literal examples in numerous characters, often of a military nature, that have been manufactured with the purpose of perfecting the manifestation of a particular consciousness in the world.\textsuperscript{93} For the purposes of a cinematic plot, the synthesis of flesh and machine, mind and matter, and the challenge to the centrality of the uniqueness of humanity at once lift the ethical burden of being created in the image of God and amplify the terror of objectification.\textsuperscript{94} This affords filmmakers potentials for tantalising visions of destruction, a great use for special effects
techniques. Yet, cyborg subjectivity, operating with variable literalness, appears much more pervasively in human characters. Often, the cyborg attributes of human characters are their powers -- quite simply the cool things that they can do. In T2 John takes off from his foster home on his moped with his friend. They arrive at a bank machine, where John interfaces the computer with the aid of a homemade digital decoder. They steal a stack of bills and fly off to “spend some money.” The cyborg, the rebel and the consumer come together in the body of the future saviour of humanity. It is important not to dissipate a cinematic sequence such as this into statements about delinquency, urban decay and so on. The subtle tensions in John’s pattern of behaviour in this sequence are at once indicative of some of the most recent trajectories in conceptions of humanness since the defeat of the fascists and the profound difficulties in formulating theories around the connections between demographics and ethics/values in consumerist cultures. It is all too easy to hold the “they” of the military-industrial complex and corporations as the guilty -- or at least responsible -- parties. Yet, the point is that it is not necessary to reify society into parties in order to explain historical entities and trends. The character of John Connor need not be an agent of the military-industrial propaganda machine. For the purposes of this inquiry it suffices to say that he is an agent -- or perhaps a participant -- in the technological invasion of humanness and a mutated descendent of the socially active critic. Herein lies the promise of a “society without opposition,” the total collapse of the positions of resistance and conformity, the concatenation of criticism and silence. This is the biology of the post WWII cyborg. All the technological gadgets of “the new economy” merely serve to convince us that this miracle of transfiguration has taken place.

The complexity of this condition has a place in the history of the use of force, in America, in post war decades. The question is whether a viable point of reference for critiques of North American culture still exists within the atmosphere of rapid co-option. Decades after the first waves of intellectual opposition -- mostly from European academics -- to the proliferation of American consumerism, it seems that this point of
reference is no longer even possible. Consumers are a culturally conquered people, if they ever imagined themselves in resistance at all. This is precisely the reason behind the widely perceived ineffectuality of current cultural criticism; most authors are still reporting the engagements of lost battles. In 1964 Marcuse asked,

Does not the threat of an atomic catastrophe which could wipe out the human race also serve to protect the very forces which perpetuate this danger? The efforts to prevent such a catastrophe overshadow the search for its potential causes in contemporary industrial society. These causes remain unidentified, unexposed, unattacked by the public because they recede before the all too obvious threat from without -- to the West from the East, to the East from the West. Equally obvious is the need for being prepared, for living on the brink, for facing the challenge. We submit to the peaceful production of the means of destruction, to the perfection of waste, to being educated for a defense which deforms the defenders and that which they defend.

Herbert Marcuse

One way or another, America's wars are premised on the pursuit of capital. The latest trends in consumerism come forward as another theatre of war for this pursuit. The line of attack is undetectable, because the "enemy" is on the homefront and pays tribute without the threat of organised bloodshed. The danger in using this kind of language is that it might seem to imply a deeply conspiratorial attitude in corporate culture. In fact, conspiracies are unnecessary, because the populations of consumerist cultures live in persuasion. They have already accepted the terms and conditions that fuel the mechanisms of profit -- by and large corporations -- as their own cherished identities. In consumerist societies, the stability of social control "can grant more than before because its interests have become the innermost drives of its citizens, and because the joys which it grants promote social cohesion and contentment." As the treasuries of the world are depleted, those who still have much to surrender to conquerors are the populations of industrial nations, who are encouraged to imagine themselves as winners in the advancement of technology, even as they dream about the comforts and pleasures of new products and services. With technology, consumerist dreams gain an urgency that goes well beyond the attainment of comfort and pleasure.
Consumption becomes participation in "the new economy," in other words, "the new humanness."\(^{101}\)

The 1980's and the early 1990's saw a series of sweeping and highly publicised shifts in super-power relations. In the first Reagan presidency the idea of a bipolar geopolitical arrangement culminated in a hypertrophied military-industrial society in the United States. The fanatical militarism of the US government in this period signalled a marked and irreversible departure -- even rejection -- of what had been the liberal, rationalist official line of the Western Allies since the end of WWII. It suffices to say that the Western allies constructed a vision of the world where the chief instruments and modes of human organisation would follow the historical projects of the industrialised nations, in particular, Britain, France and the United States. The list of the historical projects of the industrialised nations is in itself the source of much controversy. Yet, even among the shorter list of conventionally celebrated Western historical projects -- characteristically concerned with the welfare of the individual -- free enterprise, or more accurately the pursuit of capital, emerged as the only one with an immanent possibility of realisation.

In 1945 the Soviet Union was seen to be the greatest threat to capitalism and hence a threat to the destiny of the world according to the other victors of the war, especially the United States.\(^{102}\) Even at this earliest stage of the Cold War, though, the nature of the respective threats exchanged between the two sides was not identical. At the end of WWII the Soviet Union was the marching army, ideologically fuelled by an idea of global unification/assimilation that recalls the international conflicts inherited from the 19\(^{th}\) century. At least, this was the perception of the USSR in America. Faithless in God and business, the Soviets -- and very quickly the Communist Chinese as well -- represented for God-fearing businessmen the latest version of the dark hordes, the human multitude that lives in and fights for a reversal of all that history has achieved, the anti-civilised.\(^{103}\) This construction of the idea of "enemy" essentially relates to the image of every nomadic aggressor preying on human settlements, since
the establishment of the first walled communities. The reciprocal threat against the USSR was altogether different. America easily matched the Soviet military threat at any period during the Cold War. While the Soviet Union and its allies possessed a larger stockpile of weaponry, the sheer military capability of America/NATO was always superior. The United States was certainly more combat ready. Not the least of reasons for which was the fact that in America the actual operation and fire power of the military did not appear to shackle civilian life. It is doubtless that a majority of Americans were, and still are, enthusiastic about their country's military might, however historically speaking, war for Americans does not mean destruction and carnage on their own soil. There are two immense benefits to this: firstly, this means that the United States has generally enjoyed the kind of economic prosperity that allows for the appearance of independence between military operations and social life, and secondly, due to their perceived distance, America's military operations have for the most part escaped public scrutiny and critique.

While the minds of the American public -- and much of the rest of the world -- were captured by the fear of the Communist enemy, a greater threat to human life was standing in the world, already in 1945. Consumer capitalism is not merely the greed and waste that it circulates. The destruction of the planet's ecosystems, the erasure of non-industrial cultures, the suffering of the billions living in poverty, none of this speaks of the global problems of consumer capitalism. Rather than to ensure the prevention of the injustices that inflame social discontent into the various forms of productive disobedience, the economic terms and relations of liberal democracy disperse astonishingly high levels of discontent into the oblivions of inactive though vocal public forums, comical dissenting political parties, regionalism and prejudice, and above all individual and social self-hate.

Arguably, this historical juncture marks a passage in the development of political and economic organisation in America when the slightest intricacies of lives are either directly or indirectly manipulated by entities against which individuals have no
real power. The multitude of corporations are vastly more difficult to control and eliminate than any tyrant or other conventional political criminal. The powerlessness of individuals against corporations includes the participation of highly placed members of the corporate world as well. The law of the market, as it were, either silences or co-opts any contradictions. The question is, how does consumer capitalism persuade populations to give themselves cheerfully to the most perplexing disenfranchisement in human history? Throughout the post-war decades, consumer capitalism has deployed various techniques for the persuasion of populations; one might even enumerate these as advertising schemes. The most recent and I would argue by far the most awesome of these persuasive techniques has been upon American society since the beginning of the 1980's. These persuasive techniques enmesh with the idea of technology itself, technology as product, as a pleasurable and profitable extension of the experiencing subject. The idea is not new; its premise springs from the worldview of Enlightenment thought. In as much as the unit “calorie” links the subsistence of a human to everything from the operation of a machine to the creation of stars, technological products and services increasingly invade life with the assurance of the authority of science, the sciences of the material and the monetary universe. This is not so much an indictment of consumer capitalism, but an exploration of a new definition for humanness that appears to be emerging from the cultural relations that have spanned in the past two decades between technology and consumption.

Returning for a moment to 1945, one cannot forget the immense value of the palpable evil of Fascism for the Allies. Fascism was a dragon that made true knights of its destroyers. Whereas the Western European belligerents quickly disposed of their armour, America never even as much removed a gauntlet. As an unforgiving enemy of capitalism, the Soviet Union immediately became the new dragon for the United States. Already by 1945 capitalism was so much part of the construction of “our way of life.” However, rather than arms, in Western Europe the weapon of choice against the Soviet Union was the Marshall Plan. Through this, the population of Western Europe
was opened to the pursuit of capital as never before. A fundamental erasure of past social relations had occurred during the war -- indeed very similar to the Napoleonic Wars and WWI. The demolished landscape of Western Europe facilitated the unfurlment of a new economic landscape. In the spirit of the cartographic enterprise, the Marshall Plan broadened populations whose members were seen to be historically and culturally "ready" for vigorous capitalism. Hence the inclusion of Japan in the list of heavily aided nations.\textsuperscript{109}

By the 1980's however, American capitalism had come face to face with tremendous obstacles, some of which would have been unimaginable in 1945.\textsuperscript{110} And, it would be a critical mistake to view capitalism as unassailable, even in recent history. Capitalism survives not because it is naturally all-powerful, but rather because it has the ability to transform. The adaptability of capitalism and its resultant resilience are not new developments but rather lie at its roots. Indeed, one might assess this characteristic of capitalist economic relations as an essential condition for the possibility of a capitalist order, a condition that was manifest already in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

\begin{flushright}
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels\textsuperscript{111}
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The sheer vacuum of super-power conflict at the close of the 1970's signalled a radical threat to the logic of capitalism. The resolution of Vietnam, as a kind of "you can't win them all" scenario meant that there would be an eventual horizon to the growth/progress of capitalism. Free enterprise was bound to meet its confinement. The threat of international confinement for entrepreneurial profit was doubled by national confinement with the practical apogee of a whole class of consumer products that had
been in increasing distribution since the end of the war. These were household and business appliances, designed for the most part to reduce the physical pressure of everyday tasks for ordinary members of industrialised societies. As the number and magnitude of everyday tasks yet to be relieved decreased, the sense of elation that is characteristic to the celebration of consumer culture waned. People naturally get used to the reduced level of physical effort expected of them, and soon office workers feel as ill dispossessed as 19th century coal miners. And yet, the atmosphere of discontent, whether local or national, does not develop into a mobilisation toward social change. Rather, it deepens the hunger for success within an unchanged system.

As naturally as the ruled always took the morality imposed upon them more seriously than did the rulers themselves, the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them. The misplaced love of the common people for the wrong which is done them is a greater force than the cunning of the authorities.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

By the end of the Carter years, American capitalism was suffering from an emotional crisis. It was high time for a cure. The culprit had to be found and eliminated. While in 1945 the threat had been felt in Europe -- it had been the Western Europeans who were seen to be at risk of forfeiting their historical projects -- by the end of the 1970's it was America itself that felt that threat. The economic terms were also very different. In Western Europe in 1945 capitalism was categorically in question; at the end of the 1970's, in the United States, the social organisations of the most active participants of capitalism were under self-inquiry. The Soviet Union no longer merely presented the threat of global Communism and the feared collapse of the "free world." In the early 1980's the official speeches of the American president divided the bipolar world between Light and Darkness. With this came a shift in the cultural conceptions of good/evil in international politics. The designation of the Soviet Union as the "Dark Empire" obviated the need for a rationalisation of America's increasingly militaristic geopolitical position. With the spectre of the setbacks and defeats, felt especially by the conservative religious constituencies in the 1960's and 1970's, still obscuring the
cultural atmosphere, the identity of America transformed such that the invocation of the success of "personal liberties" and "free enterprise" as social experiments was no longer required for the proof of the legitimacy and superiority of Americanness.\textsuperscript{115} The greatness of America had come under inquiry, thus it was rescued from the failing protection of reason so as to be secured in the fortress of faith; henceforth it has remained there. This was perhaps the mortal wound to the most promising aspect of Enlightenment thought. The supreme advantage of this ideological relocation becomes evident in the fact that for the past two decades the cultural currency of "the greatness of America" has not decreased despite the continual deterioration of its social fabric. The Oliver North trials showed that guilt itself might fortify the image of righteousness.

Considering the cultural value of the dramatisation of the American-Soviet conflict it seems only appropriate that the theatre of the Cold War should have ended at the closing of the period under question. What had begun as the largest global turf war rapidly became useless under the logic of profit. The fever of the idea of global war carried the US economy through the hard years of the early 1980's. In the history of military engagements the Cold War before the 1980's might be read as a transitional sort of war. Traditionally, whatever is to be gained in war one expects to take from the enemy, its vassals and their allies. As late as the end of the 1980's American military engagements in the Latin America exhibit this familiar logic of conflict. The Cold War in the 1980's was radically different; one might argue that it was far more advanced in its strategies for the collection of reparations. Even though the enemy was the Soviet Union, the American population was to provide the booty. This I would argue is even more advanced than the Gulf War, on the evolutionary scale of the economics of military strategy. In the Gulf War it was American regional allies that provided -- and still continue to provide -- the funds. Critics of the Gulf War argue that Saddam is a constructed enemy, designed to unlock the treasuries of "friendly" Arab states. The 1980's war against the Dark Empire and the recent "War on Terrorism" are decidedly more advanced. With stunning brilliance, these conflicts open the "home front" to
economic and cultural infiltration by the ideology of the military-industrial complex. While an "invisible enemy" suffers American justice, the American public eagerly mobilises to give and obey. This is not to say that the economic interests of the military-industrial complex and even corporate capitalism itself are unassailable, beyond the threat of disruption and dissolution, or that corporate business interests are categorically antithetical to public interests. This merely accounts for the ways in which military industrial interests take advantage of geopolitical conflicts. The question as to whether and to what degree these conflicts are staged -- how far the technologies of representation have penetrated the realities of war -- does not yet present itself. Rather, the conclusion to be drawn from these observations thus far is that amidst the military conflicts of the post-war period, and especially since the 1980's, is another theatre of conflict. Though obscured by the media and widespread stubborn notions around the meaning of war, this theatre affords a view to the kinds of economic relations that underlie the significances of the advent of information technology in a historical period that is also defined by the absurdity of global annihilation.

Through the 1980's and certainly by the early 1990's the immemorial connections between technology and weaponry have rapidly evolved. These days, weapons no longer merely possess the gifts of technical advances; they are technology. As humanity moves away from the antiquated practice of destroying bodies by projectiles and the shockwaves of explosives, it enters a stage in history where the "mysteries of nature," discovered and harnessed by science, become unmediated destroyers. A bullet mediates the material reality of rapid oxidation in an enclosed chamber to a human body. An atomic bomb removes the intermediate step. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were science lessons, in more ways than one. The same principle applies to chemical and biological weapons. This is what is meant by the disquieting definition of missiles as "delivery systems." And so, the evolution of technology simultaneously changes the definition of weapon as well. Essentially, as tools for the exercise of force, to the end of the victims' acceptance of the aggressors' technical
superiority, weapons might evolve so far as to obviate the need for the threat of force, by
drawing compliance without the hint of hostility. Propaganda is such a weapon. Yet,
even propaganda takes some level of resistance for granted. The audience must be
persuaded. The propagation of technology conceives of a humanness that lives in
persuasion. The more closely technology attaches itself to lives, the less one needs to be
reminded of the desperate need for it, the less likely there will be an occasion to remind
consumers of this need. Current conceptions of technology draw a fundamental parallel
between participation in human society -- even more abstractly humanness itself -- and
a ready compliance to participation in consumer capitalism. This has not always been
the case. The kind of rebellion depicted in the Terminator films -- certainly disobedience
against the police -- was once constructed as negative and undesirable, though perhaps
tantalising to watch. What has occurred since the early 1980's is another cultural
erasure. Perhaps the internet will liberate humanity, but the validity of this statement
will remain dubious as long as it is those who have no interest in productive social
change that profess to it. The Microsoft Corp. will not raise alarms about the
innumerable dangers associated with the digitisation of communication. The celebration
of technology, the gadgets with many fun and exciting surprises, relieve the
overwhelming anxieties of vast populations who know that their lives are becoming
increasingly difficult.

In the Terminator films, the apocalyptic narrative begins with an awakening --
yet still in the middle of a nightmare - and facing one's demons, crashing through the
veneer of social comfort and safety. Crime, poverty, pollution, complacency, official
ineptitude, materialism and militarism are directly called upon to produce a hellish
contemporary social landscape. In the tradition of disaster cinema, these films are a
return to fallen Los Angeles, so often the cause and epicentre of the fall of America. Plots of this type are particularly effective in animating the fears that plague a culture
that unequivocally promotes material wealth, military might and geopolitical superiority
in a global hegemony as its chief national identifiers. The nightmare arrives with a
reversal of these odds, with an enemy such as the T800 cyborg. In the nightmare, the superhuman might of the military is unavailable. The defensive war against the *invented* enemy -- the menacing consequence of humanity's self-destructive policies and attitudes -- becomes redemptive. As such, the need for "justice" becomes paramount for the heroes. Yet, this will be a different sort of justice, a marked deviation from precisely that which is conventional to conceptions of ethics and good citizenry. Deviation becomes the key to victory under strangely unfriendly odds. It has been argued that the deviancy of heroic characters such as Kyle Reese and Sarah Connor is a return to conceptions of the earliest embodiments of Americanness: the pioneer, the outlaw, the uneducated genius, the revolutionary rebel and the prophet. This is true and important but fails to note that Kyle and Sarah are also genuine antiheroes, in the sense that their heroics are in many aspects antithetical. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the characterisation of Sarah and Kyle stands for the role of media in culture.

The media make themselves into the vehicle of the moral condemnation of terrorism, and of the exploitation of fear for political ends, but simultaneously, in the most complete ambiguity, they propagate the brutal charm of the terrorist act, they are themselves terrorists, insofar as they themselves march to the tune of seduction.

Jean Baudrillard

Kyle and Sarah too are enemies of America, because their sheer presence in the social fabric is deemed dangerous. They are urban survivalists. Sarah and Kyle are enemies in the sense of contagion and the action of cells in an organism that is infected by microbes. In this analogy, corporate structures are the cancerous lesions, and law enforcement is a useless immune system. The heroes of the *Terminator* films exact redemption in their fight against malignant technology.

These characterisations are the condition for the possibility of depicting a vision of the destruction of America without antagonising an American audience. The scornful voice of the *Terminator* films does not speak from the position of an "outsider" to Americanness, the position of a non-American who notices something terrible about this country and offers a non-American solution. Rather, the voice is distinctly
American; it returns to the pleasure of Americanness with a hateful vengeance. Once
the threats of American business, military and government are revealed and their
prerogatives are deemed contrary to the well-being of the individual American, the only
remaining justifiable position for conformists who should know better than to conform -
- and this is everyone who mistrusts their elected government but does nothing about it
-- is a socially impotent, gleeful self-loathing. As long as the United States' international
position is not categorically challenged and terrorists are prevented from disrupting
American society, individual Americans are free to pursue happiness within the
parameters of consumerism. The thrust of entrepreneurial logic becomes multivalent.
Unlike the culture industry that Horkheimer and Adorno observed, mass
entertainment has, since the early post-war period, dislodged itself from "good clean
fun." Far worse than sinful - unseemly before a Christian judge - entertainment can be
outright evil, according to the internal value system of Americanness. The difficulty in
selling people conventional narratives and images -- once mistrust and disillusionment
has set in -- opens the possibility of selling them the fact that they refuse to buy
conventions. Hence, it becomes possible to repatriate, culturally, a briefly treasonous
population -- a population that refused to die for its country by the end of Vietnam. It
appears that consumerism has rescued Americanness since the 1980's, by repackaging
it habits and dreams.

The logic of profit, within the culture industry in particular, has thus assumed a
newly fortified centrality in society. This is in large part the direct effect of a return to
laissez faire economics since the 1980's. However, outside the world of policy-makers,
the explosion of an unapologetic language of greed and excess relates more closely to
the liberation of recreation and entertainment from the cloudy mass of American self-
conceptions about pride, hard work, good-will and wholesome lives. In the endeavour to
find new markets, the legitimisation of wretchedness, stupor and nastiness has proven
itself to be a great success for the culture industry. Here, finally, "Amusement itself
becomes as ideal, taking the place of the higher things of which it completely deprives
the masses by repeating them in a manner even more stereotyped than the slogan paid
for by advertising interests.”

The participation of the Terminator films is, of course, more specific. As
consumable products, the significations of these films primarily extend in the discourse
of technology. As such, their participation invariably bears the disposition of a
technological consumerism. As I have attempted to illustrate, the sequel is openly in
favour of the position of the consumer, embodied by the young John Connor. Yet, even
in the first film, where characters die through conspicuous coincidences involving some
new technological gadget the sheer fact that the film presents itself as a consumer
product remains to be its central statement within the cultural relations that it
operates. Hence, the extension of these films in the discourse of technology is at once a
limited promotion of the kinds of debates and opinions that matter within this
discourse. While these films appear to condemn the flagrant militarism of the Reagan
years and the terror of technologies of identity, they nonetheless offer no possibilities for
resistance, except within the arrangements of militarism and technological
identification. These films annul the transformative promises of their purportedly anti-
establishment rhetoric -- the images and texts. Possibilities for the imagination of
changes towards social betterment are thus destroyed. The Terminator films -- as much
of the science fiction film genre -- neutralise the position of amusement seeking
consumers in relation to technology, such that the identities of the consumer and the
cyborg are amalgamated into a human alloy capable of internalising the expansion of
destructive economic arrangements. This internalisation operates in response to the
possibilities for liberation, or at least agitation, offered by technology, so as to declaw a
population that must -- as a viable technology consuming society -- sustain a
dangerously high level of technical knowledge and therefore a potential for crippling
disruptions. This is a function of the “stupidity” of films such as these, in the sense of
an intellectual confinement of both conformism and deviance.
The effrontery of the rhetorical question, "What do people want?" lies in the fact that it is addressed -- as if to reflective individuals -- to those very people who are deliberately to be deprived of this individuality. Even when the public does -- exceptionally rebel against the pleasure industry, all it can muster is that feeble resistance which that very industry has inculcated in it.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

For a society that has been convinced of its military invincibility, its worse fears must materialise from within. The Terminator is the monster -- literally a demonstration of social fears. The monster is technological, even technology itself. It is technology in the domain of corporate capitalism. At the end of the sequel we win because the monster becomes our friend. Indeed, he becomes one of us. We awake in the nightmare to destroy the threat, to destroy the fear of the threat. So that as the threat of technology creeps around us we will know not to be afraid, not to think that automation will spell the end of existing human relations and that technology will bring total annihilation. Then there is the equal and opposite fear of losing consumers, people that might lose their buying power due to unemployment. Commodities and consumers live in a symbiotic relationship whose vital links are so deep that it is literally impossible to attack one without assaulting the other. Hence, every time Hollywood averts apocalypse consumer capitalism is historically confirmed. To be precise, that which presents itself as the most potent possibility for bringing utter and irreversible destruction to the present "system" of human organisation becomes co-opted, incorporated into the panorama of imaginaries, a rich source for the inspiration of images and sounds to captivate audiences who love to shudder at representations of total annihilation.

The history of research and development for information technology in the United States elucidates this phenomenon. Information technology has followed two patterns of development since WWII. Through the 1950's and the 1960's, funding for information technology, in the shape of numerically controlled machines and representational tools, came from the central government. As the pyramidal apex of the military-industrial complex, the Pentagon controlled the development and
application of advanced systems and machines. In the decades immediately following World War Two, the dominance of America in the global economy was unquestionable. The chief threat to the supremacy of the United States was a military one, from the Soviet Union. In any case, the dramatisation of this threat also served the largest American economic interests through the direction of highly militaristic defence and foreign policies. The determinants of global superiority changed with the emergence of Japan -- and to a lesser extent Western Europe -- into the forefront of technological development and the distribution of Japanese consumer goods in global markets. From the 1970's onwards, the development of information technology shifted towards consumer industries in the United States. Thus, the new wave of consumerism, current by the 1980's, was an inheritor of the business of weapons and war. The relations between these two patterns of development fall within established spheres of power and profit, the military and the corporate sector.

Most poignantly, the shift towards consumer industries emerges out of an atmosphere of evident loss of power and profit for American economic interests, nationally and internationally. America changes when the largest economic interests react. Moreover, the humanisation of work through automation, whether at the factory or at the office, relates to the impetus of financial loss/gain. Relief from toil and tedium ultimately means the replacement of workers by machines. In and of itself, this prospect is both understandable and happy. The central and insurmountable problem with this prospect is the fact that the largest portion of the population is invariably locked in an economy of wage labour. Wage labour, in turn, reflects the financial burden of the grey-scale of average livelihoods. Hence, automation and the emergence of information technology as a whole, install a fundamental incompatibility between the logic of production/profit and the well being of society, both on the national and global scales. As Horkheimer and Adorno observed long before automation, the perpetuation of a work force under wage labour emerges as a kind of "benevolence" on the part of industrial employers. People who must sell their time to maintain their status as
viable consumers owe their livelihoods to economic interests that have the foresight to understand that mass unemployment is the greatest threat to capitalism. Arguably, this long-standing internal contradiction has been a greater threat and borne a greater influence on capitalism than international communism.

Since the advent of information technology in the production and distribution of goods and services, the stress of this contradiction has become amplified. It appears that the solution so far has been an explosion of entertainment and recreation through technology -- the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services that are necessarily not subsistence based. Yet, even though technological amusement has kept current economic contradictions afloat, it signals a morbid complication of these. Here, the utopian dream of a rational, technologically regimented society mutates; the promise of a better future becomes the vision of a more fun future. The transformative effects of the emergence of information technology -- not as tools for the historical directives of socialism, nor even as heralds of the next great stage in the continual progress of material life, but rather as catalysts for pervasive shifts in economic relations -- thus become nullified, so that existing social terms and relations persist despite a profound depletion of their logic. To be precise, the world of hourly work and monetary exchange will be maintained “in orbit,” above actual economic realities, without rational relations. Cleared from the liberating possibilities of the “Cyborg Manifesto,” these are the economic arrangements of cyborgs, fractured identities.

A new consumerist conception of humanness -- the technological or cyborg human current by the end of the 20th century -- promotes an evolutionary paradigm of technology, where synthesised objects progress from the status of tools to prosthetics until they finally attach themselves so deeply to human existence that they gain access to the inner sanctum of selfhood. Characteristically, these objects are not necessary provisions for life, such as pacemakers, mechanical valves for arteries, respirators or other medical devices. The technological devices in question are life-style objects: aesthetic implants, walkmans, pagers, mobile phones, portable videogame consoles,
GPS devices, pocket computers, portable barcode scanners, and of course, an increasing assortment of high-tech weapons. These are the sorts of objects that one can carry on his/her person. There is also the vast multitude of computerised and automated devices that constantly change the terrain of human relations, especially in the spaces of industrial production. The anxieties that feed on this phenomenon are both inherent and circumstantial. There is the inherent fear of being replaced by machines, of becoming useless and dispensable -- in this instance not only individually but also categorically. Then there is the circumstantial fear of living in a violent world, a world that constantly reiterates the terror of its violence. Technology can only escalate the violence, make it a thing of its own, divorced from human vice.

Technological violence then becomes an existential reality, a self-realising phenomenon. If the essence of technology is destruction, if we have made destruction the chief purpose of technology, then technology will know itself as a destroyer, once it has an itself. According to the current evolutionary paradigm of technology the livelihood of this new existence would not be merely war, but warlike replacement, annihilation or in the language of industrial labour termination. Films such as The Terminator and Terminator 2: Judgement Day suggest an even more terrifying scenario, where it is not humanness itself that is transforming and emerging anew, but rather it is existence as the most sacred birthright of humanity that is transforming so as to include machines, the better-than-human entities of "a new order of intelligence." Above all, these films sell through the visual effects, the horror, of this scenario.

Throughout this inquiry I have attempted to connect this point to developments in the advent of technological consumerism and the conjunction of militarism and consumerism, which marks a great part of post-war cultural relations and social formations in the United States. Then, there is the constellation of critiques and dissensions that stands against the prevailing forces of post-war American capitalism. A number of these voices constitute the theoretical foundation of this inquiry, all of whom point to the ways in which these prevailing forces -- or what each author identifies as
such -- collide with various forms of critique and dissent. Among the most troubling aspects of this collision appears to be a pattern, part co-option, part collusion, where critique and dissent become integrated into the very same relations and systems that are deemed unsatisfactory. Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Baudrillard locate this double pattern at the core of consumer capitalist arrangements. Perhaps more significantly, Marx and Engels had already laid the theoretical foundations for this line of critique in the *Manifesto for the Communist Party*.

4. CONCLUSION

The central statement of this inquiry is that “the present” as imploded, uprooted and outright antihistorical as it might be is always historical and only historical. History can never step out of itself. The very act of stepping away from history and naming the new ground something-that-is-not-history is an act of historical self-reflexivity and a ritual that is autochthonic to apocalyptics. This short-circuiting of history is central to the representational and narrative strategies of the *Terminator* films. These films take up themes and employ formulas that might fit well into a critique of contemporary social problems, with respect to labour, urban violence and militarism. The final sequences of both films take the narrative to one of the historical battlegrounds of social change, the factory. In the *Terminator* narrative, the evil machines are destroyed on the production floor, with the help of the tools of industrial labour. This might suggest a return to the promise of social betterment through the agency of collective action. Yet, while the final drama in both films takes place along assembly lines and conveyor belts, collective action is conspicuously absent. In the first film the factory is empty, even though its automated machines are ready for work. And, in the sequel the workers flee upon the entrance of the central characters.

In both films, the protagonists learn to use the industrial environments -- which appear confusing and dangerous at first -- in order to destroy the killer machines. These final sequences depict the ultimate success of the protagonists in their effort to
survive while averting global destruction. Sarah, Kyle, John and the reprogrammed T800 learn to break the boundaries of normative society and employ the resources of social participation at the margins -- the survivalist, the freedom fighter, the juvenile delinquent and the biker. In this sense, these characters appear to break through the patterns of cultural co-option formulated by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. They are not tamed heroes who finally learn to appreciate the confinements and rewards of “normal” society and play their assigned parts for more of the same. The uncompromised non-conformity of the protagonists’ characterisations is the underlying premise for the so-called anti-establishment message of these films. This non-conformity is also a great part of their audience appeal.

The contradiction in the fact that an anti-establishment message might serve marketing purposes prompts a move from the arguments of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse to Baudrillard, whose discussions explicate such paradoxes. The imploded condition of Western culture, described by Baudrillard, frames this heightened pattern of co-option. But, Baudrillard’s arguments do not merely describe the dispersion of the historical forms of exchange/interference between oppression and resistance, which are formulated by the Frankfurt School authors. One might argue that Baudrillard’s arguments take part in the very cultural relations that work, directly or indirectly, to disperse these forms of exchange/interference. This not to say that Baudrillard’s arguments are unsound, but rather that their soundness facilitates the propagation of theories and practices which signal a shift away from historical avenues of resistance and critique.

From the perspective of the tradition of socialist critique this condition appears to spell the evacuation of theory from within, and Baudrillard is not unaware of this further twist either. However, recognising the proliferation of the cultural relations which undermine the positions of resistance and critique does not equal the negation of these positions. The interventions of the Frankfurt School authors marks a point in the history of critical theory where the operation of cultural co-option -- the undermining of
the positions of resistance and critique -- had already began to channel itself through
the culture industry. From Baudrillard's perspective these operations of cultural co-
option have become total. This inquiry does not seek to credit either side of this debate.
Rather, the purpose of this discussion has been to show that actual cultural entities,
such as the Terminator films, substantiate the Baudrillardian vision only insofar as they
interpolate the signs, gestures and formulas of the discursive arenas occupied by such
voices as the Frankfurt School authors. That is, in describing the workings of these
films, it is not enough to say that the historical positions of dissent have been co-opted
into the cultural relations of entertainment and profit.

The entertainment value of the Terminator films depends in large part on the
dramatisation of uncompromising non-conformity. The thrill of the action in the fast-
paced sequences and the drama of the narrative sequences pivot on the continuously
reiterated marginality of the protagonists. In the first film Sarah and Kyle throw home-
made bombs, and in the sequel the heroes ward off the police with Sarah's survivalist
arsenal. Meanwhile, Sarah stitches up her two protectors, Kyle and the reprogrammed
T800, under a bridge and in an abandoned garage, respectively. It is this paradoxical
insistence on non-conformity that prompts a critical re-engagement of the Frankfurt
School authors' cultural critiques, formulated in the early post-war period. In a broader
analysis -- admittedly beyond the scope of this paper -- one might explore the
intersections of technology and dissent as marketable categories in post-war Hollywood
cinema and trace the vicissitudes of these categories in terms of the marketing
strategies of Hollywood cinema as an industry. For some decades, the depiction of a
character's move from the margins to the centre meets with audience approval.
Subsequently, audience appeal tends to shift towards sustained depictions of
marginality. It is true that the outlines of this patterns are very general and would
inevitably miss many historical complexities. Nonetheless, the implications of
technology and dissent as marketable categories become even more resonant in view of
the interconnection of cinema and its cultural contexts. Larger historical patterns and
phenomena, such as the Vietnam War and the relative decline of American industrial might, have had a fundamental role in the cultural atmosphere of disaffection which underlines the morbid celebrations of destruction in cinema. Yet, perhaps it is also true that the sheer impulse for novelty -- a powerful force in the production and consumption of entertainment -- has opened a demand for "new" and more morbid formulas in cinema. It suffices to say that once the formulas of taming dissent, controlling violence and punishing destruction become ordinary and boring, the depiction of violence and destruction becomes economically more feasible.

The catastrophe has already happened [...] we are living in a waiting period, a dead space, which will be marked by increasing and random outbursts of political violence, schizoid behaviors, and the implosion of all the signs of communication as western [sic.] culture runs down towards the brilliant illumination of a final burnout.

Arthur Kroker and David Cook¹³³
...Kirk nodded; and Chekov, still convulsed with pain, cried, “Captain! - we can’t!...don’t let these...animals...have the ship!”

“Animals?” Kang said. “Your Captain crawls like one. A Klingon would not have surrendered.”... (James Blish, Day of the Dove, Star Trek. 11 (New York: Bantam, 1975) 134.)


4 Ziauddin Sardar formulates this argument with a decidedly negative tone. “Modernity is the conceptual equivalent of the Terminator. Since its inception in the European Enlightenment, its alleged function has been to ‘modernize’ traditional cultures and relentlessly lead mankind, screaming and protesting, by the nose towards a progressive utopia. One-dimensional and unidirectional progress is the foundation of modernity. And it pursues its goal, like the Terminator, with ruthless logic, and without pity, remorse or fear, and will not stop under any circumstances, ever.”(Ziauddin Sardar, “Surviving the Terminator: The Postmodern Condition,” Futures 22 (1990): 303.) The present inquiry follows the general statements of this argument, but with a look to the cultural relations of consumerist societies, in particular the United States.

5 This is particularly vivid in the works of Jean Baudrillard. In Baudrillard’s arguments incompleteness and fracturing cannot necessarily be read as the aftermath of violent actions inflicted upon events and narratives, their texts and images. History speaks not only of genealogy but also of genetics, which will henceforth be recombinant. “Our only culture in the end is that of hydrocarbons, that of refining, cracking, breaking cultural molecules and of their recombination into synthesized products.”(Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994) 64.)


7 I raise this point in general reference to traditional Marxist critiques of arguments that expound the inherent benevolence of capitalism, the idea -- dating at least as far back as Adam Smith -- that the proliferation of capitalist arrangements will benefit everyone involved. Within the scope of this inquiry, each of the theoretical sources for the arguments presented here -- Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Haraway and Baudrillard -- cover this point, in terms of the illusion/disillusionment of social relations and contracts.

8 The idea of humanness figures centrally throughout this inquiry. The primary purpose of this term is to serve as a counterpoint to the idea of human nature. Human nature, as a description of the being that humans are, implies an operational mode of existence. In the formulations of this mode, humans are much like computers - or any machine capable of programming. Human nature, then, would be the programmes that are written, encoded, into humanity as a device. Without drawing the necessary arguments, I venture to agree with Heidegger -- and the philosophical tradition surrounding his work -- that this description is unsatisfactory. Most importantly, the operational description of the being that humans are neglects the paramount reality of self-reflexivity in consciousness. Humans do not merely possess awareness; they are self-aware, at both individual and collective levels. Heidegger’s term for this is Dasein, being-there, the kind of being that locates itself in the fact of Being and vice versa. “In so far as Being constitutes what is asked about, and ‘Being’ means the Being of entities, then entities themselves turn out to be what is interrogated. These are, so to speak, questioned as regards their Being. But if the characteristics of Being can be yielded without falsification, then these entities must, on their part, have become accessible as they are in themselves.”(Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962) 26.) The depth of the discussion around Dasein is too vast to allow a direct reference of the term in this inquiry; this would inevitably be a cursory reference. However, it is imperative that the argument for the integral reality of self-reflexivity in human existence be retained. The terms “humanness” and “existence” are meant to carry this signification throughout this inquiry. In a discussion of technology, of the ways in which information technology has come to pervade throughout culture, this self-reflexivity is the theoretical foundation for an exploration of the historical path of Western cultures.
The explications of the self-destructive impetus of culture in the age of information technology rest --
primordially one might argue -- on the challenge that humanity sets upon itself in its technological exploits
of nature. “Thus when man, investigating, observing, pursues nature as an area of his own conceiving, he
has already been claimed by a way of revealing, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of
standing-reserve. Modern Technology, as a revealing that orders, is thus no more human doing. Therefore
we must take the challenging that sets upon man to order the actual as standing-reserve in accordance with
the way it shows itself. That challenging gathers man into ordering. This gathering concentrates man upon
primordially one might argue ~ on the challenge that humanity sets upon itself in its technological exploits
neutralization, which is dubbed peaceful coexistence on a global level, and pacified monotony on the
traditional political spheres to the screen. “Today, it is history itself that invades the cinema according to
Blade Runner, 1979; they entertain. Films by Ridley Scott {Alien, 1982), Paul Verhoeven (Robocop, 1987;
Total Recall, 1990; Starship Troopers, 1997) and James Cameron (Terminator, 1984; Aliens, 1985;
Terminator 2: Judgement Day, 1991) are perhaps the most noted among these.

Baudrillard connects this point to cinema as a whole, in describing the transference of contests from
traditional political spheres to the screen. “Today, it is history itself that invades the cinema according to
the same scenario – the historical stake chased from our lives by the same scenario – the historical
neutralization, which is dubbed peaceful coexistence on a global level, and pacified monotony on the
quotidian level – this history exorcised by a slowly or brutally congealing society celebrates its resurrection
in force on the screen, according to the same process that used to make lost myths live again.”(Baudrillard,
Simulacra and Simulation 43.)

Haraway is not unaware of the precarious position of “fractured identities,” cyborgs, unruly assemblages
of human and machine, story-telling and science. “The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they
are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But
illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are
inessential.”(Haraway 151.) Yet, she fails to recognise that within the cultural relations of technology and
consumerism -- both the consumption of technology as goods and services and technological consumption
as a mode of behaviour -- the unrightness of cyborgs is irrelevant. Cyborgs may even be indomitable, but
only because they do not require to be dominated in order to secure the preservation and profitability of
established spheres of power.

“Like the rapid morphological transformations of the factory that result in product diversity and worker
uncertainty, the social construction of the postmodern subject conceals itself not by masking its traces
behind an apparently self-determined individuality as before, but by its ever-changing and self-glorifying
denial of a coherent identity.”(Robert F. Arnold, “Termination or Transformation?” Film Quarterly 52
(1998): 29.) I draw two closely related points from this formulation. On the one hand, the extension of
incoherence in identity, between individuals and industry illustrates the proliferation of the cultural
conditions discussed here -- rapid change through technology and dispersion of existing relations in society.
In turn, this proliferation illustrates the degree to which culture, at large, internalises patterns of identity
taken from processes in the economic sector -- such that it is no longer possible to claim that industrial
interests impose particular values oppressively. Rather, oppressive value appear to be circulated, in the so-
called “open market.”

The following passage from “The Actualized Worker” published in 1987 might illustrate this point. “By
actualization I mean a healthy personality, wholeness, a full-functioning being, and psychological
‘completion.’ The self-actualized person is creative, independent, and self-sufficient. These individuals will
increasingly have as their primary focus personal goals, inner values, and the creation of distinct lifestyles.
More persons than we might imagine are becoming interested in their own psychological, physical, and emotional well-being. Once having 'found' themselves, such individuals are hard to manage. They demonstrate more loyalty to personal goals and inner rewards than to corporate objectives. Usually, such individuals work diligently toward deeply meaningful private-life objectives."(Marsha Sinetar, "The Actualized Worker." The Futurist 21 (1987): 21.) I hope to outline connections between the insistence on notions such as "their own well-being" or "meaningful private-life objectives" and the simultaneous revival of self-righteousness in entrepreneurship and Americanness, after the growing atmosphere of disaffection in the 1960's and 70's.


Sinetar's formulation of the selflessness of the actualised person provides an argument in the rhetoric of individualism in the 1980's. "Often, what looks like selfishness, or dropping out, is the individual's need for quiet, simplicity, and solitude so as to grow inwardly into a more competent, mature, whole person. At a later stage of development, the person drops back in at a deeper, more responsible level of participation with the world. Thus, in the long run, dropping out is actually a selfless act that serves the greater good."(Sinetar 22.) It is interesting that Sinetar retains the enthusiasm of individualism without question. She assures the reader that "the person drops back in." There is no "might," "should" or "could" in this statement. This betrays a vestigial attachment to the idea of social participation at the core of the rhetoric of individualism.


In the case of Hollywood, habits and dreams are destroyed before they are created; history is stillborn. Our attitude toward particular events has already been tested through cinema. "This is how all the holdups, airplanes hijackings, etc. are now in some sense simulation holdups in that they are already inscribed in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their presentation and their possible consequences. In short, where they function as a group of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs, and no longer at all to their 'real' end. But this does not make them harmless."(Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 21.) Technological terror in cinema emerges when our spectatorial attitudes towards cinematic images cannot be transferred to actual events. This disengages our position as technological experiencing subjects. This point will be further pursued with reference to Horkheimer and Adorno's arguments in connection to the formulaic operation of effects and the function of experiential realism in films.(Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, (New York: Continuum, 1982) 126.)

"As soon as that order begins to break up, as soon as that transcendence is lost, the cosmic order, like the human order, emancipated from God and all finality, becomes shifting and unstable; it falls prey to entropy, to the final dissipation of energy, and death. The happy consciousness of eternity and immortality is ended. The problem of the end becomes crucial and insoluble."(Jean Baudrillard, The Illusion of the End, trans. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) 91.) Baudrillard's formulation of the genealogy of contemporary apocalypticism is particularly productive for the purposes of this inquiry. Baudrillard locates "the problem of the end" on the very same historical trajectories that have conventionally sought to dismantle the entire framework of this problem. A pattern of self-destruction appears to emerge out of this formulation. This pattern might be observed in relation to the context of the idea of technological progress in the past two decades, where the push for advancement has remained despite of -- or perhaps because of -- the mounting threats of a technological world. One might read this as the summary of the representational and narrative paradoxes found in the Terminator films.

Rutsky provides a powerful examination of the collusion of technology and aesthetics -- with an emphasis on the rhetoric of the avant-garde, in art and theory -- in the production and consumption of high technology. Rutsky links high-tech design principles to the spiralling, ceaselessly assimilating movement of technological culture. "The tendency of high tech
toward minimalist design, inherited from aesthetic modernism, is actually an extension of modernity’s tendency to ever more minimal, more controllable forms. It is this process that leads to the increasing technological reproduction and digitization of the world, its reduction into increasingly smaller, and supposedly more manageable, ‘bits’ of data. Paradoxically, however, as ever more data is produced, this process inevitably leads to a multiplication of the very elements it attempts to control. This proliferation of data, then, leads to an increasing level of complexity. In precisely this way, the minimalist tendency of high-tech aesthetic is inextricably linked to the complexity that is also associated with high tech.” (R. L. Rutsky, High Techné: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 13.)


22 Not only news agencies, but also television and popular culture as a whole, serve to satisfy the need for “staying informed.” The same can be said of academics and their need to “keep up with the debates.” This insistence on the strict up-to-dateness of awareness results in the absurd, though powerful, connection between “this is what people think” and “this is the right idea.” Thus the force of opinions becomes bounded by the scope and limitations of their trendiness.

23 Rutsky 15.

24 The most poignant aspect of this anthropology is the internalisation of servitude. The logic of progress through production/consumption “is a fantasy of death which leaves only the alternative of downfall and collapse. It is a strategy for wretches, for those who have so few means they are forced to exploit them for the full. It is a policy of self-exploitation one would never accept if it were imposed by someone else. It means cultivating servitude without the presence of the other, since each person substitutes himself for the other in the role of oppressor. The pinnacle of self-inflicted servitude.” (Baudrillard, Illusion of the End 103.)

25 “The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification. Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type. Consumers appear as statistics on research organization charts, and are divided by income groups into red, green and blue areas; the technique is that used for any type of propaganda.” (Horkheimer and Adorno 123.) The result is the unofficial institution of a numeric caste system. Whereas for millennia populations have been divided according to birth and occupation, from the late 20th century onwards the social parameters of identity will be increasingly ascertained according to tax brackets, RRSP contributions and so on.

26 Marcuse 242-3.

27 It appears that youth are the most persuaded, the most incapable of imagining a transformed society, whose arrangements would no longer presuppose the equation of well-being to escapism and consumption. The vicissitudes of the disruptive forces of youth culture are so well calculated and maintained under the logic of profit, that the only foreseeable direction for young people as a distinct group leads to further conformity – in fact a futuristic conformity. The commercialisation of youth culture – or perhaps the commerce of youth culture, since there was no youth culture before its commerce – has future profits secured in generations to come, in the consumption of sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll. (Eric Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991 (London: Abacus, 1997) 323-9.) Humanity itself has become credit in contemporary culture and lives on loan.

28 Technological life ascribes fluidity to the production and application of technique; liberal democracy does the same to politics. Neither of these stubbornly subscribes to specific social formations. That is, their content, that which pervades the lives of those who live within their arrangements is the subscription of another matrix of social directives, capitalism. However, this does not make the discourse of technology and certainly liberal democracy innocent of social responsibility. “Technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put; the technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of techniques.” (Marcuse xvi.) The fiction of enfranchisement constitutes the central mechanism of the pacification of an otherwise discontent and volatile population.

29 In cultures where the notions of liberty and justice have been suspended above predication — where no one needs to ask “why liberty and justice?” — entire systems of exchange operate to diffuse contested questions surrounding liberty and justice, as if society has already attained these to a full measure. The directive of profit, in a sense, becomes secondary. Because, profits are already guaranteed according to the “law of the market,” as long as the illusions of liberal democracy and consumer capitalist are sustained.
Once Adam Smith's "invisible hand" has been cleansed of profit and the orders of domination are deemed beneficent, then systems of exchange can aspire to a total fluidity of value. Baudrillard and his interlocutors describe precisely this. "In the new continent of postmodern culture: the relevant political collectivity is the 'mass media as simulacra'; the exchange-principle involves purely abstract and hyper-symbolic diffusions of information; and what's at stake is the 'maximal production of meaning' and the 'maximal production of words' for constituted historical subjects who are both condition and effect of the order of simulacra." (Kroker and Cook 175-6)

Once we have surrendered our senses and nervous systems to the private manipulation of those who try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, we don't really have any rights left. Leasing our eyes and ears and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over the common speech to a company as monopoly."(Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964) 68.) McLuhan's warning is powerful, yet for the purposes of this inquiry, the argument need not even be so literal. Consumer capitalism and liberal democracy invest their participants with possibilities for imagining and enacting social change. Hence, to follow McLuhan's argument, the question is not of the suppression of rights per se. Goods and services are circulated in the name of personal sovereignty. Yet, it appears that it is precisely this marketing strategy which serves to curb the possibility of radical social change, for consumers who benefit from legislated personal sovereignty.

30 "This points to a discussion of the cultural effects of the emergence of social formations that operate according to the language of sequential logic - "and," "or," "not," "if/then," in programming code. It is important not to be distracted by the notion of a social formation that abides by sequential logic through and through, for example, fully automated industrial facilities. The presence of sequential logic must be noted in automated telephone messages, at bank machines, in income tax forms, in video games and all computerised systems, especially in the arena of sales and marketing, where identity collides with exchange value. Hence, we need not look for a Behemoth, but pay attention to the pervasive regimentation of life through sequential logic. The machines that we have adopted with the hope of adding efficiency, security and precision to our daily affairs have set us upon a course of self-assimilation. The magic of technology is not its ability to produce machines whose operation approaches human qualities, but its persuasion of humanness to approach mechanical operation. This meeting of human and machine is a recurrent formula in the Terminator films and perhaps the most insightful aspect of their social commentary. In the Terminator narrative, the imagined future to be avoided at all costs is one that is inhabited by dehumanised/mechanised humans, where pain must be "disconnected" and one "feel[s] nothing." This future, the audience is told, comes about through the will and action of an intelligent/humanised machine.

31 It has become impossible for the populations of Western cultures to exist socially without technological goods and services. The process began with the industrial revolution, but mechanical innovation brought advantages and transformed social relation within spheres of human life that were not strictly "human." Mechanical power - for the purpose of material needs - is a fact of animal biology. Things change dramatically with the introduction of technologies of communication and especially of representation. These are spheres where humanness must be distinguished from all other phenomenon. Furthermore, communication and representation are the storehouses and marketplaces of values. It is in these spheres that the vital self-reflexivity of humanness appears in the world. The technological transubstantiation of values, the terms and conditions of humanness, occur in these spheres.

32 Horkheimer and Adorno 120-1.

33 Marsha Sinetar's article does well to clarify terms again. "By social transcendence I mean an individual's achievement of emotional independence from societal influences, including those of authority figures, family, co-workers, and other previously significant persons. The person who has detached emotionally from a known, familiar, and comfortable way of life in order to embark upon an uncharted journey is "socially transcendent" and usually is also on the road to actualization."(Sinetar 22.) The straightforward enumeration of "authority figures, family, co-workers, and other previously significant persons" captures the profound dispersion of historical lines of conflict, parallel to the historical realities of difference and power, such that society arrives at a point where one's authority figures and one's family equally stand in the way of individual well-being.

35 "Now, it is the same model of programmatic infallibility, of maximum security and deterrence that today controls the spread of the social. There lies the true nuclear fallout: the meticulous operation of technology serves as a model for the meticulous operation of the social. Here as well, nothing will be left to chance, moreover this is the essence of socialization, which began centuries ago, but which has now entered its
accelerated phase, toward a limit that one believed would be explosive (revolution), but which for the moment is translated by an inverse, implosive, irreversible process: the generalized deterrence of chance, of accident, of transversality, of finality, of contradiction, rupture, or complexity in a sociality illuminated by the norm, doomed to the descriptive transparency of mechanisms of information.” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 34-5.) In relation to the consensual perpetuity of inequality and injustice under consumer capitalism and liberal democracy, Baudrillard’s formulation uncovers deeper processes. Transparency and information overload serve to abort dissent by exposing disruptive energies to the light of media, such that actions which aim to make statements and/or affect changes “outside” of the system are summarily swallowed up again, under the injunctions of the freedom of the press and entertainment.

Throughout *Simulacra and Simulation* Baudrillard returns to the collapse of psychoanalytic formulations, as part of the systematic disintegration of the idea of the coherent individual, presumably a remnant from the earlier phases of modernism.

Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 49.


This is the general theme in *The Transparency of Evil*. Baudrillard enumerates the systematic loss of social formations and patterns of thought and action in Western societies. Baudrillard’s list of terms, used to describe the various types of cultural loss, might stand as a statement in theory, on its own. Extermination, saturation, contamination, pure circulation, circumvention, involution, centripetal compulsion, inescapable indifference, viral loss of determinacy, metastasis, cancerous proliferation, semi-urgency of everything, and the list goes on.

The putrefaction of aesthetics and the aesthetics of putrefaction as culture, its forms, media, narratives and images are the central themes in *The Postmodern Scene*. Kroker and Cook’s evaluation of the latest stage of self-reflexivity in Western cultures delivers an immensely valuable moment of infinite regress. Reflecting on a culture that has curved itself with a view of the self and all other self-reflexivities, the authors also reflect on Baudrillard, whom they see as the mirror of the culture he describes. The luminosity of Baudrillard is the poetic power of his theoretical work. “Baudrillard writes under the dark sign of Nietzsche: each of his texts are works of art which seek to arraign the world before poetic consciousness. Baudrillard’s discourse is a return to a tragic sense of history because his imagination moves along that trajectory where nihilism is both antithetical to and the condition of historical emancipation.” (Kroker and Cook 171.) What seems to stand out in these sentences is the rhetorical power of Kroker and Cook to reiterate precisely the reiteration that is fatally precise. The natural step to take would be to wax poetic again, with penetrating insight, in describing Kroker and Cook. This should make them disappear as yet another reflected frame, like Baudrillard, his theories, the simulacra that populate his theories and so on. The final note on this vortex must be, I would argue at this juncture, a recognition of the seduction of the other in places where the other is no longer to be found. Where the Other was, there has the Same come.

Baudrillard, for one, has been saying this for years. With the exception that he has not said a word, but only cried his silence, for his own silence. The utterly mute world of simulacra is the sound chamber of Baudrillard’s text. Unfortunately, this sort of language cannot proceed without becoming a mockery of itself. It is the language of court jesters in an existence that registers power as global, corporate and digital, even though it might be chained to the life of a particularly bright simian.

Heidegger, *Basic Writings* “Building dwelling thinking.”

Baudrillard provides a description of the atmosphere of guilt and revision around race and gender. “The other is all of a sudden no longer there to be exterminated, hated, rejected or seduced, but instead to be understood, liberated, coddled, recognized. In addition to the Rights of Man, we now also need the Rights of the Other. In a way we already have these, in the shape of a universal Right to be different. For the other is also an orgy of political and psychological comprehension of the other – even to the point of resurrecting the other in places where the other is no longer to be found. Where the Other was, there has the Same come to be.” (Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* 125.) I interpret these statements as cautionary observations about the emergence of new lines of difference and inequality, rather than mere complaints about
“coddling” the other. That is, insofar as the “Same” is the normative identity of consumerism, it is not the disappearance of “Otherness” but the proliferation of this “Sameness,” across the world, that causes worry. Even if old imperialist patterns of oppression are disappearing in the former colonies, these are often replaced by continuing patterns of inequality and injustice which are prevalent in economically and technologically advanced countries.

Some authors are quite optimistic about the general direction of this global economic trend. William E. Halal interprets the introduction of capitalism into China and other traditionally non-capitalist countries as the wise middle road. “This creative union of the left and right is occurring – not out of dedication to political principles, economic altruism, or moral virtue – but because a powerful combination of democracy and free enterprise is becoming the most practical, indispensable course of action to handle the complexity of a knowledge-based society.” (William E. Halal, “Beyond Left Versus Right: Evolution of Political Economy in an Information Age,” Futures 17 (1985): 203) The main problem with this argument is that it overestimates the actual global economic influence of populations and government that might be counted as socialist. Halal is correct to point out that socialist demands are addressed within and between the world’s bureaucracies. The fact remains though that capitalist arrangements do not and cannot integrate socialist principles of organisation and exchange. Socialist demands might be brought to satisfaction with the available wealth of a particular economic climate, but this does not mean that socialism has brought real and enduring changes upon the “law of the market.”

Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 15.


I have purposely excluded “class” from the traditional triad, because its discussion is at best superficial in Haraway’s work on fractured identities.

“What, then, does it mean to say that women are the other for men, that the mad are the other for the sane, or that primitive people are the other for civilized people? One might as well go on for ever wondering who is the other for whom. Is the Master the slave’s other? Yes, certainly – in terms of class and power relations. But this account is reductionistic. In reality, things are just not so simple. The way in which beings and things relate to each other is not a matter of structural difference. The symbolic order implies dual and complex forms that are not dependent on the distinction between ego and other. The Pariah is not the other to the Brahmin: rather, their destinies are different.” (Baudrillard, The Transparency of Evil 127) With respect to technology, especially of the media and representation, one might even go further to say that there is a profound disturbance of the symbolic order and its “dual and complex forms.” It is true that as long as there is difference, destinies will be different. Yet, in as much technology now stands to threaten the very fabric of identity -- the ways in which identity is formed and sustained in society for everyone -- destinies have converged to become objects of technological manipulation.

Horkheimer and Adorno delineate the precondition of cyborg consumerism in the early post-war years. “It is quite correct that the power of the culture industry resides in its identification with a manufactured need, and not in simple contrast to it, even if this contrast were one of complete power and powerlessness. Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again. But at the same time mechanization has such power over a man’s leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably afterimages of the work process itself. The ostensible content is merely a faded foreground; what sinks in is the automatic succession of standardized operations. What happens at work, in the factory, or in the office can only be escaped from by approximation to it in one’s leisure time. All amusement suffers from this incurable malady. Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association.” (Horkheimer and Adorno 137.) An equal but inverse process might be observed in recent trends in the “job market.” Positions in the “new economy” promise fun and socialisation. Though this phenomenon is too recent to allow for critical retrospectives, one could envision in this a reversal of the argument against work -- the idea that work, under capitalism dehumanises through wage-labour and alienation. This is not to say that the personal fulfilment promised in the “new jobs” is illusory, but rather that the very assertion of fulfilment in work serves to obscure the social reality of the vast number of positions where personal fulfilment poses little concern if any at all.

With respect to the implosion of violent attitudes and the violence of Western paradigms of humanness -- the exploration, study and practice of the categories of the human -- Baudrillard provides a powerful example in ethnology. He recounts the destruction of indigenous cultures, as if through instant
putrefaction, as a consequence of scientific intrusions and interventions. He explains that this phenomenon has turned upon the cultures of populations who have historically been the perpetrators of scientific destruction. "We have all become living specimens in the spectral light of ethnology, or of antiethnology, which is nothing but the pure form of triumphal ethnology, under the sign of dead differences, and of the resurrection of differences. It is thus very naïve to look for ethnology in the Savages or in some Third World -- it is here, everywhere, in the metropolises, in the White community, in a world completely cataloged and analyzed, then artificially resurrected under auspices of the real, in a world of simulation, of the hallucination of truth, of the blackmail of the real, of the murder of every symbolic form and of its hysterical, historical retrospection -- a murder of which the Savages, noblesse oblige, were the first victims, but that for a long time has extended to all Western societies." (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 8-9.)

By "literal" I mean the idea of an actual cyborg, whose worldly existence could be pieced together, in image and narrative, by attitudes and practices around increasingly well distributed and consumed goods and services, everything from electronic accessories to impulse rifles and CAT-scans.

Projecting the Shadow by Rushing and Frentz presents a collection of essay that follow the permutations of the position of the protagonist in post-war science fiction films.(Janice Hocker Rushing, Thomas S. Frentz, Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995))

"It was the machines Sarah, defence network computers, new, powerful, hooked into everything, trusted to run it all. They say it got smart, a new order of intelligence. Then it saw all people as a threat, not just the people on the other side. It decided our fate in a microsecond. Extermination..."

1 refer to the Terminator films in as much as these say something about the central concerns of this inquiry. The inverse of this, however, does not hold. The central concerns of this inquiry cannot and do not attempt to construct a definitive discussion about these films. That is, I am much less concerned with what the arguments here say about the Terminator films. The main reason for this is the particular focus of this study, which leaves out two essential sets of questions, firstly the position of these films in the history of Hollywood cinema, and secondly, the complexity of gender issues at work in them.

By Americanness I mean the imagined identity of commodity consuming Americans and their nation, a summary of the healthy mind and body, fortified by freedom and victory. The question of the actual identity and demographics of these people misses the point, insofar as they already lived in magazines and films. The fact that the smiling faces and vibrant bodies in advertisements have never lived in the real world became a long and painful lesson that America has not yet finished teaching itself. With respect to technology, an important part of this lesson has been the realization that the technical power necessary for the security of "freedom and victory" is nothing to be celebrated by healthy minds and bodies. To be precise, technical power is destructive power, and this power can and has advanced such that it has become more than merely a threat and weapon against those who might be its victims. Since the end of World War Two, technical power has become a threat and weapon against the integrity of the righteousness of America. America's power has become so terrible that it appears unnatural and demonic -- to say the least, unfair among the countries of the world.

This is not to say that the United States single-handedly defeated fascism, but that America was more than glad to take full credit for the Allies’ victory.

For the sake of clarity one might designate three steps to the logic underlying the main thrust of American conceptions of superiority in the post-war years. 1. America possesses the most advanced commodities and weapons; 2. This is irrefutable evidence for the technological superiority of American culture; 3. American's technological superiority at once produces and is produced by the relative perfection of its population, their "way of life" and their destiny to lead the world. The idea of the Terminator collapses this logic at each step, which relates to the emphasis on the cyborg's irreconcilable presence in the world. What then is the role of the protagonists, Sarah and Kyle, in this conflict? I hope to show that even though the protagonists are characterized as deviants of conventional/conformist Americanness, their attitudes and actions signal the hope and effort for the re-assemblement of the logic of American superiority in the 1980's. As desperate measures in desperate times, Sarah and Kyle are recruits from the
league of fractured identities. Their objective is to secure the future of a society, in relation to which they find themselves in mutual disavowal.

Perhaps, as Baudrillard would have it, the T1000 is artifice to the second power. The artifice is twice removed from its originator, and hence, also twice independent from its originator. The T800 is a mechanical reproduction of humanness, while the T1000 is a representational reproduction. Heidegger offers another, and more incisive, formulation of the relationship between humanity and technology. “What is decisive in techne does not at all lie in making and manipulating, not in the using of means, but rather in the revealing... It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that techne comes forth.” (Heidegger, Basic Writings 319.) Heidegger explains that the essence of technology -- the core of its meaning in life -- is not to be sought in the numerous ways that tools and techniques are employed for the extraction of minerals and energies from nature, but rather in the way that nature can be opened up or cleared to be put to use at all. Freedom occurs in the clearing of nature; it is the space for the possibility of directed utility or technique. The clearing proceeds will in freedom. The matter of choice and the presence of alternatives, at every turn, occurs in the clearing of nature. Undoubtedly, the ramifications of this formulation extend well beyond the question concerning technology, however, the point is clear -- and especially with respect to the cyborg -- that the clearing of nature and the possibility of technique are for humanity. In the light of the technological relation of humanity to its world, this for is the nexus of meaning in the identification of “nature” and “human” respectively. After all, humanity is not spared in the clearing; humans are also a space for the possibility of directed utility or technique. The introduction of embodied intelligent machines -- the Terminators -- disturbs the identification of nature and human. To begin with, the existence of intelligent machines entails a world where the clearing offers possibilities for the non-human as well. More disturbingly, that which would stand in the space of freedom would be an entity whose being would constitute the leading edge of directed utility in the life of humanity, the self-negating paroxysm of technique. This is the condition of Skynet in the shape of the T800, the machine that has become wilful. The T1000 takes this condition an absurd step further. The mass of liquid metal becomes its own nature and its own human with infinite possibilities of directed utility. This condition is the T1000’s only technique, made all the more emphatic by the fact that its only purpose is to kill.

To follow Baudrillard’s pivotal arguments on the orders of simulation, it appears that the liquid metal entity exists at the highest articulation of simulacra. The T1000 is “a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all the vicissitudes. Never again will the real have the chance to produce itself -- such is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection, that no longer even gives the event of death a chance.” (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 3.)


Arnold, The Transparency of Evil 126.

As Hobsbawm explains in the final chapters of his volume on the short 20th century, it is important to remember that the military-industrial complex is not merely an aggregate of government officials and corporate executives, but rather, these and everyone working at directly or indirectly on defence jobs, the entire bureaucracy and financing of defence contracts, and by extension the cultural relations of a society that spends hundreds of billions of dollars on weapons ranging from handguns to nuclear submarines.

One might argue that the entire edifice of Baudrillard formulations about the terminal condition of Western society rests on the argument that the elevated orders of simulacra -- when simulation is raised into orbit beyond the representational contact of an original -- pose the greatest and final threat to humanity.

Arnold raises this point in the conclusion of his article. He connects the cinematographical techniques of T2 to the representations of the Gulf War, in as much as both present reality as a digital construction. “If self-reflexivity ever was a guarantee of a knowledge effect in contradistinction to an ideological effect, which is doubtful, it isn’t any longer. The real horror of T2, like that of high-tech representations of the Gulf War, is that the technology of representation, even in the full light of its self-reflexivity and our understanding of its technical means of production, can so blind us to the real forms of human exploitation and suffering it masks.” (Arnold 29.)
Following upon the discussions of Baudrillard, Arnold and Larson, I would argue that the common field of significance between recent advancements in representational and military technologies surrounds the idea that reality -- and by extension the world -- can be manipulated as if it were a digital phenomenon. Cinema, especially, is effective in making this kind of manipulation an actual possibility, in so far as cinematic sound and image produces visions of reality, which are reflected back onto the world. "[The] threat of the T1000 is manifold, crossing the boundaries between the films' narrative and its technical means of production; between the real and its changing modes of production; between genders and other subjective identities, and between the thing and its representation, representing the end of representation itself. Even if T² is destroyed beyond recall at the end of the film, the morphological technology it represents, that of its narrative fiction as well as its own cinematic realization, continues to pose the threat of total simulation, the perfection of virtual reality, effectively bracketing out reality and its analog, the cinema." (Arnold 27-8.)

"Yet when destining reigns in the mode of enframing, it is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself and postures as lord of earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only inssofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion; it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself." (Heidegger, Basic Writings 332.) Technological humanity and humanised technology combine to direct the light of examination and manipulation onto humanity itself. This is not to say that humanity is a fixed condition awaiting investigation. Rather, the attitudes and methods of examination and manipulation enmesh with the historically changing conceptions of humanness. This phenomenon positions the participants of the given culture to conceive their own lives in terms of the objects of scientific study, rather than a being which is lived. In this sense, one might argue that technological society aligns itself to the prerogatives of research and development.

Opening text in The Terminator: "The machines rose from the ashes of the nuclear fire. Their war to exterminate mankind had raged for decades, but the final battle would not be fought in the future. It would be fought here, in our present. Tonight..."

Opening narration In T2: Judgment Day, by Sarah Connor: "Three billion human lives ended on August 29, 1997. The survivors of the nuclear fire called the war Judgment Day. They lived only to face a new nightmare, the war against the machines."

Doran Larson and Robert F. Arnold discuss this argument at some length in their articles. The central point for both authors is the fact that cinema as technology necessarily enmeshes with the political debates surrounding the cinematic depiction of technology. Hence, any critique or mere evaluation of technology in cinema also resounds as a discussion of the medium itself.

"The alliance of word, image, and music is all the more perfect...because the sensuous elements which all approvingly reflect the surface of social reality are in principle embodied in the same technical process, the unity of which becomes its distinctive content. This process integrates all the elements of the production, from the novel (shaped with an eye to the film) to the last sound effect. It is the triumph of invested capital, whose title as absolute master is etched deep into the hearts of the dispossessed in the employment line; it is the meaningful content of every film, whatever the plot the production team may have tested." (Horkheimer and Adorno 124.) With respect to science fiction films, the presence of financial interests becomes more resonant. Insofar as cinema is a technology of reality, science fiction cinema is a technology of technological reality. One might argue then that science fiction cinema already participates in both the fantasies which it circulates and the fantasy of circulation itself -- the delight of purchasing two hours worth of images and sounds from an imagined future/alternate world.

Karen B. Mann explores the multiple layers of temporal paradox. The disintegration of the projected lines of conflict in the Terminator narrative -- human vs. machine, good vs. evil -- in light of the staggering time loops figures centrally in her argument. Following Mann's discussion, one might argue that the temporal paradoxes of the Terminator narrative present a metonymic reflection of the short-circuited anti-establishment plot of the two films. And so, information technology -- the antagonist -- is both the means for the cinematic representation of this plot, and its narrative vehicle. Considering both the technical and
narrative aspects, it seems that these films are more about the ways in which technology can be represented as a terrifying enemy, than about how such an enemy might be defeated. The entertainment value of these films serves to align the position of their audiences to facilitate the conception of technology as an inevitably overpowering enemy, rather than as a tool that might still be controlled for the sake of human welfare. This cinematic statement is not hopelessly unproductive, in so far as it be might be read as warning. However, the warning turns becomes a moot point in the light of the actions produced by the human protagonists. In the actual world, car chases, fire fights and exploding buildings will not lessen the threats that come with the encroachment of information technology. Hence, the heroic “resistance” against the assault of humanity becomes amusement as well. (Karen B. Mann, “Narrative Entanglements: The Terminator,” Film Quarterly 43 (1989/90): 17-27.)

79 Horkheimer and Adorno 151.
80 Larson 61.
81 An intuitive guess on the feasibility of murder within a species might suffice to illuminate its general proscription. In addition, studies in evolutionary biology have shown that there is little reason to believe that irreconcilable murderous violence -- of the terminator variety for example -- is a “natural” fact of humanness. Steven Jay Gould explores some of the debates surrounding maleficent evolutionary traits in the closing chapters of Ever Since Darwin. Gould is especially dissatisfied by deterministic descriptions of hatred and aggression in society. (Steven Jay Gould, Ever Since Darwin)
82 Larson 61-2.
83 Arnold 28.
84 Arnold 21.
85 Horkheimer and Adorno discuss the cultural relations underlying this phenomenon in connection to the function of experiential realism in films. “The development of the culture industry has led to the predominance of the effect, the obvious touch, and the technical detail over the work itself -- which once expressed an idea, but was liquidated together with the idea. When the detail won its freedom, it became rebellious... The totality of the culture industry has put an end to this. Though concerned exclusively with effects, it crushes their insubordination and makes them subserv the formula, which replaces the work.”(Horkheimer and Adorno 125-6.) This points also relates to McLuhan’s assertion that all mediated contents are media in themselves. If cinema is the medium of light and sound effects, these effects, in turn, are the media of the habits and relations of consumerism. (McLuhan 8.)
86 This is not to say that The Matrix marks a radical break with the development of the function of experiential realism in special effects cinema. Horkheimer and Adorno explicate the paradigmatic foundations of the cinematic strategies employed in later special effects films, in as much as the significance of these cultural products is to be sought in the ways in which they operate within established and emergent cultural arrangements. “The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. The old experience of the movie-goer, who sees the world outside as an extension of the film he has just left (because the latter is intent upon reproducing the world of everyday perceptions), is now the producer’s guideline. The more intensely and flawlessly his techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen. This purpose has been furthered by mechanical reproduction since the lightning take-over by the sound film.”(Horkheimer and Adorno 126.)
87 Rutsky 13.
88 Deleuze describes the presence of cinematic characters in terms of actions produced and situations traversed. This description underlies Deleuze’s formulation of cinema as a machine of lights and sound. (Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 1: The Movement Image, trans. Hugh Tomlison and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977)) The Terminator films also present a machine -- though not self-reflexively, in the Deleuzian sense -- that activates formulaic situations and actions Sarah, Kyle, the T800, the T1000 and John. The hugely successful screen presence of Arnold Schwarzenegger, for example, carries through most of the scenes, between the two films. In as much as the Terminator narrative focuses on the notion of artificial consciousness -- programming, mission parameters and so on -- the mechanical presence of the characters continuously underscores the production of action and traversing of situations. The T1000 amplifies this mechanical presence, through its non-mechanical simulation of numerous characters. Precisely in that the T1000 is non-mechanical -- it cannot simulate mechanically -- its simulations brings the actual mechanics of objects and bodies into contrasting light. Thus, one might argue that whereas the idea of a sentient mechanical robot interrogates conceptions of humanness as a particular
kind of life in the world, the idea of a sentient “mimetic poly-alloy” interrogates mechanical presence in the world, categorically, human or not. By extension, the characters who struggle to eradicate the T1000 fight not only for human life, but also for the entire category of mechanical existences present in the world.

85 Horkheimer and Adorno 145.

86 “As ideological subjects, we enjoy the cinema as a space in which the real contradictions of subjectivity are played out in the imaginary. As an apparatus which brings objective conditions and subjective desires into contact, cinema’s own technology plays a significant part in this process. From this perspective, the cinematic apparatus provides a partial means of integrating people who are violently subjected to the alienation effects of industrial capitalism into its social formation. This partial integration represents a dialectical process whereby the pleasure of its modernized subject effect is offered in exchange for new forms of subjugation.”(Arnold 22.)

87 Hobsbawm 414.

88 Kroker and Cook vii.

89 The list of these includes characters such as Darth Vader, the Bionic Man, Robocop and the Borg.

90 In the Matrix the entire world has become a kind of cyborg, where the organic aspect of the entity are human cells fuelling the world computer. The minds of these cells exist as waste products that must be contained in the matrix for safety. We learn from one of the agents that the constitution of the human mind is such that it cannot be stored safely under harmony and bliss. Rather, the mind is ideally kept in a world fraught with conflict and suffering. Meanwhile, humanity becomes the consumed, a renewable resource for a synthetic mind that towers above it. Humans are literally arranged as objects in vast spaces. In this film the cyborg threat is universal. With Darth Vader and Robocop the threat is poignantly personal. These cyborgs stand to display extreme forms of personal suffering, not the least of which is a profound alienation from their society. The terror of objectification rests on their design principles, that they have been constructed as objects of terror. Their suffering perpetuates through their inability to align themselves to their design principles. In a sense the objectification of the synthesised body becomes their prison.

91 The characterisation of John and Sarah carry the appropriate signals of a materialist apocalypse, the apocalyptic materialism. These become loudest in the narrative device of temporal paradox, John’s technological insertion of himself -- simultaneously calculated, desperate and triumphant -- into history. John “is not an individual at all. He is a pentito of subjectivity and alienation, of the heroic appropriation of himself. His only aim is the technical appropriation of the self. He is a convert to the sacrificial religion of performance, efficiency, stress and time-pressure -- a much fiercer liturgy than that of production -- total mortification and unremitting sacrifice to the divinities of data [I ‘information], total exploitation of oneself by oneself, the ultimate in alienation.”(Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* 106.)

92 Larson identifies a similar pattern of identification with machine existence through the characterisation of the T800 in the sequel. “In T2 we are taught to identify with the reprogrammed T101, or ‘Uncle Bob,’ as the young John Connor will rename him in one of many gestures to incorporate Arnold, John and Sarah into a postmodern family. In essence, we are taught to see not a machine with flesh on the outside but an inchoate human being with an alloy core, and this shift, set in contrast to the LMM [liquid metal man], represents a shift in the conception of the body politic vis-à-vis the technological landscape.”(Larson 61.)

93 Here, I am referring to the Frankfurt School and the authors associated with Structuralism and Post Structuralism. In their explication of Baudrillard, Kroker and Cook announce the vital parameters of this condition with striking clarity. “This is that breakpoint in the symbolic totality where the ‘norm’ undergoes an inversion into a floating order of signs, where strategies of normalisation are replaced by the simulation of the masses, where signification replaces the process of reification, and, finally, where the ‘hyperreality’ of culture indicates a great dissolution of the space of the social.”(Kroker and Cook 173.)

94 The rise of individualism in the 1980’s advanced this condition through a panoply of new cultural relations that defined the emergence of renewed capitalist fervour in terms of personal well-being. “Actualized individuals do not pursue a career or do work because of the so-called work ethic or because it is profitable or because their parents or teachers or managers approve, but because it is work that will make them happy and fulfilled. The steps and choices of life stem from inner rather than outer drives. It is as if countless numbers of individuals have recovered (or uncovered) the ability to perceive their own delights and values, have rediscovered their own selves, and now wish to merge that self with vocational and life activities.”(Sinetar 25.)

95 Marcuse ix.

96 Marcuse 78.
Larson goes further to connect the cultural currency of technology to the fabric of American national identity. "Wherever we witness American bodies in conflict (or combination) with technology, we witness figures of the body politic in an age when the 'technological arts' are not only a means of national unity but are the only means that make any conception of a unified political body viable." (Larson 65.)

In the period immediately after the war the United States estimated the soviet menace as a European problem, primarily. (Hobsbawm 230-1.) However, the ingredients of the mounting conflict between the still uncongealed East and West changed continuously, especially after successful atomic tests in the USSR.

Hobsbawm explains that "the Second World War had barely ended when the humanity plunged into what can reasonably be regarded as a Third World War." (Hobsbawm 226.)

Even without venturing into patterns of cultural identity and myth in history, one observes reverberations of the dichotomous notion of order/chaos - in particular the absolute incompatibility of the two halves - in American conceptions of the Cold War. "Anti-communism was genuinely and viscerally popular in a country built on individualism and private enterprise where the nation itself was defined in exclusively ideological terms ('Americanism') which could be virtually defined as the polar opposite of communism." (Hobsbawm 235.)

Hobsbawm 246-7.

One measure of the anaemic agency of the individual within liberal democracy and consumer capitalism is the deferral of reaction to the livelihood of dissenters. The social formations of liberal democracy and consumer capitalism operate such that the dissenting refusal to participate -- or assimilate in instances where the particular voice of dissent has been found to be marketable -- escalates the unsatisfactory conditions that had fuelled dissent in the first place. That is, one ought not to abandon the system, even if it is found unsatisfactory. The immediate result of such a dissenting strategy would appear to worsen the causes of dissatisfaction. Susan Buck-Morris describes this tersely. "Capitalism harms human beings through neglect rather than through terror. Compared to the personal will of a dictator, the structural violence of market 'forces' appear benign. Those individuals (or groups) excluded from capitalism's dreamworlds appear themselves to be to blame. The fate of the poor is social ostracism. Their gulag is the ghetto." (Susan Buck-Morris, Dreamworld and Catastrophe (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000)188.)

"This structural necessity haunts us still today: that section of the American population which both conceives of itself self-consciously as democratic and unconsciously as healthy cells and organs in the body politic requires a nonhuman other which it can eviscerate in order to confirm its own political and spiritual legitimacy." (Larson 57.)

Hobsbawm 240.

The list of these obstacles is lengthy and can run into great detail. One might argue though, in agreement with Hobsbawm, that the central determinant among these was the irreversible decline of economic growth within capitalist spheres of influence. Deterioration of social conditions and disintegration of the recently won welfare state -- by the close of the 1970's -- in addition to the defeat in Vietnam and the numerous political repercussions of America's gradual descent as the overwhelming source of wealth and industrial power in the world constitute the larger forms of the generally negative cultural disposition in the United States at this time. (Hobsbawm 403-16.)

Marx and Engels 38.

It must be noted that the European public and their leaders were not committed to US policy. (Hobsbawm 237.) The descriptions of Cold War conflicts in this inquiry are meant to reflect patterns in American attitudes towards international issues and the ways in which these figure in the germination of global consumerism.

This was no less than a direct assault on Americanism, the position of the United States in the World and "the American way of life." Hobsbawm throws the cultural atmosphere preceding twelve years of Republican government into perspective. "Historians of the twenty-first century, remote from the living memories of the 1970's and 1980's, will puzzle over the apparent insanity of this outburst of military fever, the rhetoric of apocalypse, and the often bizarre international behaviour of US governments, especially in the early years of President Reagan (1980-88). They will have to appreciate the depth of the subjective traumas of defeat, impotence and public ignominy which had lacerated the US political establishment in the 1970's, and which were made even more painful by the apparent disarray of the American presidency during the years when Richard Nixon (1968-74) had to resign over a sleazy scandal, followed by two
negligible successors. They culminated in the humiliating episode of US diplomats held hostage in revolutionary Iran, Red revolution in a couple of small central American states and a second international oil crisis, as OPEC once again raised their price to an all-time peak."(Hobsbawm 247-8.)

In a passage about the Vietnam war, Baudrillard asks, "why did this American defeat (the largest reversal in the history of the USA) have no internal repercussions in America? If it had really signified the failure of the planetary strategy of the United States, it would necessarily have completely disrupted its internal balance and the American political system. Nothing of this sort occurred."(Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 36.) Yet, a glance across the 1980's and 90's in American foreign policy will show that something truly immense did in fact occur, largely because of the Vietnam war. The internal balance and political system of America was not disrupted, but the possibility of such a disruption became violently apparent. The awareness of this possibility inaugurated an era where the assemblage of political forces in the United States reshaped itself so as to foreclose the actuality of this possibility, through a simultaneous perpetuation and externalisation of its threat. The most recent - not to mention absurd - expression of this was the declaration by George Bush that America is hated because it is free, that terrorism attacks freedom. It is interesting to note that the sense of negativity in contemporary cultural observations around this period was not limited to the more familiar camps of reaction: Right-wing politicians, big business and conservative religious groups. There were expressions of distress in what might be called reactionary camps of the scientific community. As an early example, I find the anthropology invested in Behaviourism a prime example of this. B.F. Skinner's book, Beyond Freedom and Dignity, from 1971, at once expresses a profound concern for the mounting dangers of the post-war decades and derides the tradition of "freedom and dignity" as useless and uninformed of true causes. The source of the downfall of society for Skinner are "the attributes of autonomous man" and the misconception that "men are to behave well only because they are good." A far better alternative according to Skinner is a perfect system, where behaviour is regimented from birth. "Under a 'perfect' system no one needs goodness."(B. F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1971) 67.)

Manuel De Landa explores this idea at length in War in the Age of Intelligent Machines. He divides the anatomy of a weapon in three categories: propulsion, flight and impact. On the basis of this division De Landa traces the evolution of weapons systems and their deployment in warfare through historical shifts in social organisation and conceptions of humanity and nature. In contrast to this inquiry, De Landa's discussion does not identify weapons technology primarily as a tool for the perfection of the exercise of force. He goes considerably further to assert that the history of weapons technology marks moments of convergence in the world where matter and energy — constituting both the weapon and the human, including the inventor, the manufacturer, the general, the soldier and the society as a whole — come together to express a particular method of and capacity for force.(Manuel De Landa, War in the Age of Intelligent Machines (New York: Zone Books, 1991))


Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 84.

"The promotion of a friendly atmosphere as advised by management experts and adopted by every factory to increase output, brings even the last private impulse under social control precisely because it seems to relate men's circumstances directly to production, and to reprivatize them. Such spiritual charity casts a conciliatory shadow onto the products of the culture industry long before it emerges from the factory to invade society as a whole. Yet the great benefactors of mankind, whose scientific achievements have to be written up as acts of sympathy to give them an artificial human interest, are substitutes for the national leaders, who finally decree the abolition of sympathy and think they can prevent any recurrence when the last invalid has been exterminated. By emphasizing the "heart of gold," society admits the suffering it has created: everyone knows that he is now helpless in the system, and ideology has to take this into account. Far from concealing suffering under the cloak of improvised fellowship, the culture industry takes pride in looking it in the face like a man, however great the strain on self-control. The pathos of composure justifies the world which makes it necessary."(Horkheimer and Adorno 151-2.)

The celebratory tone of Halal's article captures the triumphant reconception of capitalism in the 1980's.

"Numerous small competing enterprises, freedom of entry and exit into contracts, and, above all, the widespread availability of accurate market information -- constitute the requirements that economists have always defined for 'perfect markets.' Large institutions are thereby becoming part of the open marketplace, bringing the advantages we have always attributed to the free enterprise system directly into the internal
operation of organizations themselves -- flexibility for adaptive change, easier management of complexity, freedom for innovation, and other means for coping with a turbulent world."(Halal 204)

Hobsbawm 248-51.

Horkheimer and Adorno 143-4.

The massacre in the nightclub happens only because the Terminator hears Sarah's voice on the answering machine.

Horkheimer and Adorno 144-5.

Hobsbawm 266-7.


Van Tulder 203-5.

Throughout her article Sinetar fails to mention the urgency of changes in business attitudes that underlined the emergence of "the actualized worker." She raises this point, at last, in the final paragraph of the article. "Creative, innovative workplaces are now a must for American businesses. Japanese and Western European encroachment upon product markets previously dominated by U.S. businesses now forces American management to change. Quality circles, consumer-driven product development activities, the host of novel incentives and morale-building programs that now characterize the 'best' business environments are signs that American business recognizes it can only compete by enlisting the support, creativity, and energy of its people."(Sinetar 25.)

Horkheimer and Adorno 150.

J. Christopher Jones provides a summary description of the temporality of the logic of industrial production and the worldview that emanates from this. "In order to get the economic benefit of mechanized production, using the assembly line, we have first to stabilize the goal, the product, which has to be specified in every detail and not changed thereafter. Once this is accepted (and it implies, I think, accepting the freezing of the life that is connected) it is possible to design the assembly-process from its end to is beginning, working backwards in time. Out of this highly 'unnatural' reversal of the usual order of things comes, I think, the essence of what is so odd about Western life: the willingness to disregard and sacrifice the present for benefits which will come 'later on.' I believe that the Western conception of time, as an objective reality, measured by the clock and by time tokens, in the form of money paid for 'time spent', derives from this. As does the notion of 'the future' as a 'thing', an object, which is capable of being foreseen and predicted... As each step in a production process became more automatic, the need to fix and to standardize the product was reduced. Ultimately, in a completely automatic 'plant', a wide variety of products can be made on the same assembly-line with individual design variations for each item. The need to 'reverse time', and to 'freeze life', so that the economic benefit can be obtained, gradually vanishes. Life need no longer be lived 'always in the future' but can be more entirely in the present... The process has become flexible."(Christopher J. Jones, "On Praxis: Or What Became of the Future?" *Futures* 15 (1983): 428.) Yet, despite the flexibility of automated production, there is no room for social change outside the vagaries of relations of production and consumption, in themselves. The flexibility of the world of commodities holds other cultural relations in relative fixity. Consumerism pervades society and necessarily anticipates every move for change. Again, this is not to say that disruptions are impossible within current arrangements. But rather, it is impossible to act outside of arrangements of power and profit. Nothing short of highly improbable cataclysmic disruptions can affect changes outside the determinations of established spheres of political and economic control. Even the terrible shock of the destruction of World Trade Center did not produce an atmosphere of real change. There is talk of a tougher stance against terrorism, an answer to the demand for greater global security. The whole episode was nothing more than a particularly noteworthy negative register on the vital signs of an emerging global consumerism. In as much as "security" extends "all the way from the underground batteries of intercontinental missiles in Wyoming to the submachine gun slung over the shoulder of the border police"(Werckmeister 5.) consumerism connects high-school massacres to international terrorism and the threat of nuclear proliferation in rogue countries, such as North Korea, Iran and Iraq. It is not so much that the injustices of consumerism directly cause such terror as that this sort of violence -- fluid and seemingly random -- must be counted as an inherent reality in a violent world where all human relations are becoming increasingly fluid and random.

Arnold 24.

Arnold 24.

Kroker and Cook vii.
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